

She of the Honey Voice

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Chapter 1

It was a Monday night, which meant it was Karaoke Night. As usual Jacob was in at seven to set up the karaoke machine and hook it up to the bar's speakers but tonight was slightly different, Jake had brought someone with him. Brisbane walked over to a beautiful female wolf who was dressed in jeans and a t-shirt that didn't even bother trying to hide her incredible figure. The wolfette was staring around open mouthed.

"Hey Jake," Brisbane called. "Who's your new friend?"

The old, grey squirrel smiled. "This is Jesse, she's buying the business from me so I'm showing her around the route."

"Well I see you didn't really warn her too much about this place did you." Brisbane said with a small smile.

"As if she'd have believed me if I had." Jake looked over to Jesse who was still looking around with her jaw hanging wide open. "Hey Jesse, come meet the owner."

The brown and cream-colored wolfette came over to where Jake and Brisbane were standing and was just as shocked as she had been with the rest of the bar. She was fairly tall standing just a couple inches shy of six feet, but Brisbane had well over a foot on her. "H... Hi." she finally stammered.

"Don't worry," Brisbane started with his friendliest smile, "I don't bite. Usually I'm the one whose ears are getting chewed on."

Jesse laughed a little, a very beautiful sound Brisbane thought. "I'll keep that in mind."

"Come on," Jake said poking Jesse in the ribs, "We have to set up the equipment. You can talk to the giant later."

If Norman Rockwell had ever painted a lounge scene it would have looked a lot like the Mystic Wolf at the moment. It was after two and the bar was closed, most of the kitchen staff had left for home half an hour ago, the rest of the staff were sweeping the floors and cleaning the tables. Jesse hadn't left yet; she was still on the stage practically making love to the mike as she sang old lounge songs, while the karaoke machine provided the music to back her up. Behind the bar Brisbane was still cleaning glasses that he had cleaned twice already. He didn't have the heart to kick Jesse off the stage; he was entranced, her voice weaving a spell on him.

It was Jake who finally got Jesse off the stage. "Come on Jesse it's time to pack it in."

"Sure Jake." Jesse said hopping off the stage, and shutting down the electronics. "I'll grab the screen, would you mind taking the computer?"

"Yeah, give the geezer the hard job." Jake said with a smile as he picked up the lap top that ran the operation. "I'll wind up the cables as well while you take that out to the van."

"So you're finally retiring are you Jake?" Brisbane asked from behind the bar as he started to actually put the glasses away.

"Just from this." Jake said with a shrug. "I'm still doing the sound engineering job, but Harriet wants to see me more often than just on the weekends like we do now. Truth be told I can't blame her. Still..."

"I thought the two of you were constantly fighting?" Brisbane said in a voice that made the statement into a question.

"Well that's been mostly due to the fact that we spend so little time together." Jake said as he ran a paw through his hair. "We started seeing a marriage counselor about a month ago, and it helped me realize that what our relationship really needed was more quality time together. I've been using this as a way to avoid dealing with any issues we have. Issues that we could easily work out if we just spent more time together."

Brisbane smiled to himself. He had never met Harriet but he wasn't really surprised that a counselor had been able to help them settle down. If she heard what Jake said about how their relationship had begun and how much he missed the way it had once been, it could've saved them from wasting all that time fighting.

"Jake I'd suggest you take Harriet somewhere nice." Brisbane said as he put a glass away under the bar. "Go out for a romantic dinner, and then go for a moonlit stroll down by the Mighty Miss or around Como Lake."

Jake gave Brisbane a skeptical look. "You've never been married."

"Jake I've been tending bar for about half my life." Brisbane said with a soft smile evident in his voice. "I've heard it all when it comes to relationship problems. Trust me on this one; take her out for a date, just like you did before you got married."

Jake thought about it, looking at his reflection in the mirror behind the bar, looking as if he was seeing an image of himself from thirty years ago. "Maybe you're right you ol' drink slinger. Maybe a date could do wonders for a marriage."

"I resent being called an 'Ol' drink slinger'." Brisbane laughed. "I'm not that old. A middle-aged drink slinger is a better way to describe me. You're the one who's getting old."

Jake chuckled. "If your advice works out I may have to get younger just to cope."

"They have pills for that now you know." Brisbane said giving Jake a knowing grin. "And if my email is correct you can get 'em cheap online."

"I hope to never need one of those little blue wonder pills." Jake said laughing hard.

Jesse walked back into the bar wondering what Jake was laughing about. "What did I miss?"

"It's nothing Jesse." Jake said once he was done laughing. "Brisbane was just giving me some marital advice."

"Do I want to know?"

"It has to do with the blue wonder drug that apparently costs a buck twenty-five online." Brisbane said hoping that Jesse wasn't the type to get offended by the comment.

Jesse looked puzzled for a second before laughing. "I hear that those things can improve the performance of race cars."

Brisbane smiled at Jake and jabbed a thumb in Jesse's direction. "I like her. She's fun."

"Would you expect me to sell my business to some one who couldn't handle this place?"

