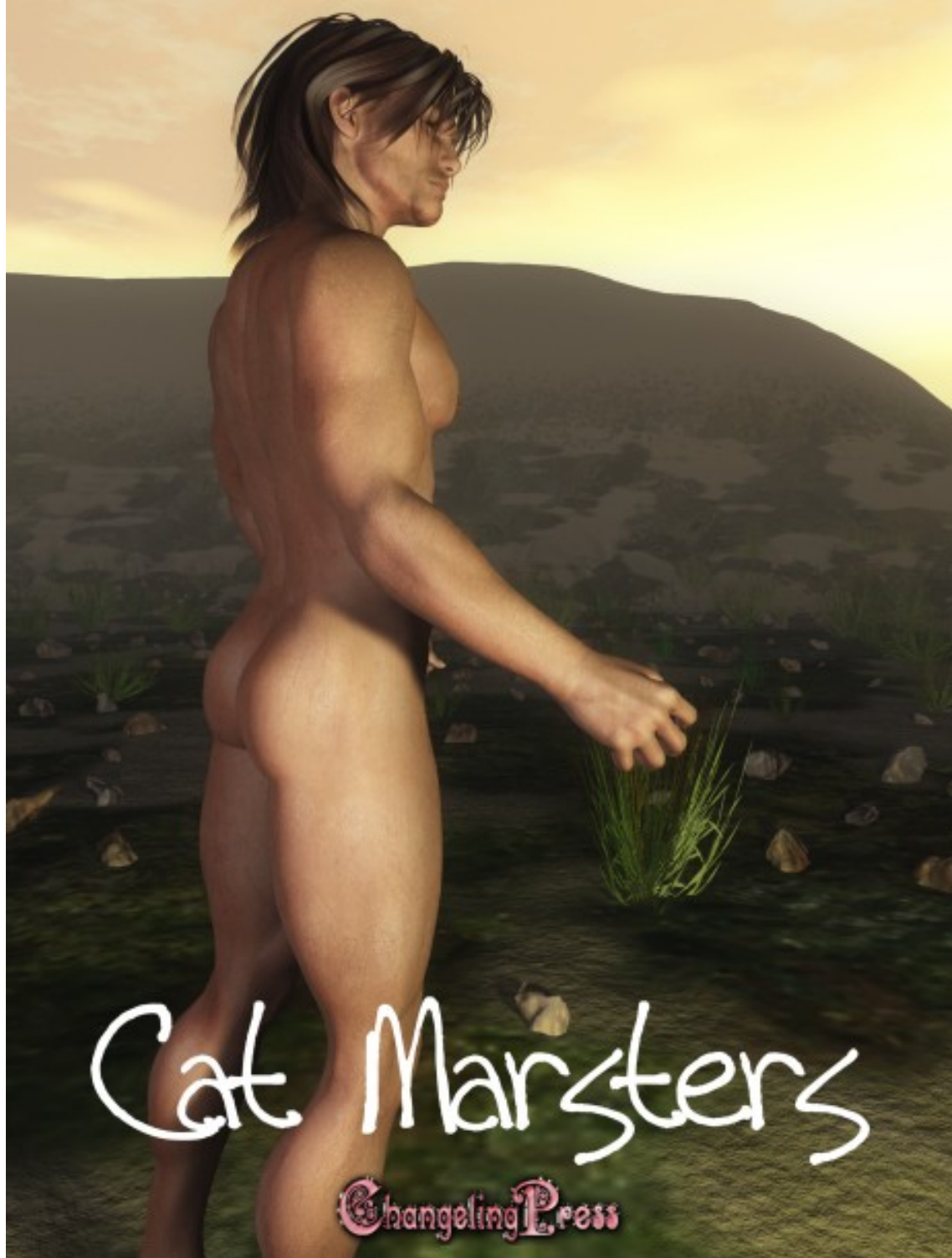


DRIVE ME DAISY



Cat Marsters

Changeling Press

Sundown Investigations 2: Drive Me Daisy

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ISBN: 978-1-59596-794-7
Formats Available:
HTML, Adobe PDF,
MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:
Changeling Press LLC
PO Box 1046
Martinsburg, WV 25402-1046
www.ChangelingPress.com

Editor: Sheri Ross Fogarty
Cover Artist: Fabiano Fabris

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Sundown Investigations 2: Drive Me Daisy

Cat Marsters

Adam was the first man Daisy ever saw. When the faeries sent her back to the mortal realm, his werewolf pack took her in. Adam was the first man to make love to her, and the first to break her heart. Now, fifteen years later, Adam's back, and he needs Daisy: in his work, in his life, and in his bed.

But fifteen years can change a person, and now Daisy's not so sure she can forgive Adam for what happened all that time ago. Plus, there's the little matter of the secret she's been keeping since she last saw him...

Chapter One

"God, you taste incredible."

Daisy's fingers tangled in Adam's dark hair as his tongue circled her nipple. She had no idea what she really did taste like, but it was certainly a taste Adam seemed to enjoy. Hardly an hour went by that he wasn't kissing her, or licking her, or biting her, or driving that long tongue of his deep inside her --

"Adam!" Her hips bucked against him as he sucked her nipple into his mouth, swirling his tongue around and around. "I want... inside me -- now! Please!"

He looked up and grinned at her. In complete contrast to the immaculate perfection of the fae males she'd known as a child, Adam had rough dark stubble, short punky hair and indigo eyes that glittered with heat and passion. He also smiled an awful lot, teeth white against tanned skin, and the sight never failed to make some part of her flutter.

"Inside you?" he teased, pressing the tip of his cock against her folds. "Are you sure?"

Daisy tried to scowl but he felt too good. "Yes," she said. "Now!" She wriggled and squirmed, trying to get him inside her, but he resisted, moving back, hips dancing, never quite letting her catch him. "Adam!"

He laughed, rolled onto his back and pushed her up so she was straddling him, looking down at his broad shoulders, his skin gleaming with perspiration.

"Whatever you want," he said, lifting her hips over him so she could sink down and take that thick, hard cock of his inside her.

Daisy's eyes rolled back in her head as he filled her, inch by glorious inch, until his balls brushed her ass. She rested there, just feeling him inside her, staring down at his gorgeous body. His face was tight, his teeth gritted, no longer smiling.

"Fuck, you feel good," he ground out. His dark gaze found hers. "Move, Daisy, move!"

She smiled. "Move?" she said. "Are you sure?"

At that he growled and rolled her, laughing, onto her back again, pulling out and surging back inside her so hard and fast she lost her breath.

"I'm sure," he said, and then neither of them were laughing as he slid inside her, stroked her inside and out, nipped her skin with his teeth. Daisy, her head thrown back, thrust out her breasts to rub her nipples against his chest.

"Daisy." His fingers dug in her thigh as he lifted her leg to drive deeper into her. "Never stop fucking me."

She took his face in his hands and kissed him.

"I mean it." His indigo eyes were intense. "I love you, Daisy."

She nibbled on his lip. "I love you, Adam."

"Stay with me," he urged, gathering her up and pressing her body against his.

"Always," she promised, shuddering as he thrust into her, over and over. "Always, Adam. I'll never leave you."

"So?" demanded Janey, yanking Daisy away from a fifteen-year-old memory. "What happened?"

Daisy turned away from the window and leaned back against the kitchen counter. "What do you mean, what happened? We were seventeen. It was never going to last."

Janey gave her a severe look. "I met Kevin when we were eighteen," she said, "and I know at least three other couples who met as teenagers and are still going strong now."

"Well, not us. We were just... it was just a silly teenage thing."

Liar, said Daisy's conscience. *It was never silly. Not at the time. You loved him, right and proper, and he loved you.*

"So what did go wrong?" Janey persisted.

Daisy shrugged, and turned away to make some more coffee. "Oh, you know. He had his plans and I had mine." *He wanted to be pack Alpha even if it meant killing his brother, and I wanted to get as far away from the murdering son of a bitch as possible*, she amended to herself.

"Right, I know how that one goes." Janey nodded. "Funny how the plans you have at seventeen are never what you end up doing."

"Right," Daisy agreed blindly, clattering coffee cups together.

"I mean, if someone had told me, twenty years down the line I'd be a housewife with three kids, I'd have called them crazy," Janey went on. "Know what I'm saying?"

"Mmm," Daisy said, because when she was seventeen she didn't even know what a housewife was.

"Did you never hear from him again?" Janey persisted.

"No. As far as I know, he's still in Australia. I can't see him leaving."

"Well, he might."

"No. He has... family commitments."

Janey rolled her eyes. "Well, maybe he did fifteen years ago, but things change!"

"No. Not for Adam. It was... a really big family."

Janey was silent a moment, her eyes widening. "Oh my God. Do you mean he was in the Mafia?"

Daisy stared at her. Then she burst out laughing. "Good God, no, nothing like that." Although come to think of it, maybe a werewolf pack was a little like the Mob. They kept everything in the family, didn't like people messing with their business, and leadership was hotly contested.

It was one of the reasons Adam had been so desperate to prove himself at such an early age.

"Anyway," she said, handing Janey her coffee, "you haven't told me about your first romance yet."

Janey was more than happy to rhapsodize about how she'd met her husband at the record store where he worked, and detailed every minute of their relationship up

until the point where Kevin had proposed on her twentieth birthday. By which time it was late enough that she needed to get home before the kids arrived back from school.

"It just seems such a shame," she said as she picked up her keys and went to the door. "You were so in love with this Adam guy, and you haven't even see him in fifteen years."

"Well, that's life," Daisy said, opening the door.

"Don't you even have anything to remember him by?"

Right on cue, the school bus pulled up over the road, and four kids spilled out, chattering and laughing. Three went to Janey's house, calling out for her as they wandered up the driveway. The fourth crossed the road, shaking back her midnight hair and grinning at Daisy.

"Oh, I have something," Daisy said, smiling, and stepped back to let her daughter in the house.

The sun beating down on the rental car made Adam feel as if he was being slowly roasted. Hot dog, hah. Any minute now he was going to get up the courage to get out of the car, cross the road, and knock on Daisy's door. Any minute now.

Before the neighbors decided he was staking out the house and called the police.

There was a car parked outside, and judging by the 'Save a horse, ride a cowboy' sticker on the bumper, it was hers and not her husband's. If she had a husband. It was impossible to tell. The house was in good repair, the garden neat and pretty. A dog barked inside.

Well, that might be fun.

Steeling himself, Adam got out of the furnace his car had become, and crossed the street. Stupid New Mexico heat. He'd spent too long in New York -- he was forgetting what real sunshine was like, what real heat was like. Back in the desert...

The endless hot rays of the sun, beating down on you with an almost physical force, blinding, burning, pinning you to the hot earth like a squashed bug.

Come to think of it, he didn't really miss home all that much.

At the door Adam listened hard, listened past the dog and the street noise, and heard water running, a hot water tank bubbling and groaning. Breathed in the scent of roses.

And under that scent, something else...

Summer meadows, freshly-cut grass, sun-warmed skin.

Daisy.

He smiled. Daisy was running a bath. She was probably naked. Naked, hot, and slippery...

He shook himself. With any luck she'd have developed a serious chocolate addiction and put on two hundred pounds since he saw her last. One thing he really didn't need was to get involved with the girl who'd walked out on him fifteen years ago when he needed, really *needed* her.

Which made his next actions all the more unfathomable. Adam found himself opening the front door and stepping into the light, cheerful hallway. A chocolate Labrador barreled out of the room to his right, barking and leaping -- and skidded to a halt like something out of a cartoon when he saw Adam.

Smelled Adam.

Recognized him for what he was.

Adam had given up being pack Alpha, but that didn't matter to the Labrador, who sensed an older, more powerful animal and flattened himself to the ground, tail thumping.

Adam raised an eyebrow.

The Labrador rolled on his back.

Adam laughed silently, bobbed down and rubbed the Lab's belly.

"Hershey?" came a voice from upstairs. "Someone there, boy?"

Adam stilled, allowing the submissive dog to scramble to his feet and trot toward the stairs. Hershey. Of course.

He watched the dog bound up the stairs and paw at a closed door. The same door where the Daisy-plus-roses smell was strongest.

"Hershey," came her voice, "I'm not letting you in."

Hershey whined, rolled his eyes nervously at Adam, scratched the door again. Adam didn't need to speak canine to know what the dog was saying: "There's a stranger in the house, so I want to protect you, but he's way bigger and scarier than I am!"

"Hershey," Daisy's voice was purposefully patient, "I am not letting you in. You'll eat my socks."

Adam laughed silently and found himself moving toward the stairs. Hershey whined urgently.

"Oh, Hershey, please be quiet. Can't I just take a long hot bath in peace?"

Adam closed his eyes, but the mental image of Daisy lying back in sweet-scented bubbles, her skin pink from the heat, tendrils of her dark hair curling around her face, eyes closed in bliss, would not go away.

"You know, if you don't shut up," Daisy said conversationally through the door as Hershey whined broken-heartedly, "I'm going to come out there and drip all over you. And I know how you hate getting wet, boy."

Drip all over you. Oh hell.

What the hell was wrong with Hershey? He was never usually this needy. She didn't expect it'd be an intruder: Hershey was the type to throw himself joyfully at anyone who came in the house, not run upstairs, whining.

And anyway, the last time she'd taken a bath with the door open, he'd run inside and leapt in the bath, soaking the whole room, her clothes and towels, and left the whole place stinking of wet dog for days. She'd banned him from even coming upstairs after that.

He whined again and scratched the door.

Well, maybe if he was being so persistent, something was actually wrong.

Frowning, Daisy sat up in the bath and stretched out her foot just as Hershey gave a loud yip. Daisy, alarmed, morphed her foot into a hand and twisted the lock, yanking the door open.

"Hey there, boy, what's the --"

The words didn't just die in her throat. They wrote suicide letters and committed *hara kiri*.

It wasn't Hershey sitting outside her door, whining and scratching.

It was Adam.

He made a little yip noise like a dog and raised one eyebrow at her.

Daisy slammed the door shut again.

For a long second she did nothing, just sat there in the hot water, bubbles popping around her in the rush of cool air from the door, her eyes wide and her heart thumping.

No. She must have hallucinated it. Adam wasn't really here. Why the hell would he be here? It was just because Janey had been asking about him yesterday, that's all --

Yes, said her brain, but if you were just imagining him, would you be imagining him fifteen years older? Clean-shaven, his hair longer, his eyes bracketed by tiny lines? Wearing a blue shirt you've never seen before and a leather jacket that looks so soft you just want to stroke it?

Well, would you?

Although, she conceded, if it was her imagination it'd done a pretty good job. Adam looked pretty damn good. Better than ever, in fact. Broad shoulders, tanned skin, those indigo eyes twinkling like the night sky...

Daisy made herself stop before she started composing sonnets to his beauty.

Mortified beyond belief, her eyes came to rest on her foot, which was currently still shaped like a hand. Crap. Although, to be fair, Adam had never been grossed-out by her shape-changing ability.

He was a werewolf, after all.

Carefully, because she was so much in shock she was liable to slip and knock herself out, Daisy got out of the bath, dried herself, and wrapped herself in a towel, wishing like hell it covered more of her than it did.

Then she took a deep breath and opened the door again.

Adam was still there.

Smiling at her.

"Oh no, you are not," she said, suddenly mad. "You are *not* standing outside my bathroom door grinning at me like a pervert!"

What if it had been Em in there? It didn't bear thinking about!

Adam's smile faded. "Sorry," he said. "But your dog was so desperate for you to open the door..."

She looked past him to see Hershey cowering at the top of the stairs.

"What did you do to him?" Forgetting that she was wearing only a towel, Daisy pushed past Adam to her dog, who thumped his tail with pathetic gratitude.

"I didn't do anything. He recognized a superior male, that's all."

Daisy shot him a look of pure poison. "That's not what I'd call you."

At least Adam had the grace to look ashamed. "Look, I'm sorry. I should have called first --"

"Or at least rung the doorbell!"

"Yeah. Sorry." He shoved his hands in his pockets and gave her his best little-boy-lost look.

Daisy scowled.

"I'm not even going to ask what you're doing here." She straightened up. "I'm going to get dressed."

"Must you?"

Daisy shot him a filthy look and slammed the bedroom door behind her. "And don't touch anything!" she yelled through it.

Chapter Two

Adam leaned back against the wall, staring at the door hiding Daisy from him. Well, hell. She'd hardly changed at all. Volatile, passionate, sexy as hell.

Her skin *was* pink from the bath. Her hair *was* curling around her face. And she *was* naked and slippery, smelling charmingly of roses and hot summer meadows.

Her huge brown eyes were still the same, the prettiest eyes he'd ever seen. Her curly brown hair was cut shorter, like a halo around her face, tipped with gold where the sun had caught it. Her skin was still pale and freckled.

Adam remembered a lost weekend where he'd tried to count her freckles, kissing each as he went. She had the cutest little mole right at the top of her thigh...

He shoved his hands deeper into the pockets of his jeans, trying to create some extra room for his cock. The split-second sight of her in the bath, naked and soapy, had made him so hard it actually hurt.

The first time he'd seen her, he'd wanted her instantly. She'd been standing there naked and muddy, leaves in her hair, scowling at the pack as they surrounded her. It'd been all he could do to prevent himself from leaping at her and fucking her into the ground there and then.