"Oh come on, compared to a lot of themed night clubs in Las Vegas I'm sure that this place is down right normal." Brisbane laughed.

"If I can find a place that can serve up something as truly unique as a Midnight Bath I'll let you know." Jake smiled. "Until then forget it, this place is literally beyond comparison, at least beyond worlds."

"I have to agree with him Brisbane. I've been to a lot of the clubs in Vegas, I used to live there, and every one of them pales in comparison to this place. I would never have imagined a dragon, of all creatures, getting up and singing 'Love Me Tender'." Jesse said, still trying to process what she had seen that night.

"Yeah Fay-Quastil was pretty damn drunk tonight." Brisbane said shaking his head in amusement. "Usually he doesn't sing Elvis, he's more of a Offspring guy."

"God remeber last week when he was singing 'Come Out And Play'?" Jake said laughing at the memory. "I thought he was going to rip the ceiling apart."

"He wouldn't have been able to. Everything up there is highly reinforced. You could hit those copper panels with an anti-tank weapon and it wouldn't even scratch them." Brisbane said looking up at the ceiling. "Heck I'm pretty sure that you could hit St. Paul directly with a tac-nuke and this place would still be here."

Jesse looked at the pure white giant. "You're kidding right?"

"Nope." Brisbane said simply. "If this place can survive an all out Pantheon clearing brawl between the Norse and Roman Gods I'm pretty sure we can handle just about anything."

"Now I know you're kidding." Jesse said with a laugh.

"Twelve-Thirty AM, New Years Day, 2005." Brisbane said shaking his head. "Everyone was pretty liquored up and the fight got started over the days of the week of all things. It's a bit of a sore spot with the Romans as they feel that the Norse got too many days named after them. I lost almost half the furniture when all was said and done. Of course I broke about half of that either hitting Gods over their heads with chairs or smashing them through tables."

Jesse just stared at him. "You did what?"

"Beat the tar out of the majority of the Gods of two major Pantheons; even had to throw around a few Goddesses when they went after each other." Brisbane said smiling. "Ended up banning both groups for a month; before I revoked the ban I brought in both Jupiter and Odin and had a talk with them about controlling their children, and made them shake hands. I also made them pay for all the lost furniture. Still things can get pretty tense when any largish number from both Pantheons are here at the same time. This place is neutral ground for all beings."

"How could you possibly take on two Pantheons? They're Gods, and you're mortal?"

"When this place was created the two truly major powers provided the magick needed to bring down all others to a mortal level of power. At the same time they increased the power of the staff over everyone else." Brisbane said grinning like a madman. "Yeah Jupiter and Thor can let lose with the lightning when they get pissed, and it still does hurt a bit, if a non-staff member gets hit I'm told it feels like getting shocked from a Taser. To me though it only stings a bit, and really ticks me off. The only reason so much furniture got busted up in that particular brawl had to do with sheer numbers. For the most part it was just me, Charlie, and my cousin Sigurd, who is part owner, versus a combined force of thirty plus Gods and Goddesses. When it's just a couple of Gods getting into a fight I can usually finish it quickly enough just by knocking a couple of heads together. That night or morning, however you want to look at it, was like no other. I pray I never have another like it."

"After spending just one night here I think I can believe you about that." Jesse said slightly dumbfounded. "Is that why you have the sword above the back of the bar?"

"Nah. She's mostly there for show; I've yet to actually use her. 'Complaints Department' was forged by the same master blade smith who forged Excalibur, at least that's what his PR guy says. Not sure if I believe it, but it still makes for a hell of a story and just as good a reputation." Brisbane said with a small, evil laugh, as he talked about the massive broad sword hanging above the mirror at the back of the bar. "All I do know for certain is that she is a very powerful magickal weapon. She can do

anything from knock a person out with a simple tap, to cleave through just about anything; tested her out to verify the truth of that claim. Got an old truck from a scrap yard to see how many cuts it would take me to go through it. One swing was all it took; slid right through the whole damn thing, like a hot knife through butter. All I have to do is grab her scabbard and anyone who sees me touch her and has any sense of self preservation immediately leaves. I've only had to threaten to use her three times. I bought her after the Pantheon Brawl, cost me a whole hell of a lot, but if she saves me from another such mess as that fight she'll have been worth every last penny."

Jesse shook her head still looking at the sword. "Any other scary things I should know about this place so I'm a little more prepared for Wednesday?"

"Nah, Mondays and Wednesdays are pretty peaceful." Brisbane looked over at Jake who already knew about some of the weirdest stuff about the bar, "Have we ever had a major problem since we started having karaoke nights?"

"Not really. I don't remember you ever having to break a table on a karaoke night." Jake said shaking his head. "You've punched out a couple of people a few times, but you've never had to go so far as to use a furson to break a table while I've been here."

"See," Brisbane said with a cheerful smile. "Everything should be pretty quiet for you as far as rowdiness goes. You'll be busy as all get out, but that's all you have to worry about."

Jake looked at his watch and panicked. "Ah crap! I told Harriet that I'd be home an hour ago. If she's awake I'm a dead fur! Come on Jesse you promised me a ride home tonight." He said as he started for the door.

Jesse gave Brisbane a warm smile. "I guess I'll see you Wednesday then."

"I'll see you then." Brisbane returned the smile.

"Come on Jesse! I was supposed to be home an hour ago."

"Coming Jake." Jesse followed Jake out the door, but just as she was about to exit she looked over her shoulder and gave Brisbane a wink and blew him a kiss, and then left.

'I think I'm in love.' Brisbane thought happily.

Chapter 2

Sam walked into the house via the kitchen door and saw her dad sitting at the table eating breakfast in his bathrobe. True, he usually ate breakfast in his robe but not when it was two in the afternoon.

"Hey dad, what are you doing eating breakfast so late?" she asked, puzzled by the situation.

"Morning kiddo," Brisbane answered through a mouth full of buttered toast. "I didn't sleep well, so I just stayed in bed after my alarm went off."

"Ahhh," Sam said drawing the word out a bit. "What kept you from sleeping well?"

"Not much really. It was just an interesting night at the Wolf last night and there were a couple of things that kept running through my head." Really there had been only one thing running through his head, and she had a damn good figure, he thought.

"Is it something I should know about?" Sam asked, hoping it wasn't bad. "I mean I've got a shift tonight and I don't want any surprises."

"Nah, it's nothing for you to worry about. It's one of those things that only affect me. Probably won't matter to anyone else at the bar," Brisbane wondered, hoped really that it would eventually affect Sam, but that was just a dream so far. It was a nice dream, but that was all it was so far, just a dream.

"If you say so," Sam said as she grabbed an apple from a bowl on the counter. She dropped down into the chair directly across from her dad, and draped her tail over her legs. "So aren't you going to ask me how my test went today?"

"So how did your test go today?" Brisbane dutifully asked the raccoon that was his adopted daughter.

"It sucked," she sighed in frustration. "I mean I'm pretty sure I did well, but it was still pretty hard."

"What did you expect?" Brisbane asked simply, he wasn't going to give Sam any sympathy. "It's a four hundred level business class. It should be hard. If it wasn't I'd say that you're wasting your money on a sub-par school, and that we'd have to find you a better school. I mean when I was in school..."

"I know, I know." Sam started in order to keep her dad from ranting. "When you were in school they made tests so hard that you had to study your tail off to pass 'em. You know how hard I'm studying dad, and you've seen my grades. If I keep this up I'll graduate with honors. And don't forget we chose the U because it has the best business program in the area, and I'm not leaving home 'cause someone needs to keep an eye on you."

"I did a good job of keeping an eye on myself before I got you off the streets," Brisbane joked. "I ate right. I exercised. I even did the dishes. I did a lot on my own."

"Yeah, but you still need a femme to keep an eye out for you," Sam said poking her dad in the chest, "and since you've never had a real relationship since you adopted me, I need to be the femme to help."

"Well I used to have lots of relationships before I found you," Brisbane said slightly defensively.

"Not according to Uncle Sig." Sam said. The family had told her tons of stories about her father's life before her. "He said that you went out on a lot of dates, but rarely dated a femme more than twice in a row."

Brisbane laughed a bit, smiling at Sam. "Okay, okay, you've caught me in a web of my own lies. Now since you're the femme who has to keep an eye on me that means you get to do the dishes."

Sam stuck her tongue out at him. "I'm not your mother. You can do your own damn dishes."

"Hey you're the one who said I need a femme to keep an eye on me, so it seems to me that, that means you get to do the kitchen work."

"And you're also the one who said I should never let a fur tell me what to do," Sam replied as she got out of her chair.

"Well at least you've learned one good thing from me," he said with a smile. "What else have you learned from me?"

"That you're very ticklish right behind the ears!" Sam cried as she jumped her dad, right before she got at his ears.

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"Hey Charlie," Sam said, walking behind the bar, and tying on her apron. "How was everything last night?"

"Not bad. Jake's got a young wolfette buying his karaoke business so he brought her here last night. And damn but she was good looking." The bear replied with a low whistle remembering Jesse's incredible figure.

"Oh? What did Dad think of her?" Sam asked raising one eyebrow.

"Well he let her sing on the stage well past closing. She has an incredible set of pipes. Never heard anyone who sang so well before in my life, and I'm including professional singers in that comment. She was incredible," Charlie smiled. "Anyways your dad let her sing until about two-thirty which was when Jake eventually kicked her off so he could go home."

"Well I guess I'll get to meet her tomorrow then." Sam wondered if this was what

had kept her dad awake last night. "Oh by the by, you didn't tell me what her name was."

"Didn't I?" Charlie asked, realizing that Sam was right. "Her name's Jesse, didn't get her last name though. I think you'll like her, she seemed to be really friendly."

"Friendly?" Sam asked raising her eyebrow again.