Of course, the fact that he was on four legs and she on two at the time might have put her off a little.

He grinned, remembering. She'd howled a greeting in perfect Lupine, startling the pack, who could smell that she wasn't a werewolf. Wasn't fully human, either -- she smelled... like a human who'd spent too long living somewhere she shouldn't.

Interesting.

Her bedroom door opened and she scowled at him again. "This is the part," she said as she swept past him, down the stairs, "where you tell me a, how you found me and b, what you're doing here."

She was frightened, he realized as he followed her downstairs, not even remotely resisting the urge to ogle her butt in faded jeans. Frightened of what? Surely not him? "Your accent's changed," he observed as he followed her into the kitchen. She now sounded exactly like everyone else he'd met since he got off the plane in Albuquerque. Fifteen years ago, she'd spoken with an Australian accent just like his.

"It does that."

"How long have you been here?"

She shrugged, her back to him as she fiddled with the kettle. "Ten years."

"Before that?"

"Why's it of interest to you?"

"I'm curious."

She stilled, the set of her shoulders tense. Her damp hair had been pinned up with one of those plastic claw things, leaving the nape of her neck bare above her plain black sweater. He wanted to kiss that nape, see if she still tasted the same.

Dammit, what was wrong with him? Daisy had left him, just upped and walked away from him without a word, completely disappeared. She'd broken his heart fifteen years ago, and he still hadn't forgiven her for it. He really shouldn't, therefore, be wanting her so desperately. But it seemed some things never changed.

"I lived in London a while. Then Vancouver. But I wanted to come here, it was where -- where --"

"Your parents?" Adam said softly, and she nodded, her back still to him. "You found them, then."

She shrugged again. "Not exactly." She turned and gave him a tense smile. "I looked them up, but you know what, they weren't exactly worth spending time with. Plus, they'd have had no idea who I was."

Adam nodded slowly, although he had no idea what she was talking about.

"Anyway," she said, dunking teabags into mugs and adding milk, "you still haven't told me how you found me."

"Sundown," he said, and watched her freeze again. "I work there now."

She moved slowly, automatically, fishing out the teabags, stirring in sugar -- two spoons -- she remembered -- and turning to hand him a mug. It said in loopy pink letters, "Go sell crazy somewhere else: we're all full up here."

"In London?" she asked, her voice even.

"New York. New office."

"Ah."

She sipped at her tea, not meeting his eyes.

"You worked at the London office, right?" Adam said.

"For a little while, yes."

It was like getting blood from a stone. Adam gave up. "So, how've you been?" he asked.

"Fine. You?"

"Fine."

Silence. Adam studied her, cataloguing the differences in her face, her body. She was rounder than he remembered, a soft woman instead of a lithe teenager. Her breasts were fuller, her hips curvier, her waist more defined. From the split-second view of her naked in the bath, her legs had still been excellent.

There were small lines by her eyes, bracketing her mouth. He liked them. Her face had more character than it had at seventeen. If anything, it made her more beautiful.

Even if she was still an evil, heartless bitch. He had to remember that part.

"I didn't ask," he said, looking at the hand wrapped around her mug. It was ringless, but then maybe she'd taken them off in the bath. "Are you married?"

"No. You?"

"No." But he hadn't missed the way her knuckles had gone white at the question. He cleared his throat: this was getting painful. It was like being trapped in a Harold Pinter play. "Listen. I came here because I have something to ask you."

Her knuckles got whiter.

"I -- well, first of all, do you have a job?"

She looked at him like he was deranged. "Of course I do."

"Right. Well, then, this might be more difficult. Is it something you can take time off from?"

She frowned. "Why?"

"Because I have a proposition for you. *We* have a proposition for you. Sundown." He cringed inwardly. This was sounding terrible. Well, it was her own fault, standing there smelling so good. Looking so lickable. He couldn't concentrate.

"What kind of proposition?"

"A job. Some work for us. I mean -- something no one else can do."

She snorted. "You want someone who can turn their foot into a hand? Go hire an orangutan."

"No. We want a shapeshifter. Someone who can imitate someone else."

Daisy put her mug down, looking wary. "Why?"

"It's a long story. But you won't be in any danger, I promise, and the pay will be excellent."

She frowned. Shit, he should never have mentioned danger.

"I'm not sure..."

"Please, Daise. I don't know anyone else who can do this. It has to be you."

She licked her lips. Hell, this was torture. She had the softest lips he'd ever kissed -- and Adam had kissed quite a few. Her mouth was wide and generous, hot and damp and delicious.

Adam didn't even realize he'd moved closer until she took a step back, coming up against the kitchen counter and tensing, her big brown eyes dark. Her eyes darted to the clock on the wall and her lips thinned.

"What?" Adam followed her gaze. "Expecting the hubby home from work?"

Those beautiful eyes narrowed again. "I told you, I'm not married."

"But you're expecting someone."

"A client." At his look, she rolled her eyes impatiently. "I make wedding dresses. She's coming for a fitting."

Adam must have looked as dubious as he felt, because she clucked her tongue and led him up the stairs -- which was almost more than his libido could bear -- to a room that had a baby-gate and a high lock barring entry. "To keep Hershey out," she said. "I really can't afford to have him in here."

The room was full of white satin and lace, blinding and baffling to Adam. A frothy confection stood on a dressmaker's dummy, pearls gleaming in the afternoon sunshine.

Fifteen years ago, he'd fantasized about seeing Daisy in a dress like that. And then removing it with his teeth. "All right," he said. "I believe you."

Still looking distrustful, Daisy closed the door and turned the lock. But as she moved past him to go down the stairs, her body brushed his, all soft curves and sweet scents, and he forgot all about human restraint -- not to mention human reasoning -- and pulled her against him.

She looked up, surprised but not exactly alarmed, her lips parted. She wasn't afraid of him. She wasn't pushing him away. And when his name fell from her lips, soft and breathy, he lost it completely.

Her mouth was as wonderful as he'd remembered. Adam had never found another woman with lips as soft and pillowy as Daisy's. He ran his tongue over them, tracing, remembering, feeling her shiver in his arms. When he licked the seam of her lips her mouth opened and the rest of the world stopped existing.

He kissed her like a desperate man. Well, he was fucking desperate: he'd spent fifteen years trying to forget her, trying to find another woman who made him feel anything like Daisy once had, and had failed utterly. She was so soft and warm in his

arms, her body pliant against his. Her sweater rode up at the back and his fingers touched bare skin, hot and smooth.

Her arms were around him, her hips pressed against his. Even through two layers of clothing -- and dear God, if she wasn't wearing anything under those jeans he was going to *combust* -- she had to feel his erection.

He'd never wanted anyone the way he wanted her. Never had such an instant and all-consuming reaction to any woman. And despite many experiments over the years, he'd never felt such a rush from just a kiss with anyone else. Kissing Daisy was more exciting than whole nights in bed with skilled, exotic, beautiful women.

And God, it was good to be kissing her again. Like coming home. Adam found himself backing her against the wall, his hands exploring under her sweater. She had on a lacy bra, cupping breasts which felt heavier and fuller than he remembered. Good. He liked them this way.

He had the feeling that even if Daisy had, as he'd wondered half an hour ago, put on two hundred pounds, he'd still find her infinitely desirable.

"This is insane," she gasped, tearing her mouth away from his. Adam started kissing her neck, licking at the fluttering pulse under her jaw. "We can't... I don't even... I still hate you, Adam."

"I know." His thumbs stroked her nipples through her bra. "Ditto."

"Then we... mmm..."

He smiled against her mouth, pushing up her sweater and unhooking her bra. Her fingers tangled in his hair and he resolved to keep it long and tangle-able so she'd have something to hold on to. He wanted to feel those fingers against his scalp as he sucked her nipple into his mouth. Wanted her to clutch at his hair as he licked her hot pussy.

His cock was so hard it was acutely painful now. Entertaining delirious fantasies about sliding it between her soft breasts, he pulled off her sweater and bra and bent to take her nipple in his mouth. She moaned, her fingers tightening in his hair. Yeah, that's what he was talking about.

A clock chimed somewhere in the distance. Well, probably it was only downstairs, but right now anything that wasn't directly connected with him, Daisy, and getting sweatily naked together was a long way away, as far as Adam was concerned.

But it obviously wasn't a long way away for Daisy. Grasping his head -- mmm, her fingers in his hair -- she forced him to face her.

"Adam," she said, her cheeks pink, her lips swollen and wet, "you have to stop."

He caressed her breasts. "I'm not sure I can."

"Well, make yourself! I really do have someone coming here in about ten minutes."

"Ten minutes," Adam echoed, considering. Well, it'd lack finesse, but in ten minutes he could definitely --

"And I have to get the dress ready and run the vacuum cleaner over the floor and shut Hershey away --" Daisy broke off, arching her back as he rolled one nipple between thumb and finger. "Adam, please," she said, weakly.

He kissed her mouth, unable to believe she was pushing him away. He'd waited fifteen years for this. Didn't she know that?

But of course she did. She knew as well as he did. And she also knew why he'd waited fifteen years. Knew better than he did. He stepped back, and it was the hardest thing he'd ever had to do. Daisy touched her lips, her bare breasts rising and falling as she breathed hard.

"I want you *so much*," Adam said, and was appalled to hear his voice shake.

She looked up -- and now she looked frightened. He could smell it on her -- above the scent of hot, aroused woman, that was. Why was she frightened now? Did she think he'd force himself on her? Did she really think so little of him?

Could he really stop himself from forcing her? Yes, of course he could. Despite his occasionally lupine nature, he wasn't an animal. Dammit. He had a conscience. Double dammit.

Rubbing at his own mouth, trying to scrub away the taste of her, he turned to the stairs. Paused. Fetched an envelope from the inside pocket of his jacket. "Here," he said,

handing it to her, waiting and watching as she tugged her clothes back on. Awkward. Embarrassed. Bloody fuck and damn! "Details of the case. Give me a call if you decide to do it. I'm staying in town. We'll have to leave ASAP."

She gave a jerky nod but didn't say anything. Adam, cursing her, cursing himself and cursing everyone in the whole damn world just for the hell of it, ran down the stairs and slammed the door as he left.

Daisy stood silent at the top of the stairs, touching her lips, breathing hard. Damn, if Em hadn't been due home in ten minutes she'd have been horizontal with Adam. And that could only be a bad thing.

Well, she thought with a smile, remembering previous encounters, actually it would probably be a good thing. A very good thing. But she really, really didn't need to be doing that.

She hastened to the bathroom, leapt in the shower and scrubbed herself all over, wishing like hell Em would allow her to have scented soap in the house. Emerging three minutes before Em was due home, she bolted downstairs and threw her clothes in the washing machine, dumping a load of powder in there and hammering at the buttons until it started up.

The envelope Adam had given her still lay at the top of the stairs. Guiltily, she shoved it under her mattress until she could burn the evidence. No way she was going to put it in the garbage and let Em see it.

When Em walked in through the front door, she found her mother pink-cheeked, her hair wet. "Hello, sweetheart!" Daisy greeted her far too cheerfully. "I've just got out of the shower."

Emma, who was no fool, eyed her and said, "Really? I thought you'd just been running under the sprinklers."

Daisy gave a weak smile. "Good day at school?"

"Oh, you know." Em threw her backpack on the ground and brandished a letter at Daisy. "But guess what! The school is running a trip skiing in February, and Mom, I really, really wanna go."

Daisy winced, thinking of her last bank statement. "How much?"

Emma, wincing also, handed over the letter. "But I was thinking, maybe I could do some jobs, like maybe babysitting or something, mowing lawns or whatever, and make up some extra money..."

Daisy stared at the eye watering sum mentioned on the letter. Emma would be mowing lawns until she was forty to make this kind of money.

"And I checked the moon phases, I'm good to go that week."

Daisy looked up. Emma's face was so hopeful.

"And Carrie and Jenny say they really wanna go, and Joel goes every year and he says it's awesome..."

Joel was Em's latest crush. Probably by the time February rolled around, she'd have moved on to someone else, but for now it was, apparently, absolutely incredibly crucial that her daughter get to spend as much time with him as possible.

"And you never know," Em continued airily, "I might discover a whole calling as an Olympic skier."

Daisy gave her a disbelieving look.

"Well, okay," Em relented. "But you have to admit it's a great opportunity. I mean, when am I ever gonna get to go skiing?"

Never, if Daisy had to pay for it. She shook her head. "I'm sorry, sweetheart," she said, and Emma's face fell. "I just can't afford it."

"But --"

"There aren't enough lawns in town for you to make this kind of money," Daisy said gently, and Emma snatched the letter back, her face blotchy, and ran up the stairs. Her door slammed.

Not for the first time, Daisy cursed Adam Connor.

The hotel movie channels were not inspiring. Adam, resisting the urge to dial up some porn and get some relief from the hard-on he'd been sporting since he walked away from Daisy, glared at a stupid sit-com about stupid people doing stupid things.

Daisy hadn't called.

Stupid Daisy.

He zapped at the TV sound and the canned laughter disappeared. Well, what did he expect from a faery changeling? She'd never been what might be considered normal. Biologically an adult, she was as naïve as an infant about the world when she first popped into existence on top of Uluru, seriously annoying the local tribesmen.

It had its advantages, obviously. She had zero problem believing in werewolves for one thing. Which was excellent for him. She was also, unlike most of the girls Adam knew, not remotely body-conscious. Faeries, she explained, were highly sexual creatures, perfectly happy to wander around half dressed and couple in barely-concealed corners. In fact, she'd confided to him, it was only the fact that they regarded her as a child that lent the fae any discretion at all. Once they'd come to think of her as an adult, they'd stopped pretending to hide and started having sex right in front of her.

Which meant that Daisy had been insatiably curious about what led the fae to moan and pant and cry out in ecstasy. Adam had been more than happy to show her.

He remembered the amazement, the delight she'd shown when she had her first orgasm. Adam was inordinately proud of bringing her off with just his fingers, stroking and thrusting between her legs until she clutched at him and cried out his name, *his name*, her whole body spasming in his arms.

She didn't appear to have changed on that front. His Daisy was still incredibly responsive to his touch. Even if her brain didn't want him around any more, her body certainly did.

He smiled. This was surely something he could work with.

When his phone rang, he snatched it up immediately. A local number was displayed -- who else could it be?

"Daisy?"

"Adam. I --" She broke off. Adam waited. "This case. How much do you need me?"

Adam stifled a groan. *A lot, sweetheart.* "There's no one else who can do it."

"Right. It's just that, uh, I have a lot of work to do. A lot of commitments. I have a dress that needs to be finished by --"

"Whatever it'll cost, I'll pay you."

There was a pause. "I have other commitments."

"Look, if you have any loss of revenue, I'll make it up. Sundown will make it up. Money's really no object. I'll double the fee in that proposal."

He heard her sharp intake of breath. "But, look. I really can't just up and leave --"

"Triple it. I need you tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow? Oh no, that's impossible."

"Quadruple."

"I --" He heard the hesitation in her voice. "Day after tomorrow? I really can't just get up and leave like that..."

Adam considered it. "Tomorrow evening?"

A pause. He waited. "Four times the money and tomorrow evening?"

"Done."

"Done." She sounded breathless, as if she couldn't quite believe what she'd just agreed to. "And -- and --"

"Give me your bank details tomorrow, I'll have the money transferred."

"Right," she said, and hesitated again. "Look, Adam. I want you to know I -- well, that is, I --"

Adam became aware he was holding his breath.

"I'm only doing this because..."

Because of you, because I love you and I missed you and I was stupid to run away from you all that time ago...

"Because I really, really need that money. Making wedding dresses isn't as lucrative as you might think."

Oh.

"And I'm not -- that is, I don't want you to think..." She took a deep breath. "I'm not going to sleep with you, Adam. I'm just not. That's not why I'm doing this. This afternoon was... a mistake."

Adam couldn't think of anything to say.

"I... just thought I'd make that clear," she finished, weakly.

He cleared his throat. "Crystal clear. Thank you for that. I'll pick you up at four tomorrow."

"Right," she said jerkily, and put the phone down.

Adam stared blindly at the TV. What the hell had that been about? And what did she need money for? When Daisy's name had finally come up on the Sundown computer search, Adam had only wanted to know one thing. Was she married? Maybe he should have asked about her finances. She hadn't *seemed* in desperate need of money...

He had an overwhelming urge to leap in his hired car and drive over to her house to find out -- but she probably wouldn't thank him for that. He had days, maybe weeks, to find out what he wanted to know.

The next evening, bags packed and flights booked, he drove over to her house and rang the doorbell.

"Ready?"

She was dressed in jeans and a white shirt, the fabric soft where it caressed her curves. Her hair curled around her face. Her eyes were bright. The scent of her skin came to him, warm and sweet, unhindered by perfume or strong-smelling cosmetics. In fact, unlike almost every other human he'd ever met, Daisy didn't smell of shampoo, or soap, of fabric conditioner, of anything except herself. He wondered what she washed with, and if she knew the lack of synthetic scents was guaranteed to drive him nuts.

"Ready," she said, slinging a bag over her shoulder and refusing to allow him to carry it. She leapt into the car, fastened her seatbelt and looked at him expectantly. "Well? Are we going?"