"Nothing like that," Charlie shook his head quickly, knowing just how protective of her dad Sam could be. "She just seemed cheerful and nice. I didn't get to talk to her much, you know how busy the people keep Jake; it was the same with Jesse. She got swamped with people asking for songs. Lori was the one keeping her and Jake supplied with food and drinks, so she might be able to tell you a little more about her than I can."

"Hey Sam," a cougar named Tobias Haster said sitting down at the bar. "Can I get a Black Rose?"

"Sure Tobi," Sam said as she started pulling out the ingredients for the memory. "What's got you so down that you need one of these?"

"You know about those 400,000 DVDs the Church is distributing?" Tobias asked looking thoroughly miserable about it.

"Of course I know about them," Sam gave a slight shudder of disgust. "I'm part of the GLBT group at school. Why?"

"I just got one in the mail," Tobias said with a sound of despair in his voice. "The things are full of hateful propaganda against homosexuals."

"So I've heard," Sam nodded now with insight into what had one of the Mystic Wolf's regulars so depressed that he needed a Black Rose. "You left the order Tobi. This isn't something you can do anything about."

"Still I was attached to a priesthood that has preached hate and intolerance for the better part of two thousand years," Tobias said as Sam handed him his Black Rose. "Catholics like to pretend that they spread a message of love, but look at them. This is just one more piece of evidence that it is an institution that preaches nothing but hate and intolerance. I really shouldn't be surprised though, since Pope Benedict, may he rot in whatever Hell takes him, was a damn Nazi," Tobias now sounded angry but he was also weeping.

Sam put her paw on the ex-priest's shoulder. "Tobi you can't blame yourself for what the church has done. You saw the light when you came here. You're no longer part of them. Now drink your Black Rose, it'll help you feel better."

Tobias took a long pull at the black drink with its red speckles, and immediately started cheering up. "You know it does help me realize that there are still people out there, even Catholics, who are willing to fight this kind of prejudice."

"That's the way to look at things." Sam was thankful that the effects of the Black Rose were already starting to hit the bar's long time regular. "The way I understand it pretty soon enough people will accept that gay marriage is not a threat to society and we'll see it legalized."

Tobias finished his drink with two more pulls, and the memory of hope despite despair hit him fully. "You know you're right. People will get this stupid nonsense out of their heads. They'll realize that if they're blaming their marital problems on the gay couple down the street that they're just looking for an excuse."

"Now that's the spirit Tobi," Sam gave the regular a friendly slap on the arm. "All you have to do is see the good in people and know that eventually they'll do the right thing. Things will work out for themselves."

Tobias pulled three ten-dollar bills out of his wallet and gave them to Sam. "Here's for the memory and a tip. I've got letters to the editor to write and a Gay Pride group to contact."

Sam grabbed a notepad and quickly jotted down a phone number. "Here's the contact number for the Twin Cities local GLBT Movement chapter. Now go out there and make a difference Tobi."

Tobias took the piece of paper and smiled at Sam. "Brisbane is a lucky fur to have you as a daughter Sam. You helped a fur realize that even one fur can help make a small difference." He then strode out of the bar with his head held high, looking and feeling a hundred times better than he had when he first came in. Twenty bucks for a memory of hope born from despair was all it took to help the ex-priest.

Charlie came up behind Sam, and gave her a slight nudge. "Your dad's a genius for coming up with that one."

"That he is," Sam said with a nod. "So how have you been doing?"

"Not bad," Charlie replied. "As much as I love this place I still can't wait for my vacation next month."

"Where are you and Sasha going?"

"We're going to La Paz for two weeks," Charlie said with a grin that Sam couldn't see. "Sun and surf and nothing to do. I think we're going to love it."

Lori came over to the bar and dropped an order in front of Sam. "Hey Sam. Nothing complex here, just a couple of boring mix drinks. Nothing that even requires any window dressing."

Sam scanned the order. "Gods, could they get anymore boring?" She started pulling down various bottles. "So Lori, what's Jesse like?"

"Oh Charlie told you about her did he?" Lori asked looking over at the bear who was mixing up other drinks without any real surprise as she talked to the raccoon.

"Jesse's really nice. She seems to have a great sense of humor, especially since she was able to handle this place."

Sam laughed. "She would definitely have to have something to handle the Mystic. Anyone interesting sing?"

"Fay-Quastil was singing Elvis."

Sam sputtered with laughter as she mixed a kamikaze. "Wait, the dragon who sings nothing but Offspring and Ramones was singing Elvis?"

"I couldn't believe it either." Lori smiled. "He was beyond drunk."

"He must have been. I would have loved to have seen that." Sam grinned as she finished the second drink of the order. "If there's anything else you can tell me about Jesse I'd like to know."

"What's got you so interested in her?" Lori asked slightly puzzled. "You'll meet her tomorrow won't you? I mean you are working a shift tomorrow night right?"

"Just wondering if there's a connection between her and something my dad said to me this morning," Sam shrugged noncommittally.

"Oh? What did he say?" Lori asked.

"It's probably nothing," Sam said as she put the last of the drinks on a tray for Lori. "You should probably get those over to their owners before the ice melts."

Lori picked up the tray and sashayed her way over to her customers. Sam let her eyes wander to the waitress' tail for a second or so before turning to an order that Trace put in front of her.

"You're not her type Sam," Trace said to the raccoon.

"A girl can still look," Sam replied with a sly smile.

The jaguar gave a slight shake of his head. "You're impossible. The question is why don't you ever go after guys? I mean I've seen you ogle males just as often as you do femmes. So why?"

"Way too high of standards," Sam replied simply. "Now what've you got for me Trace?"

"A Wing Drop and a Night Watch."

"I'll make sure to include an air-sick bag then," Sam said, not wanting to have to clean up after the effects of a Wing Drop. "So how've you been doing Trace?"

"Nothing's changed since I last saw you Friday. The biggest thing that happened was yesterday when my neighbors got into a massive fight and the femme who actually rents the place started throwing her boyfriend's shit out a window. I ended up calling the cops they were getting so loud," Trace said seriously. "Some people

shouldn't live together."

"Wouldn't know," Sam shrugged as she mixed the two memories. After a few more seconds she handed them and an air sick-bag over to Trace. "Make sure you explain the purpose of the air-sick bag to whoever ordered the Wing Drop."

"I already did. They said they've had it before so I'm not too worried."

Everything ran smoothly for another hour until Brisbane showed to start his shift, just before the dinner crowd showed up. He ran a quick check on the inventory on the back of the bar as he tied on his apron. "Do we need to have Trace get anything from downstairs?" asking Charlie and Sam about their stations.

"Not on this side boss man," Charlie said as he finished a margarita. "I'm good for now."

"How 'bout your side, Sam?"

"I'm down to my last bottles of bar vodka and gin so I could use one of each," Sam said and then looked in her till. "I'm also low on ones and fives."

"How much you need?"

"I could do with a total of a hundred between the two and I also need a roll of quarters," Sam said, pulling two fifty-dollar bills out of the tray and handing them to her dad.

Brisbane took the bills and stuffed them into a pocket on his apron. "How much do the two of you have in your trays?"

Charlie looked at the screen on his computer register. "According to this I'm about forty away from needing to make a drop."

"You, Sam?"

"Over a hundred or so before needing to make a drop on this end," Sam said. "I made a drop about thirty minutes or so ago."

"Okay I'll be right back." Brisbane left for the office for a trip to the safe to make change. And so began the dinner rush at the Mystic Wolf.

Chapter 3

Seven o'clock on Wednesday found Sam mixing up two pitchers of margaritas, the really expensive margaritas. These two pitchers would set the customer back eighty bucks. Still they were the ones who had ordered them. Steven came by shortly, dropped off another order and picked up the tray of margaritas to take it to the table that they had been ordered for.

Sam looked at the clock on the screen of her computer register and seeing the time started looking out for this new femme, Jesse. If she was right about her guess the new karaoke owner was the reason her dad had trouble sleeping the night before. She wasn't sure what she was looking for. Charlie had told her that Jesse was a good looking wolfette, but that didn't help much, not in this place at least. So she only had the computer and lyric display screen to go by as a solid way for recognition.

At about seven-o-five Sam saw a drop dead gorgeous wolfette enter the bar carrying some of the karaoke equipment. "Wow," Sam whispered. The grizzly bear had understated her looks; this femme put most super models to shame.

"Hey Jesse!" Brisbane said from behind the bar, two stations down from Sam, his tail wagging furiously. "Do you need any help setting that stuff up?"

Jesse shook her head causing her long, wavy hair to brush across her shoulders. "Don't worry about it Brisbane, I've got everything well in paw."

Tanya looked over at Sam and noticed that the raccoon was staring at the karaoke femme. "Sam you might want to get your eyes off Jesse before she notices. I mean you're just about to start drooling."

Sam's head snapped up to look at the badger. "What did you say?"

"I said 'you're just about to start drooling.' Though I must agree she's very good looking," Tanya said. "Wish I had that kind of body."

"So do I." Sam replied, trying to concentrate on the drinks order that Steven had dropped in front of her. "I mean how does someone get a body like that?"

Tanya shrugged, "Probably one part good genetics and another part large amounts of exercise. I don't have the first part, and I'm too lazy to use the gym membership I have. You on the other paw have the good genetics, plus you exercise a bit."

Sam laughed as she put together a patriot. "My genetics aren't that good."

"Not from where I stand." Tanya grinned at Sam, as she reached under the bar for a couple bottles of one of the more frequently ordered micro-brews. "Okay, you may not have the looks to be a top model, but you're still a good looking kid."

"Thanks Tanya." Sam said, grateful that her fur hid her blush. She went back to the drink order and finished it with a long island ice tea. She then got to work on another drink order that had just been laid in front of her by Hope.

"Is there anything anyone needs for their station before I leave?" Andy asked. The coyote had spent the day on first shift so he had been in at nine in the morning and was now about to head home. Since no one needed anything Andy bid them goodnight and left.