Why was she in such a hurry? Adam got into the car beside her, closed the door, started the engine. He was just about to pull out of the drive when from the house opposite suddenly burst a teenage girl, black hair flying, Hershey the Labrador bounding along after her.

“Mom!” the girl yelled, making a beeline for the car. “You didn’t think you were going to leave without saying goodbye, did you?”

Chapter Three

Daisy shot Adam a nervous look as he signed the register in their little hotel in upstate New York. It was after midnight now and he still hadn't mentioned Em. Surely he'd have worked it out by now? If the physical resemblance wasn't enough, then there was that famed sense of smell of his.

Even Em had looked surprised, whispering to her mother, "He's a werewolf!" as if Daisy didn't know. But Em hadn't worked out the family connection. Her sense of smell wasn't refined enough.

Maybe Adam hadn't worked it out either. But surely he'd have said something? Asked about Em's father? How old she was? *Anything*? She might have assumed he didn't care, except she knew how important family connections were to his pack. Knew all about the importance of heirs, especially for the pack Alpha.

Hell, that was why she'd taken such pains to hide herself.

"How did you find me?" she asked as they made their way to their rooms. Rather depressingly, Adam hadn't even tried to talk her into sharing. It was one thing, Daisy thought, to tell him she wasn't going to sleep with him, and quite another to find he was happy with this arrangement.

"Sundown," Adam said. "I work out of New York now."

"Did they move?"

"No, the London office is still there. There's one in Rome too, now. We ran computer searches on you."

"But -- you didn't even know my last name." Fifteen years ago even Daisy hadn't known it.

"Yes, but the London office did. They had an address for you in Colorado, so I started there."

"Oh." Back when she'd worked for Sundown, Inc. in London, Daisy had made them promise never to give out her details to a client. She hadn't bargained on Adam actually getting a job there.

"Why did you move?" he asked.

"Em kept killing chickens," Daisy said without really thinking. Her hand flew to her mouth, and Adam's eyes sparkled.

"Hazard of the species," he said. He nodded at the door just past Daisy. "Well, that's your room. I'll meet you for breakfast about eight-thirty?"

That's all? That's *all* he was going to say? The man was completely maddening. "Fine," Daisy said, and slammed into her room.

Bastard!

Adam closed the door to his own room and leaned against it. So, he had a fourteen-year-old daughter. Well, that made the day more interesting.

He could tell Daisy was itching for him to ask about her. But since she'd never breathed a word in the fourteen years since the kid's birth, he was damned if he was going to start nosying around now.

Hell. There was no mistaking the girl's scent. She smelled like a member of the Connor family, and that was all there was to it. Horror slammed through him. Oh God! A member of the Connor family -- any member! Blind panic consuming him, he barged from his room to the one opposite and pounded on the door.

"What?" Daisy's voice came from inside, annoyed.

"Let me in! Now!" Adam roared.

The door opened, rather too suddenly, and Adam almost fell into the room. Daisy was clutching a towel about herself, looking alarmed. "What?" she said again. "Are you okay?"

"Am I okay? Am I bloody okay? No, I'm not bloody damned fucking okay!" Adam yelled.

Daisy shut the door, eyeing him warily. "Why not?" she asked.

He stared at her, the wolf snarling inside him. "Who is Em's father?" he demanded.

Daisy huffed out an irritated breath. "Now you ask," she said. "I'm just about to get in the goddamned shower, and now you ask. We've been together all day, and *now* you ask!"

"Too damn right I'm asking," he growled. The bedroom was pretty small, most of it taken up with the double bed and small clothes chest. The standing room was minimal, restricted to a few feet by the bathroom door.

"I can't believe you even have to," Daisy said.

"She smells like a Connor," Adam said.

"Because she is!"

"But whose?" Adam snarled, and she slapped his face. Hard.

"You see?" she yelled. "You see? You really are a complete bastard. And you can't have her, you know. You are not taking her back to your twisted little tribe."

"Pack," Adam corrected absently, rubbing his cheekbone, which throbbed. Daisy was flushed, her curls bobbing as her chest heaved and her eyes flashed. Adam knew it was a cliché, but dammit, she really was magnificent when she was angry.

The towel was slipping from her breasts, too. That helped.

"I'm not going to take her anywhere," he said. "Listen, Daisy. Please tell me once and for all before I make an even bigger fool of myself than I already have. Who is her father?"

"You are," Daisy snapped, glaring at him.

He was. Thank God for that. If she'd been screwing around with one of his brothers -- or worse, if they'd forced themselves on her! -- he thought he might go insane. "Why didn't you tell me?" he said, and Daisy's eyes narrowed.

"Why?" she said, taking a step forward. "Why? You have to ask why?"

Adam took a step backwards, remembering how Daisy could shapeshift her fingers into anything she wanted -- blades included.

"Er, yeah," he said. "Why? You just left. You just walked away and you never told me why."

The color in her cheeks deepened. "Then I'll tell you why, wolf-boy," she said, advancing further. Adam backed into the bed but she didn't stop. "Because you wanted to be pack Alpha, that's why. And you told me you'd do anything to get there. Remember that?"

"Uh, well, yeah -- at the time I wanted --"

"Even if it meant fighting off all the other contenders," she spat, poking him in the chest with one -- thankfully properly-shaped -- finger. "Even if it meant fighting them to the death, which by the way I still don't understand since I thought werewolves could only be killed with silver bullets, but anyway."

"Actually, it's any kind of silver --" Adam began, but she poked him harder.

"And! You said pack Alphas got *droit* -- *droid* -- *dieu de* --"

"*Droit de seigneur*?" Adam supplied, and she gnashed her teeth at him.

"Yes! So you could sleep with the other girls in the pack!"

"Yes, but it didn't mean I would have," Adam said desperately.

"Because you said you loved me. You said you'd never love anyone but me. And yet," she punctuated each word with a poke, "you were perfectly happy to shag around with the other girls in the pack? *All* of them?"

"I didn't actually --"

"And one of the other contenders was Ryan! Your littermate! You were planning to kill your own littermate!"

By now the pokes had turned to thumps, which Adam deflected automatically, catching her wrists in his hands. "I was planning *what*? You seriously thought I was going to kill my own brother?"

"That's how you make pack Alpha, isn't it?"

"Five hundred years ago it was!"

"No, fifteen years!"

They stared at each other.

"I did not kill Ryan," Adam said firmly, yanking her body against his so she couldn't do him any more harm. "If you never believe another word I say, believe that."

Daisy wriggled furiously against him. "So how come, when I screwed up all the courage I had to come back and tell you I was pregnant, I was told you couldn't be reached since you were conducting funeral rites for him?"

"Because he died of a brain hemorrhage!" Adam shouted.

"Oh," Daisy shouted back, and looked immediately horrified.

Adam was still gripping her wrists, her body still pressed against his. With all her wriggling, Daisy's towel had come loose.

"I didn't know werewolves could have brain hemorrhages," she said, her voice jerky.

"We can. We can die of disease, cancer, heart failure. It's hard to get treatment by human doctors," Adam said, watching the top of her towel slip.

"I thought it was just silver..."

"That's the only thing that can injure us," he said, becoming highly distracted by the bare flesh being revealed, bit by bit, as her towel dropped.

"And -- and --" her breasts rose and fell, "you -- did you make pack Alpha?"

Adam nodded. But only for a few years, until the pack had started pressuring him to take a mate. Because the only woman he wanted to mate with was right here, wearing only a towel that was slipping rapidly.

"And did you have to..."

"Kill anyone? No. Shag every woman in the pack? Well," he gave her a faint smile. "Not every woman."

"I can see you were really broken-hearted about me leaving," Daisy grumbled, making to twist away, but he stopped her with a kiss.

He expected her to try and pull away from him. He fully expected her to slap him again. But she didn't. She kissed him right back, her body flush against his, and when eventually she drew back for air, Adam told her, "I was, you know."

She looked dazed, he thought happily. "What?"

"Broken-hearted." He held her closer. "You never even told me you were leaving."

Her big brown eyes were liquid with contrition. "I'm sorry." She looked away. "I was a little stupid."

A little? Leaving the pack, leaving the country, leaving the damn hemisphere, that was a *little* stupid?

"But you did tell me you'd do whatever it took," she rallied, lifting her chin and glaring at him. "And don't forget I had all the worldly knowledge of a newborn. I didn't know when people were exaggerating or anything. I came from Faery. I didn't even know people could lie."

Damn, she was beautiful. "I never lied to you."

"Yes, but you --" she broke off, looking frustrated. "You told me all this stuff about the pack Alpha, and it wasn't true. That's lying!"

"No," Adam said, enjoying the way her eyes flashed, "that was me trying to impress you. Daisy, I'd never met a girl like you. I was pretty sure if I didn't keep a tight hold of you then you'd get bored with me and go off with someone else."

"Oh, yeah, sure," she scoffed.

"Yeah. Ryan was mad about you, you know."

"Yes, I know." She frowned. "I thought that was why..."

Adam waited. Daisy's cheeks pinkened.

"You thought I'd killed him for it?" he supplied eventually.

"Uh. Yes." She winced. "Adam, I'm sorry. And I'd have never gone off with your brother! Just because he wanted me doesn't mean I wanted him."

Adam opened his mouth to tell her that he hadn't seen it that clearly at seventeen, then shut it. He didn't really want to be talking to her now. Her towel had all but dropped to the floor and she was naked, pressed against him, and he wanted her.

He'd never stopped wanting her.

"It doesn't matter now," he said, tracing her jaw with his thumb. "Daise, none of it matters."

"I'm pretty sure it does," she said, looking up at him with those huge brown eyes.

"Well, maybe it does matter, but not right now," he amended. He skimmed his hand down her back. "You know what does matter?"

"What?"

Her eyes were sparkling now. She knew where he was going with this. Adam leaned closer and spoke into her ear. "That your towel is really slipping and you're not wearing anything under it."

"No," she agreed, shivering as Adam brushed his lips against her ear. "I'm not."

"It's the sort of thing an unsophisticated animal of a guy could take advantage of," he said.

"Is it?"

"Of course, I'm not an unsophisticated animal."

Daisy nuzzled his neck. Her words came to him on a whisper. "What a shame."

That was it. Adam nudged her head up so he could kiss her, ridding her of that stupid towel as he did. Her skin was warm, velvety soft, dotted with freckles here and there. For someone who could change her appearance at will, she hadn't done a lot to alter her natural looks. For which Adam was pretty damn grateful.

Her hands stole up his back, tracing his muscles, kneading them. Here in his arms, so warm and soft, she felt completely wonderful. "You know what?" she said, feathering little kisses all over his jaw.

"What?"

"This isn't very fair."

His heart sank.

"Here I am all naked, and you're fully clothed."

Adam's heart rocketed skywards. Along with certain other parts of his anatomy.

Chapter Four

He was actually more beautiful than she remembered.

Which was insane, Daisy thought as a bare-chested Adam backed her against the bed, because she remembered him as being so dazzlingly gorgeous she couldn't stop staring at him. The other members of the pack had just looked so... normal, so mundane, so unspectacular, but not Adam.

As a wolf, with dark silky hair, he was magnificent. As a seventeen-year-old with fierce, arrogant beauty, he'd been irresistible.

Now, with his hard body, muscles beautifully defined under tanned skin, intelligence and experience and desire in his eyes, he was so incredibly beautiful Daisy couldn't stop touching him. There was a dark shadowing on his jaw, fine lines around his eyes, a couple of faded scars on his chest and arms. He'd been handsome as a boy. He was glorious as a man.

"Daisy..." He laid her down on the bed, and Daisy wondered if she should perform a little enhancement on herself. Flatten her stomach, make her boobs a bit perkier, magic away those lines around her eyes. It was, as far as she was concerned, one of the biggest benefits of being a shapeshifter.

But Adam was staring at her, gazing as if she was something precious and he couldn't get enough of her.

"You're so..." He shook himself. Grinned at her. "Great job growing up, Daise."

She smiled back, reached up and ran a hand over the ridge of his collarbone. "You didn't do so bad yourself."

He moved to join her on the bed, but she shook her head. "Uh-uh. Pants off."

Adam quickly obliged, and then it was Daisy's turn to stare.

Well.

Some things didn't change.

Admittedly her frame of reference wasn't huge, but... well, huge was the word that came to mind when staring at Adam naked. The other day when he'd kissed her blind on the landing at her house, she'd felt the hard ridge of his erection, but she'd told herself she must have been exaggerating it. Must have been thinking back nostalgically. No one really had a cock that big.

Well, Adam did.

"Daise?" he said.

"Yeah." Her eyes were rooted on his big, hard cock, just inches away. She licked her lips.

"Daise, don't do that."

"Don't do what?"

"Lick your lips like that. There's only so much self control I have."

She looked up then, saw his tortured expression, and laughed. "Well, get down here and put it to good use," she said. "It's very distracting, you know."

"I'm glad you think so." Then he was there with her, all that big hard body pressed against hers, and Daisy lost her breath. The mattress dipped as he rolled against her, gathered her in his arms and kissed her some more.

Damn, this man could kiss! Like everything else about him, Daisy figured she'd been looking back through rose-colored glasses on his ability to kiss. It couldn't possibly be as good as she'd remembered it.

Except that it was, and now she was wrapping her legs around his waist and fitting her whole body against his, just needing to touch as much of him as possible while his mouth rediscovered hers.

"Christ, Daise, you feel so good!"

"Ditto," she said breathlessly, her hands roaming over his back, delighting in the sculpted muscles beneath her fingers. She reached down and cupped his wonderful rock-solid buttocks, pulling him against her so that big hard cock of his pressed against her pussy lips.

She was wet for him. Truth be told, she'd been wet since he yanked her against him, her towel slipping -- and he'd known it too, for sure. A werewolf's nose rarely lied.

She indulged in a few glorious seconds of rubbing against him, making herself dizzy with desire, before he pushed her down into the mattress, rearing back with a growl.

"No," he said, "bad Daisy. I want to make this last."

Deprived of the lovely hot cock she'd been writhing against, Daisy pouted.

"No," he said, big and stern and so sexy she nearly combusted on the spot. "I've been waiting fifteen years for this. I don't want it to be over in a second."

She slid her legs against his. "Your stamina's better than that, big guy."

"Not when you do that, it isn't."

Daisy smiled and tried to tug him back up for another one of those drugging kisses, but he stubbornly went the other way, down south, skimming his hands over her breasts and stomach.

"Is this you?" he asked, stopping and stroking the faint marks on her stomach. "I mean, you can look like whatever you want, but is this you?"

"You think I'd choose to have stretch marks?"

Adam dropped his head and kissed them. "I think they're sexy."

"Oh, you are so full of -- shit!"

Adam ran his tongue over her pussy lips, making Daisy's hips lift right off the bed.

"Christ in a miniskirt, Adam, warn me next time you're going to do that!"

"You mean like right now?" he said, doing it again.

Hell, she'd thought he was good at kissing her mouth. His tongue was a damn miracle, swirling and diving over her sensitive flesh. He dipped inside her with his tongue and then with his fingers, sucking on her clit and flicking his tongue over it.

"Holy mother of God and all her wacky nephews," Daisy cried, fingers clenching in his silky hair. "Again! Do that again!"

He flicked his tongue once more. Daisy was a millisecond away from coming.

"Just once more," she begged, but Adam was lifting his head, his eyes wild as he slid back up her body.

"I want to be inside you when you come," he said, fitting the head of his cock against the pussy he'd just been licking.

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

"My, we are in a hurry, aren't we?" Adam teased, flexing his muscles and sliding his cock back and forth over her labia.

"Yes. I've waited fifteen years for this too, you know!"

His eyes softened. "Have you really?"

Daisy reached up, cupped his face. "I have," she said gently. "And if you don't get inside me in the next five seconds, I'll bloody castrate you, wolf-boy."

Adam, damn him, had the temerity to laugh at that, but he slid inside her anyway and Daisy nearly died with pleasure. She wrapped her arms around him, felt him shudder as he pulsed deep inside her, and held him there for a long moment.

This was what she'd missed. Orgasms were one thing, but holding her beautiful wolf like this was another.

Adam lifted his head, his eyes meeting hers, and she saw in them a reflection of her own feelings. Wordless, he kissed her, soft, gentle, wonderful, and then he started to move, sliding nearly out of her then thrusting back in.

Daisy felt the pressure rebuilding in her almost immediately. How the hell could he make her come just by being inside her? No other man ever had.

But no other man was anything like Adam.

Her fingers dug in his back. "I'm almost there."

"Me too," he said, surging into her harder and faster with every stroke. He grabbed at her leg, lifted it high around his waist and Daisy nearly cried because he'd remembered how she liked it. How much she loved to feel him pushing deep inside her, buried up to the balls, stroking her from the inside. He penetrated her at just the right angle, hitting something wonderful inside her, and the tension that had been coiling inside her suddenly snapped.

She came hard, gripping him and convulsing in his arms. Adam thrust harder, faster, strain etched in his face, and with every thrust her orgasm went on and on.

Dimly, she was aware that he came too, and as she lay there in his arms, breathing hard, every cell in her body tingling, she realized she'd never completely fallen out of love with him.

Damn him.

* * *

"You read the file?" Adam asked as the car approached the gate.

"Yes. All the way through. Twice."