"Can I get a shot at 'Sk8r Boi'?" Asked a young, red vixen.

"You got it," Jesse smiled; she was really enjoying this gig. "But you're going to have to wait a bit; I've got three songs a head of you."

The ferret on stage was butchering Bruce Springsteen's 'Glory Days', and was being pelted with the free popcorn and pretzels. Jesse knew that the ferret was well aware of just how incredibly bad he was, but he seemed to be enjoying himself just the same. Plus there was the free drink he was promised for singing. It didn't matter that he couldn't sing to save his soul, all that mattered was that he had the guts to go up there and make a fool of himself. For that he'd get any drink he wanted on the house. At least she was used to this kind of singing already and it no longer made her wince. He had also thrown a ten in her tip jar so she wasn't about to really complain about something as trivial as a bad voice.

Lexi placed a Cesar salad with grilled chicken in front of Jesse. "Pretty bad isn't he?" She whispered.

"I've heard worse." Jesse whispered back. "Not many, but a few."

"Do you want something other than water?"

"Actually a Roy Rogers would be nice," Jesse smiled. "Need to treat myself every once in a while."

"Sure you don't want a Shirley Temple instead?" Lexi asked just to see if Jesse would get the joke.

"Is it true about those two?" Jesse grinned.

Now it was Lexi's turn to grin. "The boss was right, you do fit in here. I'll be right back with your drink."

Shortly after the ferret was done committing aggravated assault upon 'Glory Days' a group made up of a variety of species got up to sing 'Hotel California'. They weren't great but they were still a damn sight better than the ferret who had gone before. At least they weren't having the bar snacks thrown at them.

Lexi came back with Jesse's Roy Rogers. "So what do you think about this place?"

"Busy," Jesse replied simply. "The other couple of places I do this at don't have anywhere near this many customers asking to get up to sing."

"Must be the free drinks we offer." Lexi replied with a smile.

"Almost definitely." Jesse said just before taking a sip of her Roy Rogers. "All I know is that I'm averaging about a five or ten dollar tip from each singer, not including the ridiculously huge tips the Gods and the like give me, and I haven't had a free minute. I'm making out like a bandit here. Makes up for how slow it is at my other three gigs. "

"Yeah, Gods and others from the magical realm are good tippers. They simply have more money than they know what to do with since in their own realm everything is much more expensive. So they tip us with gold coins which they see as cheap but what we see as horribly generous." Lexi said, trying to explain the situation as best she could. "The boss did tell you what to do with the coin tips right?"

Jesse nodded, "yeah I take them to him; he has them analyzed for purity and weight and then gives me the cash. One dragon gave us a tip on Monday that turned out to be worth about seven hundred dollars. One tip! That's way more than I pull in from the other three bars combined."

Lexi gave her a shrug. "Yeah we make a lot in tips here; as long as we get decent hours we all pull in a six-figure income. That's the reason we rotate shifts so often. That way none of us get stuck with always getting the shifts that are crappy for tips. Brisbane gets the best hours of any of us but that's mostly because he wants to do all the night drops. It's not that he doesn't trust us with that kind of money, but mostly it has more to do with us being safe. He'd rather just take the risk himself."

"I can see that. He looks like the type of furson that it would take an anti-tank weapon to stop." Jesse commented looking past Lexi to the bar so she could see Brisbane.

Lexi turned her head to see who Jesse was looking at. "Good looking fur isn't he?" The rabbit asked.

"Mmm. That he is." Jesse said just barely resisting the urge to lick her lips. "By the way, what's up with the raccoon behind the bar? She looks a little young to be mixing drinks."

"That's Sam," Lexi said, "she's twenty-two and the boss' adopted daughter. She's a pretty good kid once you get to know her. She is also highly protective of her dad. Well I got to get going, lots of customers tonight."

Jesse looked at Sam for a bit wondering how hard it would be to get the raccoon to let her date her dad. There was a huge obstacle though. She was only three years older than the young drink slinger. With that small of an age gap between her and Brisbane's daughter she was going to have major trouble making any serious head way with the giant. Still he made for a nice fantasy.

At midnight Jesse cut people off from any more requests to go on stage and got up to sing herself. She left the tip jar on the edge of the stage in case people wanted to give her tips for singing. Soon people were flipping through her song list book asking her to sing specific songs. In short order the tip jar started flowing over. As she sang song after song with only a few short breaks to line up the songs on her computer and drink some water.

All this time Sam kept an eye on her dad. His tail had really started wagging when Jesse had gotten up on stage and she knew what that meant. She had seen him act this way before, and everytime he had tried for a phone number, and had almost always gotten them. So the question became what was she to do?

Jesse looked only a couple years older than she was, and that kind of worried Sam. What if her dad was really interested in the wolfette? She wanted to see her dad happy, but it disturbed her just how young the wolfette was. Also she apparently found her just as attractive as her dad did. By the Gods this situation could easily get very messy.