She didn't seem at all nervous. Unlike Adam. Hadn't she comprehended the risk? Didn't she know it could be dangerous?

"Are you sure you can do it?"

Daisy gave him a look. "I think I can manage it, yes."

Adam gave a tight smile and buzzed down the window. "Adam Connor," he said into the intercom.

Silently, the gates glided open.

"Thanks," he said, a little unnerved, and drove forward. Beside him, Daisy seemed entirely unconcerned, gazing out the window at the beautifully landscaped garden. No, not garden -- this place had *grounds*. Acres and acres of smoothly rolling grassland, elegantly placed woods and a couple of streams tipping into a lake. It was all far too pretty to be natural.

"So, these clients," Daisy said. "You really meant it when you said money was no object."

"I really did."

"I should have pushed for more," she said idly.

He shot her a look. "If money's a problem --"

"It's not," she said, quickly. A little too quickly. "I'm not -- I don't want -- look, we do just fine."

"Okay," Adam said, wondering why, if that was the case, Daisy had been tempted only by the offer of such a large sum.

"I don't want any money from you," she added, and he raised his eyebrows at her. "I mean -- look, that's not why I -- that's not why I said yes..."

"You didn't say yes for the money?"

"No -- well, yes, but not from you..."

"Ah," said Adam. The car rolled over the smooth drive, making almost no sound.

Daisy looked wary. As well she might. Adam wondered if she knew how insulted he was. "You want money, but you won't take it from me."

"You make it sound like a bad thing!"

"Well, it is a bad thing," Adam said. "What's wrong with my money?"

"Nothing!" Daisy cried. "Except that I haven't done anything to earn it."

"Neither has Em, but you must spend a fortune on her."

"But she's my daughter," Daisy said, as if he was an idiot.

"Yes, and mine too."

There was silence in the car as they pulled up outside the house. It was everything Adam expected from the grand entrance: huge, ornate, and ever so slightly chilling in its perfection. But then, it was the home of a vampire.

"You don't owe me anything," Daisy said eventually.

"Then it's good I wasn't offering you anything."

He got out of the car, the door slamming a little harder than he'd intended, and purposefully didn't look at Daisy as she got out and approached the house. As she raised her hand to the old-fashioned bell pull, he muttered, "She's an ancient, so be polite. They move faster than anyone can see."

"I am capable of being polite," Daisy said, and her tone could have frozen water.

Before Adam could reply, the door was opened by a man so smooth and blank Adam knew he was in thrall to the vampire. What were they called? Renfields. Basically mindless drones.

Well, this was going to be fun.

“Daisy Kennedy and Adam Connor,” he told the Renfield, who nodded and escorted them through a forbiddingly grand entrance hall, up a set of stairs that wouldn’t have looked out of place in Scarlet O’Hara’s house, and down a corridor hung with paintings that even Adam’s untrained eye could see were each worth more than his whole house.

The silent servant opened a door, and the sound of an ecstatic moan greeted them.

Adam raised his eyebrows at Daisy, who was apparently still mad because she ignored him, and strode ahead into the room. On a large, decadently-furnished daybed two athletic and totally naked men writhed together, watched by a pair of women, one of whom was fully dressed and smoking a cigarette. The other was naked, cupping her own breasts, her eyes bright as she watched avidly. She, like the two men, was unmistakably a werewolf.

The smoker looked up. Vampire, Adam could tell even without scenting her. She had that sort of stillness about her that only the really old ones achieved.

“Adam Connor,” she said, her voice accented with what sounded like Russian. She looked to be in her thirties, dressed in a black velvet cocktail dress with her hair in Hollywood starlet waves. Her lips were painted glossy red, although Adam noticed that none of the lipstick came off on the cigarette. Possibly because it was in a long ivory holder.

Adam gave a slight bow. “Lady Margolotta.”

“We talked on the telephone.”

“Yes, we did.”

He was at a slight loss as to what to say next. On the daybed, the two men were grunting and kissing noisily, and a sudden movement made Adam turn his head. One of the men had pushed the other to his back and was now straddling his face, rubbing his cock and balls over the other’s stubbled jaw.

The naked woman gave a slight whimper and pinched on her own nipples. She made to get up, but the vampire put out a hand, resting her fingertips on the werewolf's arm and stopping her completely.

"No, not yet," she said in her thick accent.

The werewolf woman looked torn, her hips undulating on the sofa, but she stayed where she was and slipped a hand between her own legs.

"It's so fun to watch," Lady Margolotta said to Adam. "Part of our agreement."

"Agreement?" Daisy said, and Margolotta's eyes snapped to her.

"Who is this, Adam Connor?"

Daisy's gaze was rooted on the two men, watching one suck on the other's balls. "Daisy Connor," she said, and Adam blinked.

Suddenly, Daisy realized what she'd said. "Kennedy!" she blurted, and Adam couldn't hide his huge grin. "Daisy Kennedy. Daisy *Kennedy*. That's me."

Her cheeks were flaming. Adam started to laugh, but turned it into a cough when she rounded on him, her eyes flashing.

"This is our shapeshifter," he told Margolotta, who turned interested eyes on Daisy.

"This is the creature who will pretend to be me?"

Daisy didn't look all that happy at being referred to as a creature, but she didn't say anything. She just fixed her eyes on Margolotta, who stared back unblinkingly.

Then, as Adam watched, Daisy's skin turned a shade or two paler, her freckles disappearing. Her hair grew longer and darker, falling down her back in a dark ripple. Her cheekbones sharpened, her eyes turning from brown to deep blue.

Her breasts grew higher and rounder, her hips more slender, and as she flexed her shoulders Adam saw that even her nipples had hardened to match the vampire's.

She'd become a perfect replica of Lady Margolotta.

Chapter Five

"Impressive," breathed the vampire. She walked in a slow circle around Daisy, her attention no longer on the two naked men. This was probably just as well, since they too had stopped what they were doing to watch Daisy.

"I need to see your teeth," Daisy said, as Margolotta faced her again, and it was incredibly eerie to hear her voice issuing from the wrong mouth.

"My teeth?" Margolotta's perfectly arched eyebrow went up. "But you are being paid to portray me as human."

"Yes, and I assume most of the time your teeth look human, too," Daisy said.

Margolotta hesitated, then opened her mouth to reveal small, neat white teeth which did indeed look wholly human. After a second, Daisy's were identical.

"That's amazing," said one of the men, and Margolotta shot him an irritated look.

"We will go downstairs," she said.

"One sec," Daisy said, and went over to the daybed. She looked over the two men, her cool restored as she regarded their nakedness. "Which one of you am I meant to be impersonating?"

The kneeling man raised his hand. Daisy nodded, and after a second's hesitation, took off her t-shirt.

"Uh, what are you doing?" Adam said, watching her kick off her shoes.

"I need to get his shape right while I'm looking at him." She unfastened her bra.

The man lying down on the bed started stroking the hips of the other.

"Do you need to be naked?" Adam asked, and his voice came out a little strained.

"He's a lot bigger than me. I'll just rip my clothes." Daisy shot him a wry look over her bare shoulder. "It's all right, I don't have anything you haven't seen before."

"Actually, that's not true," Adam said, because she was still in Margolotta's shape. Her bare back was creamy white, smooth all over, absolutely exquisite. Adam felt his cock hardening and willed it to go down.

"And it certainly won't be, soon," said Margolotta. She breathed out a cloud of smoke and grabbed the werewolf girl in a passionate kiss.

Okay, this was way too much. All the blood in Adam's body rushed south, and when Daisy kicked off her jeans he actually started to feel faint. Gripping the nearest piece of furniture, which turned out to be a statue depicting a scene from the Kama Sutra, he watched as Daisy, flinging the last of her clothes onto the floor, tugged the keeling man to his feet and faced him.

A surge of jealousy swamped him. There should only be one man allowed to see Daisy, and it should be him.

Fingers gripping the polished wood of the statue so hard they left dents, he watched as Daisy's shape changed from the slender, feminine form of Margolotta to the taller, broader, muscular werewolf. The guy had a pelt of hair on his chest, and she ran her fingers over it, as if testing the texture.

The guy's cock jerked and his jaw clenched. Adam knew how he felt.

"Okay." Daisy had her hands on his shoulders -- her hands, which were now larger, hairier, and tipped with blunt nails. She had muscular buttocks and a broad back. Hell, according to the shadow between her legs, she actually had balls!

"I need to hold this a sec," she said, "and then I can remember it better. Once I've taken a shape, my body usually remembers it."

"What about voices?" Margolotta asked, and Adam looked over to see her naked to the waist, her fingers buried between the legs of the werewolf female.

Daisy cleared her throat, and when she spoke again it was in Margolotta's rich, accented tones.

"I need to hear a decent sample of it," she said, and she even had that slight multi-tonal effect Margolotta's cigarettes had given her. "But it's usually the same."

"Do you need to hear my voice?" asked the male werewolf who -- damn her! -- she was still holding by the shoulders.

"Yes," Daisy said, but then she sort of shook herself, as if realizing for the first time that nearly everyone in the room was naked, including herself. When she spoke again she was using her own voice. "But -- right now I think I'd better... leave you to it."

"No, darling, stay," Margolotta said, as the were girl sucked on her nipples.

"I'll be right downstairs," Daisy said, and turned abruptly. Adam caught a glimpse of a large cock and hairy chest, and then her skin seemed to shimmer as she bent to pick up her clothes.

By the time she straightened up again, she was Daisy once more.

But she was still naked.

Rather rapidly, she walked past Adam and out the door. He followed, closing the door with a definite click just as someone inside gave a gasp of pleasure, and turned to see Daisy leaning against the opposite wall, shaking. Her eyes were closed.

"Daise? Daisy? Are you okay?"

She gave a jerky nod. An awful thought occurred to him. "Did it hurt you? Changing into someone bigger?"

She shook her head. "No," she whispered, "it didn't hurt."

Adam reached out, lifted her chin with one finger. "Then what?" he said, and her eyes snapped open, blazing at him.

"Is it really like that?" she asked. "Is it like that for men?"

"Like what?"

Her hand darted out and roughly caressed his crotch. His cock leapt at the attention.

"Thinking with this. Led by this. I thought I was just taking on its shape but my God, Adam! That thing has a mind of its own!"

Adam had to agree. His certainly did.

"It's... difficult to ignore," he said. From the other side of the door, someone was yelling, "Yes! Oh God, yes!"

"He was so turned on," she whispered, her eyes wide. "I was so turned on!"

"Were you?" Adam asked, slightly desperately.

"God, yes." She cupped him through his clothes, fondled him. Adam closed his eyes.

"Daise, please stop that."

"Why?" Her arm curled around his neck, drawing him closer. God, she was still naked, and this time it was really her, no shapeshifting illusion. Her breasts brushed his chest, and even through his shirt he could feel how hard her nipples were.

"Because you're going to make me come in my pants, sweetheart."

Her voice came very close to his ear, her breath tickling him, making him shiver.

"Then take them off."

Adam opened his eyes, saw Daisy grinning up at him mischievously, and groaned.

"Out here?" he said. "In the hall?"

She was already unzipping his fly. "Out here," she confirmed. "In the hall."

When her fingers touched his bare cock, Adam lost it. Pressing her back against the wall, he kissed her long and hard, thrusting into her hands, lifting her legs around his waist. She was wet, hot and slippery for him, and he only had a second before she was guiding him inside her.

She fit him like a glove. She'd always been the perfect fit for him -- in fifteen years he hadn't found anyone better. Here in her arms, her body warm and soft and her mouth hot on his, Adam pretty much felt he'd found paradise.

* * *

"It's a local group of... well, for want of a better term, we call them Van Helsings," explained Robyn, the female werewolf. Now dressed in jeans and a sweater,

freshly showered and sipping tea, she bore little resemblance to the wild, naked creature who'd been cavorting upstairs.

Daisy's skin tingled with the memory of it. Even to her untrained nose, the air had been heavy with lust and sex. It must have been driving Adam insane.

"They've been tracking us, taken to stalking us and trying to take us out with silver," said one of the male weres, the one whose shape she'd taken on. His name was Darren. "It can only be a few steps from here to silver bullets."

"None of us want to kill them," said Tony, the other were.

"We're pacifists," added Robyn. "If you can imagine such a thing of werewolves."

Adam raised an eyebrow at Daisy, whose cheeks burned.

"So, you want me to be your decoy," she said quickly. "Wear silver jewelry, appear human at the full moon, that sort of thing?"

"Yes, exactly."

She nodded. "No problem."

The three werewolves exchanged glances. "We do want you to know it may be dangerous," Darren said.

"The more determined they get, the more militant they get," Robyn added.

"I can defend myself," Daisy assured them. She turned to Margolotta, who was dressed elegantly, drinking something dark and red and definitely not tea. "Do you want me to do the same for you?"

The vampire nodded. "I too am a pacifist," she said, and Daisy nodded seriously, as if the idea of a vampire against violence didn't make her want to burst into giggles. "I wish to... preclude the possibility of these Van Helsings coming after me. Because if they do," she sipped from her delicate china cup, "I may have to kill them."

Yeah. A real pacifist.

"When do you want me to start?"

"As soon as possible, simply making appearances around town," Tony said.

"We actually live in Manhattan," Robyn explained. "When it comes to the full moon, we're going to need you to make numerous appearances as all of us."

Daisy opened her mouth to say that would be no problem, then she realized something. "The full moon," she said, "it's next weekend, right?"

"That's right."

She glanced at Adam. His indigo eyes showed understanding.

"I can't leave her with Janey at the full moon," Daisy said. "She can hold it, but not all night, and she's sharing a room there."

"Who?" Margolotta asked.

Daisy paused, not really wanting to explain the whole situation. But Adam cut in with, "Our daughter. She's staying with friends but they don't know she's a werewolf."

"You have a daughter?" Robyn exclaimed. "How old?"

Adam answered her. Daisy couldn't help but notice the small smile touching Margolotta's lips.

"There are few things that escape me," the vampire said, and Daisy could only nod.

Chapter Six

Being Margolotta's body double was easy. Daisy learned that older vampires could tolerate small amounts of indirect sunlight, but could rarely manage being in the full, direct sun for any length of time. She made a trip to the local high street, wearing Margolotta's form and her elegant, expensive clothes, accompanied by her eerie Renfield manservant.

The Van Helsing had been pointed out to her, and she spotted one going into the local library. Following, she asked the librarian for some books on gardening, explaining that she wanted to grow her own garlic.

The Van Helsing -- it was a young woman with narrow eyes and mousey hair -- looked up at this. Daisy gave her a smile and fingered the crucifix pendant at her throat.

"That's very pretty," the girl said, coming over. She reeked of garlic -- either she was fanatical about vampires, or she just had poor dental hygiene.

"Yes," Daisy agreed, glancing down at the crucifix. "It has been in my family for generations. I rarely wear it as it is so precious."

"How old is it?"

"I do not know," Daisy said, "but it belonged to my great grandmother, who was imprisoned for her faith in the old country." She hoped to hell the girl wouldn't ask which old country, or what faith. "I wear it now to commemorate fifty years since her death."

There, that sounded convincing. With the bonus that Margolotta probably wouldn't be expected to wear the cross any more.

The girl nodded and said, "I notice you're checking out books on gardening. I thought with those huge gardens of yours, you'd have a gardener."

"Yes, I do. But I like to tend my own herbs. There was some garlic already planted in my garden, but I have used it all up. I love garlic in my meals."

"Really? Me too!" the girl said.

Yes, I know, Daisy wanted to say, but forced a smile instead.

They spent the next hour or so swapping gardening tips and hummus recipes, and at the end of it, Daisy left, reasonably happy with herself.

Back at their little hotel, Adam was talking on the phone, making arrangements for Em to come and visit them in Manhattan over the next weekend. Daisy winced: she hadn't exactly explained the full situation to her daughter yet and if she was honest, she had no idea what she was going to say.

She watched Adam move about the room, the sunlight playing on his hair. He was wearing a dark blue shirt that almost matched his eyes. Almost. Daisy'd never seen that exact color anywhere else.

He glanced at his watch as he spoke, and Daisy found herself sighing over the strong lines of his wrist and hand. He had really beautiful hands. And what's more, she knew what they were capable of doing.

It had only been a few hours since he'd pressed her up against the wall and slid into her, long slow strokes that had her writhing and shaking with pleasure. It hadn't really been a good idea, and even at the time she'd known that, but Adam had always been hard to resist.

The thing was, she had no idea how to proceed with this relationship. How did you pick up where you left off fifteen years ago? It would be incredibly stupid to assume they even could. Back then they'd both been hot-headed teenagers. Daisy was pretty sure she'd changed a lot since then -- hell, she had a hot-headed teenager of her own now -- and she knew Adam had, too.

He wasn't the impetuous boy he'd been then. He was calmer now, more patient, definitely wiser. His goals had changed, but the problem was that she didn't know what they'd changed to.

"What?" Adam said, ending the call and looking at her.

"What, yourself."

"You've been staring at me since you walked in. What's up?"

I'm trying to figure out if we've both changed into people who might suit each other again, Daisy thought. I want to know if there's anything between us apart from sex and shared history. I don't even know if you want to be with me, or you're just spending time with me while we're working together. I need to know if you're going to be someone I want in my daughter's life, or if you'll just bugger us about.

I can't figure out how I feel about you.