People started dispersing as it got later into the night leaving only a small pawful around to hear Brisbane call for the last order. Jesse was still up on the stage singing with a voice that could make angels weep for its beauty. In fact a couple daemons who fit the description of angels were doing just that as the wolfette's voice swam through a ballad of lost love. There was barely a dry eye in the house when she was finished with the song. Even the street hardened Sam was trying hard to blink back tears.

Jesse's voice had the soft feel of satin yet at the same time it had the power of an ocean liner behind it. She seemed to have a voice that could probably bring out the very best in furs, no matter what they were like. Her voice could probably work any miracle. Sam had never heard a voice so incredibly beautiful, not even the Muses, with all their talents over the arts, could top her. Not only did she have the voice of a Goddess but she had a beauty that would effortlessly put her in the same league as those Goddesses. How any mortal could obtain that level of perfection was beyond any fur's ability to understand. Sam doubted even most of the Gods that were patrons of the Mystic Wolf could have explained it.

Even after everyone but the staff was out of the bar Jesse was still up on stage singing much like she had been doing Monday. The wait staff was sweeping up the floor or wiping down tables. Sam, Brisbane, and Tanya were washing glasses. All of them enjoying the free concert that Jesse was giving them.

Every once in a while Sam would look over at her dad and watch as his tail continued to wag. She was pretty sure that it meant her dad was going to have another

rough night trying to sleep. Jesse was probably going to keep up with her concert throughout his dreams and who knew what else would happen in that dream.

Chapter 4

Jesse was up on stage singing as if the life of an entire country was at stake. Everything around her was in darkness with only a single spot showing the wolfette in all her sultry glory. Instead of the usual jeans and t-shirt, the green eyed beauty was wearing a slinky, green, cocktail dress with a slit on one side that went almost all the way up to her hip. Brisbane sat at the very edge of the stage, and hearing clapping realized that he wasn't alone. The giant looked around at the rest of the audience but saw only empty seats. The wolf couldn't understand why he was alone. He could hear an audience all around him, yet couldn't see anyone else.

The siren all but floated down the stage to where the snow white wolf was sitting so that it seemed that she was singing to him, and him alone. The bartender, now turned prisoner by the goddess like voice, could sense her in every way possible. He could not only hear and see her, but now he could smell and almost taste her sweet breath. The merely mortal fur could feel her singing deep in his chest, reaching to take a gentle hold on his heart. Never before had a furson been so real to him. He didn't even feel this real to himself. She was like a psychonaut, far more real than reality could truly allow for.

Time seemed to slow down for the sole audience member as he felt his heart beat fall into synch with the rhythm of the music. The young wolfette's lips caressed the words of the song as if she was using them as brushes to paint a picture. It was so sensual that the giant felt like he could live like this forever and never tire of it. Despite only being twenty-five she had a voice that seemed to have benefited from thousands of years of training.

All of a sudden what sounded like a fire alarm ripped the moment apart. Everything shattered as if the scene had been painted on glass.

#

Brisbane shot straight up in bed and slammed his fist down on the offending alarm clock. There was a loud crack and the speakers started buzzing instead of beeping. 'Ah shit,' Brisbane thought, 'killed it. Still that piece of crap deserved it for waking me up.'

What I wouldn't give for another few minutes of that dream. Wonder if I could get Jesse into a dress like that?'

As he swung his legs over the edge of the bed he shook his head hoping to dispel the last, lingering images. As incredible as it had been, he didn't want to hold on to that dream all day; it would just make it hard for him to function properly. That being said he would love for that dream to become reality.

Brisbane went over to his closet and pulled on a light robe and headed towards the bathroom for a shower. There had once been a time when he had never bothered with robes, but that was before Sam had come to live with him. He didn't like the idea of being naked in front of his daughter so he had just started wearing a robe. He seriously doubted if Sam would really have cared if she saw him in the fur, but the idea never sat well with him. The young raccoon had a seriously messed up past, and there were times that he felt like he was walking on eggshells in case something triggered a suppressed memory.

The therapist said that Sam was fine, but something in Brisbane said that there may be something deeper that was, as of yet, untouched. The raccoon usually seemed tougher than nails, but he had seen her at her worst. He had seen her wake up screaming in terror of furs that had hurt her, furs that if he ever found he would brutally torture before killing. No one should go through what Sam had been through. It had made her hard as a diamond; and like a diamond there was that small point that if hit could shatter it. He didn't want to hit that spot by accident. He didn't want to accidentally hurt the one furson who meant more to him than his own life.

Brisbane stepped into the shower, started lathering up and started thinking about the dream again. Jesse had seemed so real in that dream; it was almost like she wasn't merely a construct of his own memories but instead really there. It seemed like she had literally crossed over into his mind and gave him that concert on purpose. That would have been a neat trick. In theory he knew how to work the magick necessary to do that, he had just never done it. As far as Jesse was concerned he was just about dead positive that she didn't know the magick.