"Nothing," she said. "I'm just a little tired, that's all. Holding a different shape for long wears me out."

He nodded sympathetically. "How'd it go?"

"Fine. I met one of the girls, we talked about garlic, she admired my cross," she fingered the pendant, "I figure it was a good start."

He nodded. "Great. Well, don't over-do it. We don't want to make them suspicious. I spoke to Darren earlier. He thinks we should go out there this week and get to know their daily habits, their routines."

"Good plan."

Adam smiled, flashing his killer dimples at her, and Daisy's temperature rose a little.

"I reckon we should stay here tonight and leave in the morning," he said, glancing at his watch, "which means we have, oh, twelve hours or so to kill. Now." He frowned pensively. "What could we do for twelve hours in a hotel room?"

Daisy's heart rate speeded up, a fact Adam didn't miss. His indigo eyes darkened.

"Twelve hours of it and I'd be dead," she said.

"Yeah, but what a way to go." He slipped his arms around her waist, and Daisy stiffened. "Daise? You all right?"

She looked up, and nearly faltered. Nearly told him she was tired and didn't want to, but her body would make a liar of her, and she knew he could smell it.

"Adam," she said, stepping back, watching his face fall. "Look, I don't think we should rush into this."

"Into what? I intend to take it slowly," he said, and her mouth went dry.

"Into anything. We both have a lot of stuff to talk about, to work out, and I don't know about you but I have to know where this is going."

"You have to know right now?"

"Well, I'd like a general direction."

He regarded her for a moment, then he nodded. "Fine. All right. I want to sleep with you."

Daisy couldn't help glancing at his crotch. "I'd noticed."

"I want to meet Em. I want to be a part of her life."

She smiled. "I want that too."

"Then we want the same things." He started toward her.

Daisy felt her smile fade. "No, I don't think we do."

Adam stopped. Daisy sighed.

"Being in Em's life and sleeping with me doesn't make us a family. If you and I spend time together we have to know where it's headed. Em has to know."

Adam's eyes narrowed, but Daisy pressed on.

"She has to know about our relationship. If we're together or not. I mean, think about it, Adam. For fourteen years I've been telling her she doesn't have a father, that he's not in the picture, and then what's she going to think when you turn up? She's not stupid, but she is a kid, and she's going to want us to be a happy family together."

"And why can't we be?"

"Because I don't know you. And you don't know me, not really. Fifteen years changes a person, Adam. It sure as hell changed me. For one thing, I spent most of that time thinking you were a fratricide. For all I know you might be lying about that --"

His eyes turned cold. "I'm not."

Daisy rubbed her hand over her face, suddenly very tired.

"Do you really think I killed my own brother?"

She blew out a long sigh. "No. But you know, I spent fifteen years believing it. Fifteen years pretty much hating you. And now you're back, and once again I've had my perception of you changed and I just don't really know who you are. I'm not about to just blindly throw myself into a relationship with you because we used to be good together when we were teenagers. Hell, we were hardly older than Em."

Adam's gaze didn't waver. He stood utterly still, watching her. Daisy was silent a moment, trying to get her words in the right order.

"And I think we need to get to know each other again," she said eventually. "I'm not going to deprive you of being in Emma's life. I -- I shouldn't have before. It was wrong of me but hey, I was young and very stupid, and can I just reiterate that I'd grown up in Faery, where no one can lie and just being something you're not is impossible."

"I never lied to you," Adam said evenly.

"No, but I thought you had, and I didn't understand it. Young. Stupid," she repeated.

"And now you've changed your mind?"

"Now I've realized a few things I was trying not to think about before," Daisy said carefully. "And yes, I think you and Em should get to know each other. But..."

"But you don't think you and I should be together."

"We're different people, Adam," she said, not without a touch of sadness. "We hardly know each other now. Six months down the line we could end up hating each other --"

"So? People do!"

"-- which Em will pick up on because as I said, she's not stupid. And then, what, we either stay together for her sake, and she realizes she's the cause of us both being miserable, or we break up and take away this family we've just created. And I won't do that, Adam. She needs to know her parents love her."

I won't give her the fantasy of a happy family and rip it away from her, she thought fiercely. I won't hurt her.

Adam shook his head. "You seem so sure this is all going to end in misery," he said.

"Well, it did last time."

His eyes flashed, and for a split second Daisy was afraid, because she was in a small room with an angry man who could turn into a large wolf at will. Then she shook herself, lifted her chin and stared him down.

"Fine," Adam snapped. He stormed past her, across the corridor to the room he'd reserved but hadn't used yet. "I'll see you in the morning."

"Fine."

"Fine." His door slammed.

Daisy sat down on the bed, blinking furiously. "Fine," she said to the empty room.

* * *

By the time they'd reached Manhattan the atmosphere in the car was so unbearable Daisy seriously considered throwing herself out of the moving car. Adam had somehow managed to avoid both verbal and physical contact with her all morning, glowering at the road ahead so fiercely she expected it to erupt in a flood of molten lava.

He pulled into a parking garage in the east seventies and got out without a word, striding off toward an elevator.

"Is this your apartment?" Daisy asked, unsure whether she should bring her luggage or not.

"This is a garage."

She rolled her eyes. Well, at least he wasn't ignoring her any more. "I mean, should I bring my stuff?"

"No." He hit the button for the elevator with far more force than was necessary. The metal buckled. "You're not staying with me."

Well, that sure told her. Dispiritedly, Daisy grabbed her handbag and followed him into the elevator, which was large, well lit and even had a bench seat at the back.

"Swanky."

Adam grunted.

Daisy bit her lip. She'd spent most of the night staring at the ceiling, willing herself the courage to knock on Adam's door and apologize. But then she wondered what the hell she was supposed to be apologizing for. Adam didn't understand; he never would. His parents, to her recollection, had actually been happy.

And how weird was that?

The elevator chimed, and a smooth female voice announced several businesses, including Sundown Investigations.

"Sundown?"

The doors opened, and Adam strode out without replying. He pushed through a glass door etched with the company's name, and Daisy followed, taking in the expensive furnishings, original works of art and glossy staff. The girl behind the large desk was speaking into a headset whilst fastening her long shiny black hair into a braid.

"...yes, it's guaranteed to be human blood only. Yes, of course. We guarantee that all the blood we collect is not only one hundred percent clean and human, but also that it's not required by the hospital. We only take expired blood." The girl looked up and waved at Adam, who gave her a smile. It didn't quite reach his eyes. "No, it's still perfectly safe to drink. And there's no difference in taste. You just warm it a little in your microwave, and it's delicious."

Daisy blinked, but Adam seemed unconcerned. Perhaps things had changed since she'd worked in the London office all those years ago. Back then they'd never have talked publicly about supplying vampires with blood.

"Uh-huh... so that's one month of O Positive. And we'll have it delivered weekly. No, thank *you* very much."

She ended the call and beamed at Adam. "So how was your trip?"

Daisy couldn't help a stab of jealousy. The girl was very pretty, with big dark eyes and skin the color of milk chocolate. She had a strong accent, Mexican, Daisy thought.

"Fine," Adam said. "Maria, can you do me a favor? I need a pickup at LaGuardia on Thursday arvo."

"Arvo?"

He flashed that dimpled grin. "Afternoon."

"Anyone important?"

"Very."

"I can send Chloe if you like? Right up to the plane."

Daisy frowned. She'd planned on going to fetch Em herself -- surely the were pack couldn't need her all day on Thursday.

"That's not really necessary," she began, but Maria shook her head.

"It's no problem. Cuts out a load of hassle. You know, flying is so unpleasant these days," she said, with a seriousness that made Daisy want to giggle.

While Adam was giving Maria the flight details, a door opened and a handsome dark-haired man came out. He had a thin scar across his cheek, and as he moved, Daisy caught the scent of ice and a feeling of... otherness. Almost like the faeries of the Seelie court, but not quite.

He slowed down, watching Daisy the way she watched him. Their eyes locked, and Daisy shivered, a wave of darkness washing over her. He was Unseelie, she realized. The court of winter, of darkness. That's why he seemed so familiar, and so alien all at the same time.

"You know, you don't need to stare," Maria said, a touch jealously.

"I'm sorry," Daisy said, unable to quite take her eyes off him.

"I wasn't talking to you. Hey, Ruarc. Snap out of it!"

But Ruarc didn't seem able to. Scowling, Maria got to her feet and tugged on his arm, and then he managed to tear his gaze from Daisy. He looked quite shaken.

"You've never met a changeling before, have you?" Adam said quietly.

"What is a changeling?" Maria asked, dragging Ruarc back behind the desk with her.

"I am," Daisy said. She shook herself.

"You seem human," Ruarc said, "but you're... you're not. You're just not. You smell like the Seelie court."

"I was raised there," Daisy said.

"Are you Seelie?" Maria asked doubtfully. "You don't smell like a faery to me." She sniffed. "Actually, you smell like Adam."

Daisy scowled. "I showered and everything!"

"How long were you there?" Ruarc asked. He seemed fascinated.

"Seventeen years."

"And the court... rubbed off on you?"

Daisy looked down at her hand, made the skin change color, turned her fingers to claws, to fins, to suckers, and back to fingers again.

"You could say that," she said.

"You're the shapeshifter!" Maria cried.

Daisy shrugged. She tried not to look bitter, but it wasn't easy. "The fae are easily bored," she said, and glanced at Ruarc to see if he was insulted. He didn't seem to be. "And they like children. They love children."

"The Queens are fond of bargaining for them," Ruarc agreed.

"How do you bargain for a child?" Maria looked revolted and fascinated all at the same time.

"Usually in advance," Ruarc said. "She grants their dearest wish in return for their firstborn child. Plenty of people think they're being smart when they agree, since they don't plan on having children. But then the Queen steps in and... changes those plans."

Daisy stared at the carpet.

"That's so terrible!" Maria said. "And they lose their baby? As soon as it's born?"

"In some cases, yes."

"Is that what happened to you?" Maria asked Daisy, who looked up. This time she knew she hadn't kept the bitterness from her face.

"They took me as a newborn, yes," she said. "But there wasn't any bargaining. My mother gave me away."

They all stared, Adam most of all, and Daisy realized she was going to have to tell them the whole story.

"They never take something without bargaining," Ruarc said. "They can't."

"Well, I think she was offered something in return," Daisy clarified. "My mother was a beauty queen who got knocked up by a married man. He actually gave her money to keep it quiet, and she took it. She planned to give me away to an adoption agency or something, but a faery got there first."

"They do that," Ruarc said, and there didn't seem to be much love lost between him and the rest of his kind.

"She was horrified at how pregnancy had ruined her figure. So she asked the faery to make it so no one would know she'd been pregnant, and to make sure it never happened again."

Ruarc winced as if he knew what was coming. "What'd she do?"

"Car crash," Daisy said. "My mother was crippled. Of course, in the aftermath of the accident no one had any clue she'd had a baby. She was such a mess inside."

"Enough of a mess that she could never have children again?" Adam guessed, and Daisy nodded.

"Could never even walk again. She'd wanted to be a model, maybe an actress, but the car crash had scarred her face, burned her scalp. She had no hair on one side. She used to be so beautiful," Daisy said, recalling the picture of a smiling young woman in her tiara, faded and undusted on the bedside table, beside the blood pressure cuff. "And the faery ruined it."

"They're big on irony," Ruarc said. "Makes up for not being able to lie."

"But you said..." Adam began. His voice was soft, his expression appalled. "You said you'd tracked them down, you didn't say..."

Daisy shrugged, closing her eyes and fighting hard against the threatening tears. She'd decided long ago that her worthless mother wasn't worth crying over. Unfortunately, her tear ducts never remembered this.

"Was your mother pleased to see you?" Maria asked.

"Pleased?" Daisy opened her eyes and nearly laughed. "I'd ruined her life. If she hadn't fallen pregnant and made that deal with the faery, she'd still be able to walk, she'd still have her hair. She'd have a glittering career in Hollywood. She wouldn't be a freak in a wheelchair. Little children wouldn't point and stare and cry."

"Her words?" Adam said gently.

"Her words."

"She told you that?" Maria was aghast.

"Yeah. You could say she wasn't happy to see me."

There was silence for a long moment, broken by the ringing of the phone. Maria, looking relieved, answered it, and Ruarc straightened up.

"The shapeshifting," he said to Daisy. "Queen's gift?"

She nodded. "Made me more entertaining. After I grew up they weren't so interested in having me around."

"Yeah. Children are precious to them, but they lose interest when the kid grows up."

"They do," Daisy said. "They sure do."

Chapter Seven

"Look," Adam said as they reached the were pack's apartment building, "we don't have to do this now."

Daisy had been silent in the car, staring out the window and barely responding to his questions. He supposed he deserved it -- after all, he'd been giving her the silent treatment this morning -- but he got the feeling Daisy wasn't doing it to be petty.

She was doing it because she was upset.

Fifteen years ago, when she'd told him about the fae courts, he'd asked her about her parents.

"They were tricked into it," she'd said, her eyes shining. "That's what the fae do. They told me. They'll bargain anything for a child, but if someone actually gives in, they're so disgusted they always do something to punish them. Children are so precious to them that they don't think much of someone who'll give them up."

Well, that seemed true enough. He wasn't a hundred percent surprised at what the fae had done to Daisy's mother. What had surprised him was what the stupid woman had done to deserve it.

She hadn't bargained for a child who didn't exist. She hadn't wrestled with her conscience. She'd freely given away her own baby, and then she'd blamed her own absent child for everything she'd brought on herself.

No wonder Daisy was so protective of Emma.

"Daise? We can go somewhere else if you want."

"No. We'll do this," she said, her voice calm, and got out of the car.

The wolves took a while to answer the intercom, and when Robyn finally did she sounded breathless. "Come on up," she said, and either the intercom was terrible or someone was gasping in the background.

When Daisy pushed open the unlocked apartment door, Adam saw that it hadn't been the intercom at all. The three werewolves were writhing on a large rug in the center of the apartment, naked and shining with sweat. The smell of sex in the air was so strong it nearly choked Adam. Blood rushed south.

Daisy stood immobile, watching them.

Robyn was between the two men, her lithe body undulating as Darren licked and kissed her breasts, her stomach, her shoulders. Her legs were around him, squeezing and stroking, his fingers between her thighs. Behind her, Tony was licking and biting her neck, his fingers rolling her nipples. He thrust his cock against her pussy, not entering but stroking her, and Darren was doing the same. The three of them rubbed and writhed against each other, never still, always moving, fluid and graceful together.

Adam's cock throbbed as he watched the three of them. He'd always known each pack was different, and while his own was more like an extended family, there were plenty of packs of unrelated werewolves who lived together, free of conventional relationships, taking pleasure wherever they wanted.

Apparently this was one such pack. Or maybe these three were the exception. As he watched, Darren moved down Robyn's body to lick her pussy and she let out a piercing shriek. She shook and writhed, and then she reached down and guided Tony's cock into her. He thrust hard, hard enough to hurt a normal woman, but then Robyn didn't seem to be entirely normal.

Tearing his eyes away, Adam glanced at Daisy, and was horrified to see her removing her clothes. She did it mechanically, her face blank, watching the three weres the whole time.

"Daise," he croaked, "what are you doing?"

"You don't mind, do you?" Daisy asked the weres, and her voice sounded distant.

"Hell, no," Tony grunted from behind Robyn. She let out a squeal as he shoved deeper inside her.

"The more the merrier!" she yelped. "Adam! Come on!"

But no matter how arousing the scene was, Adam didn't want to join in. He didn't want to fuck these strangers, didn't want to touch and taste them, to feel their hands on his body.

The only hands he wanted were Daisy's. The only taste he craved was hers. It always had been. He'd given up on trying to find another woman to distract him years ago. It was never the same, it was never right.

But Daisy clearly didn't feel the same way. She moved toward the gasping, grunting werewolves, apparently desperate for some other hands to touch her body, some other taste on her tongue.

Every instinct in Adam rebelled, and the urge to grab her, throw her over his shoulder and drag her back to his apartment was overwhelming. But he stopped himself. She'd hate him if he did that.

But he couldn't stop watching as she knelt down in front of Robyn, touched her breasts tentatively. Adam felt himself wondering what all those porn film fantasies were about, why so many men tried to get their girlfriends involved in a threesome. According to every men's magazine he'd ever read, watching Daisy play with another woman's breasts ought to be the biggest turn-on of his life.

Instead he wanted to scream that she was his, only his, and she couldn't have anyone else.

But that wasn't what Daisy wanted.

And then he caught sight of Daisy's expression, the misery and pain there, and without even thinking he reached down and grabbed her, swinging her into his arms.

"Hey, share with us," called Tony, but Daisy was clinging to Adam and shaking.

"If you want to stay, I'll let you go," he told her. "If you really want to."

Her face was buried in his neck. His heart thumped as he waited for her answer.

She shook her head.

Adam walked her straight out of there, pausing only to wrap his jacket around her naked body, before taking her down to the car and placing her gently in the passenger seat.

She shook all the way home, silent tears running down her face, and with each one Adam's heart broke a little. When they reached his apartment building she got out and walked alone, arms wrapped around herself, her face blank.

The click of the apartment door closing sounded very loud in the silence, and it made Daisy jump.

"I -- I, uh," he began. "I think I'll just go and..."

She wasn't even looking at him.

"Maybe take a nap?" Adam suggested gently.

Her nod was jerky. She looked around as if she'd never seen walls and furniture before. Adam pointed to his bedroom and she went in, closing the door behind her.

He closed his eyes. Damn, but he wanted to go to her!

The door opened, and so did his eyes.

"Could you just --" Daisy began, and Adam tensed, every muscle in his body wanting to go to her.

"Could you just hold me?" she said, and he was there in seconds.

While she was a child they'd protected her. Later in life, Daisy had formulated the theory that the reason the fae loved children so much was because children were so innocent, and the fae were so jaded. They spent their endless lives plotting and scheming and screwing, but they never played, they never laughed and they never had fun.

They'd been fascinated with Daisy's total innocence, a wonderful fresh start, and for a while, she'd childishly believed they were like her. But they weren't. They weren't innocent and they didn't understand fun. Faeries might not be able to lie, but they could cheat and manipulate to achieve their own ends. And when Daisy's innocence faded, so did their interest in her.

At seventeen, with the full glory and decadence of the degenerate Seelie Court thriving around her, Daisy had snapped.

"I'm not like you, you won't treat me like you, and you don't want me any more, so send me back," she yelled at the Queen, and the next moment she'd been standing naked on top of a huge red rock with the sun beating down on her.

The wolves had found her, but she hadn't been afraid. The fae kept animals a thousand times more terrifying than anything that walked in the mortal realm. She had been mildly intimidated by the ring of silent animals, however, until one of them changed into a beautiful young man. He had broad shoulders and lean hips, his skin was streaked with dust and sweat and sunburn. There were freckles on his nose, which was less than perfectly straight, and a few small scars on his body. He moved with the easy grace of a hunter, every muscle in tune. His eyes, those beautiful dark indigo eyes, sparkled as he looked her over.

He was utterly unlike fae males, who were so perfect as to be boring. He was earthy and vital, gleaming with health and energy, and when he smiled, a flash of white in a tanned face, Daisy started to understand what made the faeries gasp with pleasure.

"I'm Adam," he said, extending a hand, and when she just looked at it, he whispered, "This is the part where you tell me you're called Eve."

"But I'm called Daisy," she said, and he threw back his head and laughed.

Daisy fell instantly in love.

The whole pack escorted her back to their temporary campground, but it was Adam who stayed with her that first day and that first night. When she shivered he found her clothes, which she didn't understand since she'd never worn them before. He'd found her a bed, a private space to sleep in, but Daisy hadn't understood privacy, either. She didn't like being alone, naked and cold in her bed, so she'd gone to find the man who'd been so kind to her, slipped into his bed and curled up in his warm arms.

Fifteen years later, she was back in his arms again, once more confused and lost but feeling safer for being with him. He didn't say anything, just held her close, his arms protecting her from a world she still didn't totally understand.

Eventually she looked up at him, and he smiled. And she felt exactly the same as she had that first time, that first smile.

"You know," she said, reaching up and touching his jaw, "we got it right back then."

"Of course we did." He frowned. "Got what right?"

Daisy smiled. "You and me. I loved you exactly as you were, without you becoming pack Alpha. You didn't have to impress me."

"I was seventeen. Of course I did."

"And I didn't need to worry that you were going to do something stupid to get there. I should have known."

"No, you shouldn't. You said yourself. How could you have known?"

She sighed. "I wish... I wish I could go back to how it was then."

"Do you really?"

"Yes," she said, meeting his eyes.

"I don't."

Her face must have showed her surprise because he stroked her cheek and said, "Daise, we were seventeen. We weren't..." he trailed off, looking frustrated.

"Weren't what?"

"We weren't ready for each other then."

Daisy swallowed, all of a sudden desperate to hear what he had to say. "And now?"

Adam cupped her face in his hands. "Now I've spent fifteen years telling myself I didn't need you, and never believing myself for a second. I still want you. And we might not have been right for each other then, but we've both changed and my god, Daisy, I hope we've changed into the right people now."

"But what if we haven't?" Daisy whispered.

"Then maybe we're not done yet." He gave her a crooked smile. "Daise, don't you wonder why I gave up being pack Alpha? Why I left the pack? It was because I wanted to be there with you. I wanted you at my side and I wanted our children with us. That's all I wanted. And I don't know how things are going to work out with Em but

I promise you this. You are not your mother. I am most definitely not your father. Emma will always have two parents who love her and want her."

A lump lodged in Daisy's throat, and she couldn't speak.

"Is that what you were worried about?" A light of concern came into his eyes. "Or was it something else?"

She shook her head. Then she shrugged and managed, "There are so many things I'm worried about."

"Then we'll take care of them. I promise."

She looked at him, so strong and handsome and so willing to help her, and on impulse leaned up and kissed his soft lips. Just a brief kiss, to show him how much she appreciated him, but that wasn't quite enough so she brushed her lips over his again. Then again.

"Okay, just once more," she said, and Adam smiled, which always affected her ability to concentrate. So she forgot she'd meant to stop kissing him, and did it again and again until her fingers were sliding through his hair and her tongue was in his mouth and she was wishing he wasn't still dressed because she wanted to feel his warm skin against hers.

Adam's hands stroked her back, holding her close as he kissed her, and Daisy rubbed her bare leg over the roughness of his jeans. It felt good, so she did it again, and as she wriggled closer she realized the denim was definitely stretched tight over his crotch.

They were lying together in bed, they were kissing like they'd just discovered it, and Adam had a pretty decent erection. Daisy knew that if she didn't stop now, she never would. But she didn't want to stop. She wanted to run her hands all over Adam's strong body, smooth skin and hard muscles. She wanted to taste him. She wanted to arch her body into his skilled hands. She wanted to feel him thrusting deep inside her.

Breaking away from his mouth, she pressed wet kisses against his stubbled jaw, the rough skin of his neck. His skin was so hot and he tasted wonderful. Werewolves

rarely used scented cosmetics or any kind of cologne, which meant no traces of chemicals on his skin.

Her hands slid up under his shirt, feeling the muscles in his back jump and tense, then she brought them around to the front to tug at his shirt buttons, kissing and licking each bit of skin she exposed.

"You drive me crazy, Daisy," he groaned, and she nipped at his throat.

"That's me," she agreed, pushing his shirt away. "Crazy Daisy."

He pulled her back up his body, sprawled across his chest, and kissed her some more, his dark eyes sparkling. Then he rolled her onto her back and dipped his head to her breasts, kissing first one then the other, licking her nipples until they both hardened, tight and sensitive, and she was clutching at him. His hair slid over her fingers, her ankle rubbed up and down his thigh, and then he lifted his head and grinned at her. His eyes were glittering like the ocean at midnight.

"This is how I remember you," he said, skimming his hands over her ribs as she arched her back, thrusting against him. "Your cheeks are pink, your nipples are hard and you're arching toward me. You're imprinted on my memory like this."

His hand dipped down between her thighs and Daisy's whole body tensed in anticipation. His finger skimmed her folds so lightly she only just felt it, but that tiny sensation was enough to make her shiver.

"You're so beautiful like this," Adam breathed, his eyes on her as he stroked her. "I could watch you forever."

Those indigo eyes never left her face as his fingers delved inside her, touching her just the way she liked it until her hips arched right off the bed. His thumb stroked the side of her clit, his fingers toying with her labia, and her head tossed from side to side as the pleasure built inside her.

But before her orgasm came Adam lifted her hips, draped her legs over his shoulders, and licked into her.

Daisy let out a hoarse cry, her hands fisting in the loose sheets on the bed. Adam's tongue stabbed inside her, then ran up to her clit in one long lick that left her shuddering.

When he sucked her clit into his mouth she came, but he didn't stop. He licked and sucked until a second orgasm overwhelmed her and she nearly sobbed with pleasure.

When he lowered her to the bed again, her entire body was shaking and she knew if she tried to stand, her legs would give way. She didn't care. Her body felt wonderful, soft and sated, and she watched in a happy daze as Adam tugged off his jeans and sat back against the headboard. He was still hard as a rock, and Daisy reached out to stroke his cock. It quivered under her touch.

Adam groaned and hauled her into his lap, straddling his hips, and kissed her as he slid into her. He wrapped his arms around her, held her close and thrust gently, building up the sensations in her until Daisy was quivering not from exhaustion but from pleasure.

Adam's lips were on her neck, his hands on her hips, pulling her closer as he thrust upwards into her, a little faster and harder now. His eyes were bright, his breathing ragged, his skin damp with sweat, and as her third orgasm approached, Daisy kissed his mouth and squeezed her pussy around his cock, feeling his orgasm hit at the same time as hers.

"Oh Christ, Daisy," he cried, crushing her to him. "Daisy!"

She kissed him, trembling in his arms, unable to move and not wanting to either.

"I love you, Daisy," Adam whispered into her hair, and she snuggled closer, feeling pretty in love with him herself.

Chapter Eight

On Thursday, Adam awoke to the scent of coffee in the air and Daisy on his skin. He smiled. Three days and three nights of her in his apartment, in his bed and in his arms conspired to make him pretty happy.

Well, not just in his bed. In his shower, in his living room, and once, memorably, in his kitchen, too.

He stretched, grinning, and went to find the source of all that was good in his life right now.

She was standing by the patio doors, looking out over his little roof terrace and the city view beyond. Adam's apartment wasn't far from Central Park, where no one really noticed a large dog trotting around a few nights a month, but it faced east and the river could be seen sparkling through gaps in the buildings.

Adam padded up behind Daisy and kissed the back of her neck. "Morning."

"Hi."

He slid his arms around her, rested his chin on her shoulder. "You smell gorgeous," he said.

"I don't smell of anything."

"You smell of you," Adam explained, "and you are gorgeous. Ergo..."

She looked back at him, smiling. "Someone woke up happy today."

"You were here," he said simply.

Her smile faltered a little, reminding him that this was only temporary. Sooner or later, they were going to have to go back to their real lives. At least, that's what Daisy kept saying. To Adam, this was real life. Waking up in the morning, eating breakfast, deciding what to do about dinner. Yesterday, Daisy had taken Robyn's form and gone

jewelry shopping -- buying silver items specifically. Adam had loitered opposite Tiffany's and indulged in fantasies of taking Daisy there to buy a ring.

If Daisy and Emma wanted to continue living in New Mexico, he'd go there with them. Or they could move here. Or they could go back to Australia and Emma could meet his pack, who were after all her family.

Daisy wanted to take things slowly, and that was fine by him. But it seemed to Adam that she was expecting it to all go wrong, and Adam sure as hell wasn't planning for that.

After Daisy had left him all those years ago, after his brother had died and the future had looked pretty bleak to Adam, he'd questioned whether becoming pack Alpha was something he even wanted to do any more, since it seemed everything else he planned for just failed spectacularly.

"Kid," his father had said, "stop looking for ways for your plans to fail. Look for ways for them to succeed."

Daisy, he felt, might benefit from the same advice, but he didn't think she'd take kindly to it right now.

"I was thinking, I could still go up to the airport to fetch Em," Daisy said now. "Save your friend Chloe the trouble."

"It's really no trouble," Adam told her. "In fact, it's the opposite of trouble." She frowned, so he clarified, "She won't get stuck in traffic, and she won't have to go through all the airport hassle. Baggage reclaim and all that."

Daisy looked confused. "Just who is this friend of yours?"

"Chloe? She's a siren. She can make anyone do anything she wants just by asking nicely."

"An actual siren? The... wings and...?"

"Feathers and teeth, yep. You should see the teeth, Daise. Actually, you probably shouldn't. Gave me nightmares."

She laughed, as if the idea of Adam having nightmares about anything was ridiculous, and he smiled, because it was kind of nice that she thought of him that way.

Little by little, he thought, I'm getting you there.

Daisy spent the morning pretending to be various members of the werewolf pack and the afternoon rushing around Adam's spacious apartment looking for housework to do. Since he had a cleaning service, there wasn't much, but nerves had got the better of her and she badly wanted the apartment to make a good impression on Emma.

If she liked the apartment, she might like Adam. If she liked the restaurant Adam had recommended for dinner, then she might like him. If she liked the color of his shirt, she might like him.

She had no qualms about Adam liking Emma. He was a man of good judgment and she was the best teenager in the world. She was just terrified her daughter might look at Adam and wonder what on Earth her mother had ever seen in him.

Pausing as she dusted surfaces that didn't need dusting, Daisy wondered, not for the first time, if Adam really was as good as he seemed. Maybe she thought he was more handsome than he was. Maybe she'd believed his story about what happened fifteen years ago too easily. Maybe he had his own agenda. Maybe she was just making allowances because she was really horny and he was the best sex she'd ever had.

Maybe she was going quietly mad.

When the intercom buzzed, Daisy dropped her duster in alarm. Adam, grinning at her, strode over to hit the button before she could get there.

"Hello?"

"Adam, it's Chloe." A female voice with a slight accent, Greek maybe. "I have someone for you."

"Bring her up."

Daisy bolted to the kitchen, stared blindly at the cupboards and ended up throwing the duster in the oven. She flicked the kettle on, then off as she remembered Adam had a fancy coffee maker and Emma didn't like tea. Mopping her upper lip, which was suddenly very damp with perspiration, she glanced over to see Adam reclining on the sofa, reading a magazine.

"What is wrong with you?" she hissed.

"What?"

"Aren't you nervous?"

He glanced up, amusement in those beautiful eyes. "Everything'll be fine, Daise."

"Yes, but... aren't you *nervous*?"

He stood up, came over and wrapped his arms around her. "She's your daughter. How could she be anything but fantastic?"

Daisy looked up at him and he smiled reassuringly. She attempted a smile in return.

As a knock sounded on the door, Adam leaned down and whispered, "Besides, I'm bloody terrified."

Before Daisy could react, he'd strode over to the door and opened it. Emma stood there, her Sunnydale High backpack over her shoulder, looking very young to Daisy's eye. Next to her was an incredibly glamorous creature with long blonde hair and designer everything.

"Mom!" Em dropped her bag with a thud and raced over to hug Daisy, while behind her the blonde, who she assumed to be Chloe, addressed Adam.

"We took a limo," she said. "I didn't think Emma would want to fly all the way here."

"When you say 'took'...?" Adam said, and Chloe just smiled.

She had a lot of teeth.

"Mom, Chloe's so cool," Em babbled. "She just, like, walked right up to the plane and told them to get my bags, and then we got in a limo, right there next to the plane, and drove off! There was no baggage claim or anything, it was so cool! Chloe, you have to teach me how to do that."

"I'm afraid it can't be taught," Chloe said. "I was born like this."

"Oh, that sucks. I mean, not that you were born like, it, 'cos that's cool. But I want learn how to do it!"

"Well, I think it's cool you can turn into a wolf," Chloe said. "I'd like to do that."

Daisy smiled at her for that, because Em frequently wailed that having to change her shape just wasn't *fair*, and Chloe held out her hand.

"You must be Daisy. Adam never stops talking about you."

Daisy raised her eyebrows at Adam, who had a slight pink flush on his cheeks.

"Yes, well, she was the right person for the job," he said, waving his hands about too much. Daisy hid a smile.

"What job?" Em wanted to know.

"Just... a job," Daisy said. "Thank you, Chloe."

Chloe inclined her head elegantly. "My pleasure. It was nice meeting you both." She nodded to Adam, and left.

Em had raced over to the patio windows and was gaping at the view. "This place is seriously cool. I mean, wow. Look at the view! Mom, have you seen the view?"

"Yep," Daisy said, watching Adam and wondering when either he or Em were going to acknowledge each other.

"On the way here, we drove past the Empire State Building, and I said I wanted to see the Statue of Liberty but Chloe said it was too far out of our way. But she said she'd take me there tomorrow, 'cos you have to work anyway. Is that okay?"

"Uh, sure," Daisy said, wondering just what Chloe had told her about the nature of this work.

"Hey, look, I think I can see the UN Building!" Em cried, then whirled around at the speed of light and said to Adam, "So, you're my dad?"

"Yep," he said.

"Cool," Em said, and the two of them studied each other.

Daisy gaped. "But -- but -- how did -- I haven't told you -- how -- ?"

Em rolled her eyes as if it was obvious. "Come on, Mom. He just... smells like family."

"But how do you know what family smells like? I'm the only one you know."

"And he's a werewolf."

"Yes, but that doesn't necessarily mean he's your father."

"And, big clue here Mom, he said 'yes' when I asked."

"She's smart," Adam said.

Daisy stared at the two of them.

"I figured you'd have darker hair though," Em said, and held up a strand of her own.

"My dad does. You have his coloring. You turn black all over as a wolf?" Em nodded. "So does he. My sister and me take after our mother, we take the sun more."

"God I wish I did. I, like, never tan."

"Well, it's bad for you anyway."

"I'm a werewolf."

"Werewolves still get cancer."

Em scowled. "Yeah, you're my dad," she muttered, and Daisy found a smile.

"So, who's this Joel, and is he good enough for Em?" Adam asked seriously as Daisy came out of the bathroom.

She laughed. She couldn't help it.

"He plays football, he's very good looking --"

"Already I don't like him."

"He's a nice kid," Daisy said. "And Em's fourteen, let her have her crushes."

Adam didn't look convinced. Daisy climbed into bed beside him and wrapped her arms around him, because he looked so adorably concerned. It wasn't until he'd started kissing her that it occurred to her she'd been meaning to talk to Adam about separate rooms. Not that she didn't want to sleep with him -- she did, urgently -- but because she wasn't sure she wanted to give Em a false impression.

Adam's hand was already sliding up her thigh. Daisy slept naked, she always had, unless Em had a friend staying over. Neither she nor Em were self-conscious about nudity -- werewolves seldom were, and Daisy had formed many of her adult habits while she was with Adam's pack.

"Adam," she interrupted his impassioned kisses, "don't you think... well, should we be in the same room?"

"It makes sex easier," he said gravely.

"I mean with Em."

"No, I don't think we should be in the same room as Em."

She bashed his arm and he grinned. "You know what I mean."

"Do I? You mean you don't want your teenage daughter to know her parents are sleeping together? Sweetheart, she's probably already figured it out."

"What? What do you mean?"

Adam tapped his nose. Daisy felt her entire body blush.

"Oh God!" she wailed, burying her head in his chest. "Oh God, she knows we've been having sex!"

"Well, she at least knows we're covered in each others' scent," he said. "I'd like to think she doesn't know what sex smells like."

"Well, she does now!" Daisy cried, burrowing against Adam's shaking chest. "Stop laughing, this isn't funny!"

"Oh, come on, it is a little."

"No, I'm mortified," Daisy said, her voice muffled.

"Are you really?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you smiling?"

Her head shot up. "I am not smiling!"

He grinned. Daisy fought it.

"You are," Adam said, and wrestled her to her back, tickling her until she laughed.

"It's a good thing Em sleeps like the dead," she said. "Not even a steam train could wake her."

"Then we can be as noisy as we want?"

Her heart rate speeded up. Adam was poised over her, naked and hard and so beautiful she could hardly believe he was here with her.

“How noisy were you planning?” she asked, and he grinned his wicked wolf grin, and bent his head to lick her nipple Daisy gasped.

“Much noisier than that,” he said.

Chapter Nine

In the morning, Daisy woke to hear voices from the kitchen. Em's excited chatter, and Adam's lower-pitched rumble. She smiled. They were getting on better than she could have hoped for. Which probably meant something was about to go wrong any minute, but maybe Adam was right and she should enjoy it while she could.

She wrapped a robe about herself -- there was being unself-conscious, and then there was being naked while everyone else was dressed, thereby embarrassing your teenage daughter -- and went out to see how they were getting on.

Okay, she wanted to eavesdrop.

"...so this faery's standing there going on and on about how he can't stand vampires, how they're vicious predators, heartless predators --"

"Whereas the fae are fluffy bunnies?" Em giggled.

"Right, exactly. And Ruarc's just standing there listening with this poker face -- I tell you, Em, no one can do a poker face like a faery. They might not be able to lie, but they're damn good at hiding the truth, too. And then when this guy's done, Ruarc reaches over, hits the intercom, and asks Maria to bring them in some coffee, and she goes, 'Of course, sweetheart.'"

"And the faery goes...?"

"Well, he doesn't know she's a vampire yet. He just asks Ruarc if he's sleeping with this girl, so he says yes, and then he asks if she's pretty so he says yes, she's gorgeous, see for yourself, and Maria walks in, and the faery just stares at her."

Em was sitting on a breakfast stool, hugging her knees to her chest. Her eyes were shining, just the way Adam's did when he found something funny. "And then what happened?"

"Well, Ruarc just says to her that this faery thinks he's being stalked by a vampire, and she just looks him over and smiles. And she's got her fangs showing. And she says, 'I don't think so.' And the faery gets the guts to ask why, and she says, 'A vampire wouldn't let you know you were being stalked. You'd just wake up dead one day.' And Ruarc reaches out to take the coffee from her, and lets his sleeve fall back so the faery can see the bite mark on his wrist..."

"Maria's bite mark?" Em looked fascinated.

"And the faery, who clearly isn't all that bright, says that clearly whoever bit Ruarc didn't kill him, and Maria smiles again and says, 'Why would I want to?'"

Em laughed delightedly. "That's brilliant! Did the stupid faery go away?"

"He left the city. You see, the Seelie prince lives here in the summertime with his family, and he *suggested* to the faery that --"

"The Seelie prince lives here?" Daisy broke in, and they both looked at her.

"Yeah. He's a fashion designer, would you believe." Adam sipped his coffee.

"Well, yes, I've met him, I would believe." Daisy shook her head in disbelief.

"Is there a problem?" Adam asked, giving her a narrow-eyed look.

"No." There wasn't, really -- the Seelie princes hadn't been much in evidence while Daisy was at the Court. But she remembered Prince Elline, laughing and mincing and always in the company of other men. "It's just weird he's here is all."

"Well, this is where his wife lives." At Daisy's look of astonishment, Adam laughed. "His wife, their children... and his lover, too." He glanced at Em. "Uh, you should probably forget you heard that."

Her indigo eyes were like saucers. "He has a wife and a girlfriend? That is so *rude*."

"Actually he has a wife and a boyfriend. And they all live together. They're, uh, very good friends," Adam said, and while Em continued to marvel, Daisy blushed, because she knew precisely what Adam meant by 'very good friends'.

"Anyway," she said loudly to Em, "did you say Chloe was going to take you sightseeing today?"

"Yeah!" Faery trios forgotten, Em downed the rest of her orange juice. "She says she never has to wait in line for anything. I was like, even the ladies room? And she said no, not even that."

Daisy hid a smile. Since her best friend had been elected class president, Em had been campaigning for more girls bathrooms at her school because at lunchtimes the line snaked out of the building.

"So what do you want to see?" Adam asked Em, who immediately launched into a list of what she wanted to see, and then what Chloe had said was 'totally awesome', plus what her friend Jenny who'd been here the year before had said was just 'so boring', several of which clashed. Em sided with Chloe's opinions. It was clear she had a serious case of hero-worship.

"Wait till she meets Alexius," Adam said, when Daisy put forth this opinion while Em dashed off to change her outfit again. "Chloe's other half."

"Don't tell me there are male sirens," Daisy said, her eyes widening.

"Close enough. Demi-god."

"Yikes."

"Yep."

The intercom buzzed, and Em yelled from her bedroom, "Is that Chloe?"

"Reckon so," Daisy called back, and Em ran out seconds later, grabbed her backpack and skidded to a halt just past her mother. She turned.

"You know, you sound just like Adam," she said.

"I -- what? No, I don't."

"Actually, you have gone native again," Adam said, eyes sparkling.

"Native for me is Faerie, and believe me it sounds nothing like this," Daisy said.

"You sound Australian," Em said as a knock sounded on the door. Daisy didn't ask whether Chloe had just flown up -- the answer, she knew, would be a worryingly sincere 'yes'.

"It's because I've been hanging out with your father," she said, and a sly look came over Em's face.

"Chloe says imitation's the sincerest form of flattery," she said, and flew out the door before either of them could say anything.

"And Chloe must be right," Adam said into the silence.

"Just so long as Em doesn't start eating people," Daisy said, turning away to clear up the breakfast things. "We have enough problems with chickens."

She was at the sink when Adam's warm arms came around her. "Chickens?"

"Yes. Your pack never did this."

"Not a lot of chooks in the outback, sweetheart."

"Well, I'm forever having to keep her out of chicken pens." She rinsed a plate.

"You go out with her?"

"I'm not letting her run on her own." Daisy hesitated. "Tonight, when it's..."

He kissed the back of her neck, making Daisy shiver. "I'd love to."

"I mean, I'll come too, but..."

"As a wolf?"

"No, as a human with a dog lead. Yes, as a wolf."

He nuzzled her, and Daisy gave up on the dishes. "It's been years since I've seen you on four legs."

His words hung between them, and images sprang into Daisy's mind.

"Actually, it was two nights ago on the hearthrug," she murmured.

Adam's laughter was warm against her hair. "I meant four legs as a wolf," he said, "but that was pretty memorable, too."

Daisy's breath came faster as she remembered it, too, firelight flickering against her skin as Adam took her from behind with slow, sure strokes, his teeth nipping the back of her neck and his fingers stroking her clit. Her pussy flooded with heat and she knew Adam could smell it by the sharp way he inhaled and pressed closer against her.

"Have you noticed we're alone again?" he said. His body was very warm against her back, only a few thin layers of clothes separating them.

"I have, yes."

"And we have no obligations until this arvo."

"No... oh, Adam, I can't go out with you and Em tonight, I have to play decoy. It's the full moon, they have to see me -- the pack -- as human."

"Damn. Well, then," his hand slid down her front, loosening the belt of her robe, "we'll just have to make the most of what time we do have."

Her pulse sped up. Adam's lips were on the back of her neck, his hand dipping inside her robe, tracing patterns on her stomach. She let her head fall back, let his kisses trail to the side of her neck.

"God, you're delicious."

His fingers crept south, dipping between her legs and finding her already wet. Daisy, her fingers gripping the edge of the kitchen counter, arched against him, thrusting gently against his hand. Incredible how he could arouse her so much with just a few strokes, the heat of his body and his lips on her neck.

Behind her, she could feel the hardness of his erection, straining against his jeans, and she reached back, moving carefully because she felt a little unsteady from all the pleasure he was stroking into her. Her hand cupped him through the rough denim, and he groaned.

When she unzipped the fly, he breathed, "Don't do that, sweetheart, or it'll all be over too soon."

"Then you'll have to think of something to distract yourself."

"Are you kidding? You're in the room. What else is ever going to get my attention?"

Daisy lost her breath, and when she found it again she spun around, locking her arms around Adam's neck and kissing him deeply. Her tongue thrust into his mouth, tasting coffee, toothpaste, tasting Adam, her Adam.

When she let him go he looked a little dazed.

"That's the most romantic thing anyone's ever said to me," she explained.

"Daise, I used to tell you I loved you on about an hourly basis," he said, boosting her up onto the counter and pulling her robe wide open.

"Yes, but... this was *romantic*."

Adam rolled his eyes, and Daisy smiled, kissing him again. She tugged at his t-shirt, pulling back from the kissing just long enough to pull it off over his head, then draped her legs around his waist, pulling him flush against her. His whole body was so tight and hard, not an ounce of fat on him anywhere. His biceps bulged as he wrapped his arms around her. Her pussy was pressed against his flat stomach, his abs like a ladder going to heaven.

He smelled so wonderful, an indefinable masculine scent unhindered by cologne or shampoo. Just clean sweat and hot male skin.

"You," she kissed his neck, feeling his stubble brush her cheek, "are a beautiful," kiss, "beautiful," kiss, "man."

"No, I'm not," he said, and she looked up. He grinned. "I'm a beautiful werewolf."

Daisy rolled her eyes. "With a big ego."

"Well, with a big something."

At that she laughed, wriggled and rubbed her ass against said something. Adam let out his breath in a hiss, no longer grinning, and Daisy shifted back so she could reach down and fondle his rigid shaft.

"Christ, Daisy!"

"It's amazing how men are ruled by their cocks," Daisy marveled, nuzzling his neck again, still stroking him. "I never took on a male shape until the other day at Lady Margolotta's. Now whenever I'm pretending to be Darren or Tony..."

"Has a mind of its own, doesn't it?" Adam breathed.

"It does! I mean... I've taken on other shapes and developed better reflexes, or a better sense of smell, but... it's always been my brain inside a different body. This time, it was my brain... and this heat-seeking missile attached to it."

Adam laughed. "Good description."

Daisy kissed his neck some more, enjoying the roughness of his stubble against her skin, and then a thought occurred to her.

“Adam,” she said, running her fingers up and down his cock. “Does this feel good?”

“Just a little bit,” he said, his voice strained.

“What does it feel like when you’re inside me?”

“Bloody incredible.”

Daisy looked up at him, and he must have seen the light in her eyes because he asked suspiciously, “What?”

She licked her lips. “I want to know,” she said. “What it feels like.”

Adam blinked at her.

“What it feels like,” she stroked his cock, “to be you.”

Chapter Ten

"What..." Adam said, and cleared his throat. "What?"

Daisy pushed him back and slid to her feet. Then, a wave of paranoia hitting her, she led him to the bedroom and shut the door.

"Take your pants off," she said, and Adam immediately complied. When he was naked before her, she reached up and put her hands on his shoulders, saw the comprehension come into his eyes.

"Oh, you're not... oh Christ, you are."

Daisy paused. "If you don't want me to --"

"No," Adam interrupted. He took a deep breath. "This is going to be weird."

She smiled. "Sweetheart, you're a werewolf and I grew up in the faery courts. It was always going to be weird."

He gave her a crooked smile, but he looked nervous. And as Daisy concentrated on growing taller, wider, taking on his bulk before she refined the details, he looked more nervous still.

"Relax," she said, "this isn't going to hurt."

She knew his whole body so well that it wasn't hard to recreate it with her own. Tracing every detail of his face with her eyes, she mirrored her own to match.

When she was done, Adam stared at her for a full minute.

"You have no idea," he said, "how weird this is."

He stepped back. Daisy did the same, dropping her hands from his shoulder. He reached out, touched her chest. She did the same. He raised an eyebrow. So did she.

"Stop that," he said, and she laughed, took on his voice, and repeated it. "No, seriously," Adam said, looking a little freaked out. "Stop."

Daisy stopped, mainly because Adam seemed to be so weirded out he was losing his splendid erection. Daisy, however, only needed to run her eyes over the magnificent body of the man in front of her to be instantly aroused.

It was incredible, having a penis. Arousal for Daisy could be a full-body thing, but even when it centered on her breasts or her pussy it was never this intense.

But this cock... it really did think for itself. Daisy's brain told her body it was aroused, and her body responded by sending any and all available blood south.

Her cock throbbed with desire. She didn't know what she wanted, but she wanted it fiercely. Her hand slid down her stomach, over the crisp hairs that were at once familiar and unfamiliar, to the cock rearing between her legs.

As soon as she touched it, pleasure surged through her. The cock leapt and throbbed, desperate for more. Daisy stroked it some more, soothing her hand from base to tip, feeling the stickiness seeping from the end.

"No, *this* is weird," she said, and looked up to find Adam watching her.

"I have to say, I don't usually get turned on by blokes touching themselves," he said, but his hand was on his own penis. "Try this," he said, running his thumb over the head. Daisy did, and gasped. "Good, huh? Now wrap your fingers around it... no, like this..."

He moved her hand away and replaced it with his own, and Daisy sucked in a deep breath at the feel of his fingers encircling her shaft. He moved his hand up and down, and she let out a gasp.

Adam's eyes met hers, and she wrapped her hand around his cock, mirroring his movements.

When he slipped his fingers below to touch her balls, Daisy moaned, and did the same to him. Adam let out a harsh breath and moved closer. She stepped closer to him - and their cocks touched.

Electricity leapt through Daisy, and from the look on Adam's face it had happened to him too. She nudged closer, brushing her cock against his again, velvet skin over something so hard, and pleasure shot through her.

Daisy wrapped her arm around Adam's neck, brought him closer, and kissed him deep as she rubbed her cock against his. It was incredible, all the sensation in her body focused on that one organ -- which didn't even belong to her anyway. Her hips thrust, her fingers tangling with his as they both frantically stroked each other. Adam's tongue delved deep into her mouth and she pushed herself closer, wanting to touch as much of him as possible.

When her orgasm hit, it was unlike anything she'd ever felt before. No rolling waves of pleasure but a desperate surge, her balls tightening in a moment of agony before the explosion of pleasure that obliterated everything else in the world. Come spurted from her cock, her hips jerked, and Adam held her, stroked her tenderly until she was done, then pushed her down gently to the bed.

Too exhausted to hold his shape any longer, Daisy reverted back to her own. The soft, sticky cock disappeared, her own breasts emerged, and she lay there, her pussy flooded with wetness and her nipples hard.

Nipples. She hadn't even thought about those when she was in Adam's shape.

She opened her eyes and he was sitting beside her. "Weird, huh?"

He frowned. "Do I really look like that when I come?"

"I don't know." Exhausted, she curled up against him. "Next time I'll have to do it in a mirror."

Adam stretched out beside her, and she realized he was still hard.

"I don't know how you get through the day with that thing ordering you about," she said.

"It is hard," Adam agreed, then realized what he'd said and closed his eyes, laughing. "I mean, it's difficult."

"It's hard too," Daisy said, stroking his cock gently. It throbbed in her hands, and to her surprise her clit did the same. "The thing is," she said, marveling at how she still wanted more, "I could go again, once I've got my breath back. I thought... when I came just then I didn't think I was ever going to be ready again."

"You have no idea how jealous I am of that," Adam said, slipping his hand down her back and between her legs. "Orgasm after orgasm, and you can carry on. Me, once and I'm out of the game."

"Well, not exactly orgasm after orgasm," Daisy said, squirming as his fingers found her pussy lips. "Sooner or later I'm going to pass out."

"Has that ever happened?"

"Well, not yet," she admitted.

A slow grin came over Adam's face. "Want to try?"

* * *

They didn't get that far, but by the time Daisy got dressed to leave the house and do some more decoy work, she'd had more orgasms in a row than ever before. Adam, who'd come twice before admitting defeat, had even followed her into the shower and licked her to her eleventy-hundredth climax under the cascading water.

Daisy found herself thinking she was very glad Em was a sound sleeper, and that thought pulled her up short, because it implied that Em would be in the house while they were having sex, which in turn implied that Adam would be living with them.

For some reason, the thought didn't fill her with as much apprehension as it had before.

She changed into Darren's shape and picked up his car from his office garage, noting as she did that one of the Van Helsing's, a blond youth, seemed to be tailing her. A thought occurred, and she drove to the Sundown Investigations office, changing back to her own shape in the elevator. Maria smiled up at her from the front desk.

"Maria... you're a vampire," Daisy said.

Maria laughed. "Full marks," she said.

"No, I mean... it's broad daylight. How come you're here?"

She shrugged. "Filtered glass, underground parking. If I have to leave in daylight, I wear these," she pulled out a burka and some sunglasses.

"Ah. Can I borrow those shades?" Maria handed them over. "And... your clothes?"

Maria gave her a questioning look.

"One of the Van Helsing's was following me," Daisy explained. "I thought I'd head them off at the pass."

Maria still looked confused, but she swapped her skirt suit for the oversized man's suit Daisy had been wearing in her Darren guise, and watched her leave.

The blond kid was waiting in the lobby downstairs, pretending to read a magazine about fishing. Daisy, wearing Maria's shape, gave him a smile and told the receptionist in a loud voice that there was a bulb out in the Sundown office, if she could send someone up to fix it.

As she expected, the Van Helsing followed her out into the sunshine. "Excuse me," he said, "do you work at that Sundown place?"

"Yes," Daisy said, inflecting Maria's accent, "I'm the receptionist."

"What do they do there?"

"Private investigations." She took off her sunglasses and gave them an exaggerated polish, making sure he could see her face in full sunlight.

"Oh. What kind of investigations?"

Private ones, Daisy wanted to say, but instead she shrugged and said, "Oh, you know, just checking people out. Like right now, one of our clients is a graphic designer -" which was Darren's job "-- and he thinks someone's stalking him."

"Oh," said the guy, looking a little concerned. "Uh, right, I see."

He left after that, but just to be sure, Daisy went to the nearest deli and bought a meatball sub, extra garlic. She ate it as she walked back, famished after all her extracurricular activities with Adam that morning.

She smiled, remembering. Damn, but that man was a genius in bed! The last few days, her body had been in a state of permanent bliss, either being touched by Adam or reliving the experience. Daisy knew this state of affairs couldn't last, but it had been wonderful to experience.

But the thing was, even when he wasn't making love to her he was just fun to be with. He could cook, he made great coffee, he was smart and he was funny. And he was kind. He'd already engaged with Emma, to the extent that Daisy wasn't feeling half as nervous about the two of them going it alone tonight as she thought she would.

She made her way back up to the Sundown office, swapped clothes with Maria again, and went to the werewolves' apartment. It was currently empty as all three were out at work, but they'd given Daisy a key to come and go as she liked. Having ascertained that tonight all three would be driving out early to the Hamptons, where Tony had a beach house and the three of them had more freedom to run as wolves than in the city, Daisy was free to impersonate them all weekend.

She picked out some clothes for the evening, then took a nap. She planned to be out all night, making herself as visible as possible so that whenever the Van Helsing looked, they'd see one of the werewolves in human form.

* * *

Adam was finishing an email to his father when Chloe brought his daughter home. He liked the sound of that -- 'his daughter'. Bursting into the apartment wearing an I Heart NY t-shirt and bearing dozens of shopping bags, she yelled out, "Hi Dad!" and his heart swelled.

"Hey, sweetheart." He eyed the shopping bags. "Good time?"

"The best! It was awesome! And! You don't even have to pay for any of this stuff, Chloe got it all free! People keep giving her things!"

Chloe shrugged, smiling. "Sure, it sounds fun," she said, "but after a while you run out of places to park your Ferraris."

Em laughed, but Adam knew she wasn't joking.

As the door closed behind Chloe, Adam checked his watch and glanced out the window. "It's about an hour until moonrise," he said. "Do you want to go somewhere first?"

Em suddenly looked bashful. "Where do you usually go?"

"When I'm in the city, I have a run around the Park," Adam said. "I don't stay out all night."

"Me neither," she said, looking relieved.

"Besides, it's not really a safe place to be after dark."

"But we're werewolves!"

"Yes, and can you imagine what'd happen if a large wolf started attacking people in Central Park? The cops'd probably shoot you, and if they didn't then Animal Control would take you down."

"Oh." Em deflated. "So... uh, is it safe to be out there at all?"

Adam smiled, feeling very manly. "Stick with me, kid," he said. "You'll be all right."

Em rolled her eyes, and in that moment looked exactly like Daisy.

"Hey, where's Mom?"

"Working." Adam hesitated. "Did she explain to you what she was doing here?"

"Not really. She said it was some kind of decoy work. Like, pretending to be someone else?"

"That's it."

"Anyone famous?" Em perked up.

"No, sorry. Just a local werewolf pack. We're trying to put some amateur Van Helsings off the scent."

"Van...? Oh, like the movie?"

"No," Adam said patiently, "not like the movie. They're the bad guys. Actually, they're mostly college kids, but they could do some damage."

"So how are you and Mom gonna stop them?"

Adam explained about Daisy taking the shape of the three pack members. Em listened, then waited expectantly. "And?"

"And, she's going around handling silver -- they wear a lot of silver jewelry, she keeps finding excuses to brush against them, touch their hands with silver rings on, things like that."

“And?”

“Well, tonight she’s making appearances in human form, around town.”

Em waited some more.

“Well, what else should she be doing?” Adam asked, a little annoyed.

“To really put them off?”

“Yes.”

Em put her head on one side. She smiled. “Well...”

Chapter Eleven

It was three am. After two beers to steady her nerves, Daisy had been on nonalcoholic drinks since ten pm, and she was bored as hell. Parading herself around a variety of bars, occasionally changing shape, she'd discovered three things. One, that the Van Helsings weren't particularly subtle. Two, that bar-hopping without alcohol was screamingly dull. And three, that the weres were all terrible sluts -- she kept getting propositioned by past conquests.

The fourth thing she'd discovered, she didn't really want to think about. It was the tiny little thought that kept creeping into her brain: damn, I wish Adam was here.

Daisy had never wanted or needed a man to protect her. Adam had encouraged her to use her shapeshifting talents to create dangerous or intimidating shapes which usually meant any opponent would back down before she needed to shed any blood. Nonetheless, she'd made a habit of practicing turning her hands into sharp knives at a moment's notice, should the need arise.

She didn't need Adam there to protect her from the girl and two boys who'd been trailing her all night. She needed him there to keep her company, to make her laugh, to reassure her she was doing a good job. To fend off all the 'friends' of the were pack who kept propositioning her. More than once she fantasized about Adam simply slinging his arm around her shoulders and sending her admirers off with a mere look.

Daisy had spent fifteen years telling herself she didn't need anybody but herself. She'd spent the last week telling herself she only wanted Adam, and that wasn't the same as needing him.

It wasn't. But she needed him anyway.

With a sigh, she finished her drink and got up to leave. Three am was definitely going home time in her book. Weaving her way through the sweaty bodies on the dance

floor, she started up the stairs to exit the basement club, but before she made her way back to the garage where she'd left Darren's car -- and several changes of clothes -- she heard a sound behind her.

Dark alley. No one about.

Well, this was certainly a recipe for success.

The sound came again. A whimper. A frightened whimper.

Trap, thought Daisy.

Rolling her tense shoulders, testing her reflexes, she started toward the alley mouth. She was wearing Robyn's shape, a tiny scrap of fabric and a pair of ankle-cracking shoes, and the thought occurred to her that if she didn't know she could turn her hands into claws or knives at a moment's notice, this would be an incredibly stupid thing to do.

Her eyes adjusted to the darkness. "Hello?" she called.

The whimper came again. There was, Daisy thought, always the possibility that there really was someone in distress down here.

"Are you okay?"

A dark shape passed behind her.

"I'm just fine," said the voice of the young man she'd met outside the Sundown building. "How are you?"

Daisy sighed. "It's a good thing I knew this was a trap," she said, as the other two materialized from the shadows.

"And what are you going to do about it?" sneered the girl, who no longer looked so mousey.

"I could call the cops."

"So call them," said the other youth, a red-haired kid. He didn't look much older than Em.

"You don't even have a cell phone, do you?" said the first boy, the blond.

"No," Daisy said, "and I don't have any money, either." She had a twenty and the car key tucked into her bra, but that was all.

"We don't want your money," said the girl.

"We know what you are."

"Uh," Daisy said. "What am I?"

"You're a werewolf."

She stared. She let out a short laugh. "What, are you crazy? There's no such thing as werewolves!"

"Yeah?" said the redhead. "Then this won't hurt you!"

With that, he stabbed her.

For a second, Daisy was too shocked to move. He'd lunged at her with a short blade and it had gone an inch into her upper arm.

"Are you crazy?" she yelped, jamming her hand over it. "Of course it hurts!"

"That's because it's silver!" said the girl, triumphantly.

"No, that's because it's a goddamned knife, and you just stabbed me!" Daisy took her hand away from the wound. It was bleeding all over the place, but it didn't seem to be serious.

The three werewolf hunters peered at it uncertainly. She glared at them.

"Isn't it supposed to, like, burn or something?" asked the blond.

"It'll get into her bloodstream," said the girl, although with less confidence than she ought to. "It'll poison her."

"Why? Was that blade clean?" Daisy demanded. "If you've given me septicemia I will sue the crap out of you!"

"It was clean!" the blond stammered.

"It was silver!" the girl snapped. "It should be killing you!"

"Well, maybe it would if I was a werewolf," Daisy yelled at her, "but they don't fucking exist, do they?"

It was an argument that might have gone over a lot better had not a large black dog hurtled into the alley, barking fiercely. *Em!* Daisy thought, panic overtaking her initial thought that her daughter had just heard her use the F word.

What the hell was she doing here? Alone? Where the hell was Adam?

"It's a wolf!" screamed the girl, as Em, larger than a dog but not yet fully wolf-sized, galloped toward them. "Come for its pack member!"

"Oh, for --" Daisy began, but then the redhead drew a gun and her throat closed over. "Don't --" she croaked, but got no further.

Everything happened within a few seconds, but to Daisy, viewing it through time that was flowing as fast as treacle, it seemed to take hours. The redhead fired the gun, straight at Em. Daisy, a scream flying from her throat, lunged at him.

And a huge shape burst from nowhere, slamming into Em and knocking her to the ground. But not before the bullet had hit it.

It was Adam.

"Oh God," someone whispered, and Daisy realized it was her. "Oh God, Adam!"

"I'm okay," he said, but he was breathing fast, looking pale. She rushed to him, past the three kids who were standing, frozen with horror.

"Adam," Daisy cried, tears burning her eyes. There was blood everywhere. On his other side, Em was licking his face, whining anxiously.

"He's dying," stammered the redhead. "If he's..."

"So dig it out with this," the girl said, snatching the knife from him and thrusting it into Daisy's hand. "Go on, if he's human."

Daisy stared at her. Then Adam took the silver knife from her hand and made a half-hearted cut at his t-shirt.

"You see?" Daisy turned her tear-stained face to them, grief and anger welling up inside her. "He's not a werewolf any more than I am! You just shot an unarmed man!"

The two boys were looking like ghosts now.

"We just shot a human," one of them whispered.

"You shot him!" hissed the girl.

"We could go to jail," the blond moaned.

"Let's get out of here!"

Em growled at them as they made to pass Adam, so they ran to the other side of the alley, and then off into the night. Daisy, pain overwhelming her, threw herself over Adam, sobbing. He wrapped his arm around her, and --wait, that didn't feel like the weak, feeble movements of a dying man. Maybe he wasn't as badly hurt as she'd thought!

She raised her head. Adam was watching her, a sparkle in his eyes.

"Have they gone?" he whispered.

Daisy nodded wordlessly. "Adam, please don't die. I love you."

He smiled a tiny bit. "Do you really?"

"Yes! Oh God, and you saved Em, and you've only just met her, and I wanted us to be a family, and..."

"Really?"

"Yes!" She tore at his t-shirt. "How bad is it? Did the bullet go right in? God, Adam, does it hurt really bad?"

"Are you sure they've gone?" Adam asked Em, who dipped her head in a nod. "Thank God." He dropped the knife, shaking his hand as if it was burned. "Excuse me a minute, Em, but, FUCKING HELL, THAT HURTS!"

He sat up, hardly seeming to notice the silver bullet in his gut.

"Adam, you need to stay still!" Daisy pushed him back down, alarmed.

"What? Oh, no -- Daise, that's a regular bullet. Could smell it. You think I'd have let Em run in here if they had silver bullets?"

Daisy stared at Em, who licked the tears from her face.

"You -- you knew?"

"Em and I had a talk earlier," Adam said, pulling himself to his feet, shaking his hand, on which blisters were starting to form. "She said they were never going to stop unless they had conclusive proof. We were going to stage a thing. I was going to be her dog and she was going to cry when they shot me with a regular bullet... but then she smelled your blood and, uh, the plan went a bit... haywire."

Daisy stared at them both.

“Seriously, she had a nightie and slippers and everything, and a sob story about how her beloved doggy had escaped from the yard, chasing a cat.” Adam ruffled her hair with his good hand. “But this worked too.”

“But he *shot* you!”

Adam looked at the blood on his shirt. “Yes, and it hurts. But I heal really well, Daise, you know I do. This hurts more, to be honest.” He waved his blistered palm at her. “Still, convinced them, eh? And now they think they’ve shot an innocent human, they’ll probably be leaving the area. And hopefully, they won’t be chasing werewolves any more.”

Daisy blinked. She stood up slowly.

“Did you mean it when you said you wanted us to be a family?” Adam said. “Hey! Don’t kick me!”

Epilogue

"So... let me get this straight," Adam said, as the cab bearing Em to the airport pulled away into the early dawn. She waved frantically through the back window, and Daisy waved frantically back. "Even though I offered to take us all skiing, in Aspen, in a luxury chalet with its own hot tub, private charter there and back... she still wants to go on her school trip?"

"Yep." The taxi turned the corner, out of sight, and Daisy pressed her head to his shoulder.

"But... they're staying in a youth hostel!"

"Yes, they are. Don't worry, it's perfectly safe. I told you, there are four teachers and --"

"But a youth hostel? What can that possibly have that my luxury chalet doesn't?"

Daisy looked up at him as they went back inside his apartment building. It was amazing how Adam, a model father in most respects, could miss out on the most basic things. "The boy she has a massive crush on," she said.

"That Joel kid?" Adam looked appalled.

"Yes."

"And they're staying in the same hotel?"

"Yes."

"But she's *fourteen*!"

"And they have separate dormitories, patrolled by teachers. It's not quite the crisis situation you imagine," Daisy said, kissing his nose as the elevator doors opened.

"But --"

"Adam, she'll be fine," she soothed, wrapping her arms around him. "And what's more, being the kid who flies in from New York instead of taking the bus from the school with the rest of them? Do you know how cool that's going to make her?"

His frown lessened a bit. "Will it?"

"Yes. And," she decided to embroider the truth a little, "I heard her on the phone to Jenny the other week, telling her how cool her dad was."

Adam's face lit up. "Really?"

Actually, what Em had said was that her dad's place was very cool. Her words on Adam were, "He's okay," but this was high praise from Em.

"Yes," she said, conscience clear.

Adam seemed to be considering this. "I did take a bullet for her," he said.

"Yes, you did." Smiling, Daisy kissed his mouth.

"And I got a silver scar, right here." He showed her the burn mark on his palm, as if she wasn't intimately acquainted with it.

Daisy took his hand and kissed the palm.

"Hurts sometimes," Adam went on, watching her, and she licked his palm. The elevator chimed. Without taking his eyes off Daisy, Adam hit the Stop button with his good hand.

"Uh," Daisy said. She looked at the button, then back at Adam. His eyes were sparkling.

"It's just occurred to me," he said.

"What has?"

"That we have a whole week to ourselves."

She raised her eyebrows. "Is that right?"

"And something else occurs to me, too."

"What's that?"

"I don't think I've ever had sex in an elevator."

Daisy hid her smile. "Well, we're nearly at your floor now, so there's no point in -- whoa!"

Adam crushed her against his body, which was hard -- everywhere. She grinned. He groaned.

She started to pull her shirt off.

"You know something, woman?"

Daisy tossed her shirt away and unfastened his fly.

"What's that?" Her hand dipped inside.

"You drive me -- Daisy!"

Cat Marsters

Cat lives in a village in south east England, which, while not quite a fairytale setting, is nonetheless very pretty and was mentioned in the Domesday Book of AD 1087. She shares a house with only slightly batty parents who hardly ever tell her to get a real job, and a musician brother who knows there's no chance she'll ever get one if he doesn't. Cat doesn't have children but she does have cats, who are her babies in every sense except the biological one.

Cat has been writing all her life, but in order to keep herself rich in shoes and chocolate, she's also worked as an airline check-in agent, video rental clerk, stationery shop assistant, and laboratory technician. She's aiming for a fairytale cottage, and asks all potential Prince Charmings to apply in writing with pictures of themselves and their Aston Martins.

Visit's Cat's web site at <http://www.catmarsters.com>.