As he rinsed off he made a mental list of what was on his schedule for the day. After breakfast he had his tai'chi class. Once that was over he'd be home with plenty of time to be ready to take Sam and her best friend, Kukiko, to see a movie. Every parent he knew said that spending quality time with your child was necessary for a healthy bond to form. Even though she was basically a grown up now, they still spent a lot of time together and they probably always would.

Today was one of the few he wasn't going to take a shift at the Mystic Wolf. Even he needed a break from the place every once in a while. Even if he had a date, which was a pretty rare occurrence, he still often ended the night at the bar since he really wasn't one for the proverbial 'night cap'. So most nights after a date he'd still usually ended up at the bar for a couple of hours.

He wasn't really a ladies fur; he had just never gotten the hang of it. Sure he could easily get a date, but he was lost after that. That line of thought brought him back round to his dream. Could he go farther with Jesse?

Jesse was like most of the femmes he always tried for, beautiful, and hopefully not dumb as a sack of potatoes. He had talked to her a bit several times and she had come across as being intelligent, and fun. She made up a perfect package as far as he was concerned, which meant he would probably bomb out if he did get a date with her. Sam knew femmes better than he did, for obvious reasons, but he didn't think he should talk to her about Jesse because of the closeness in age between the two of them. If he went after Jesse he would definitely be 'robbing the cradle' she was so much younger.

So now he had to find someone he could talk to about the situation. He ruled Sigurd out immediately. That poor fur had never gone on a date in his life, partially because of his bizarre looks but mostly because a total lack of self esteem which drove femmes away. Maybe he should just call his dad.

After he finished getting dressed he went over to his phone and dialed his father's number. There were three rings before the phone was answered.

"Volsung residence, Taylor speaking," he heard his dad answer.

"Hey dad, it's Snow Dancer."

"Well Brisbane, I was beginning to wonder when you were going to call."

"What do you mean? Did you already know I was going to call?"

"This call wouldn't happen to be about a beautiful, young wolfette would it?" Brisbane's father said with a hint of humor in his voice.

Brisbane sighed. "Let me guess. That brat of a daughter of mine called you."

"Nothing gets by you does it. She worries about you."

"How did she know to call you about it? I'm only trying to sort this out now."

Taylor laughed. "I think part of it has to do with her taking after her old man. You really should have become a therapist..."

"Dad we've been through this before," Brisbane said exasperatedly.

"I'm just talking as your mother," the older Volsung said. "You know she would have preferred it if you had become a therapist instead of not using your degree."

"This isn't about that dad. I know what mom said about me becoming a bartender; I got an earful about it, remember?" Brisbane never liked digging up the past between himself and his mother. "I'm still in the situation Sam called you about, and I really need advice."

"Well let me play therapist then." Taylor said. "What about this femme has you hooked?"

"That's just it, everything she is has me hooked. She's beautiful, funny and seems to be highly intelligent. There's nothing not to like about her. However..."

Brisbane could practically hear his dad nodding. "What's the however?"

"The however," Brisbane sighed, "is that she's only a few years older than Sam. That and I always seem to screw up any romantic relationship with femmes."

"Let's talk about the second part first," Taylor said seriously. "If she finds you attractive and wants to give it a real try, she'll help you get past your normal problems. Unless you've changed since high school you tend to freeze up on femmes if things start going too far. At least you're not like your cousin, Sigurd. That kid just freaks out around femmes. You on the other paw just need to relax. If this Jesse femme is right for you, you'll relax enough so you don't freeze."

"Okay I think I can work on that," Brisbane said with only half an ounce of confidence. "Still there is the age problem. I can't get past that."

"Age doesn't matter as much as people think it does," Taylor started. "Now if she was younger than Sam I'd come down there and give you a good hard slap upside the back of your skull. Now from what Sam told me Jesse is only a tad older than her. How does that make you feel?"

"That's just it, I really don't know," Brisbane sighed. "I'm more worried about what Sam thinks on the matter. I don't want to do anything that will make her uncomfortable."

"I won't lie to you son," Taylor said, "when she called me Sam sounded a bit confused on the matter herself. She said that she wanted you to be happy, but there was something else in her voice; something that I could place my finger on, something that she didn't want to admit to. I think what you should do is give it a shot with this femme and see what happens. Remember your first priority is to yourself, but you have to be careful for Sam's sake."

"You know me better than that dad," Brisbane said. "I'd never do anything to hurt my brat."

"You know you should go talk to your mother about this."

"Um, dad you do realize that mom has been dead for fifteen years?" Brisbane asked suddenly worried for his father's mental health.

The older Volsung laughed. "I'm not going senile son. What I mean is that you should go to her grave and just talk to her, it will help; trust me."

"Do you ever go and talk to her?"

Once again Brisbane knew his dad was nodding. "Every other week. I know the two of you weren't on the best of terms when she passed away, but I know she's forgiven you. Bring her some flowers when you go."

It was Brisbane's turn to nod now. "I'll bring her some lilies."

"Yes. Those always were her favorite," Taylor said softly, glad that he didn't have to tell his son that. "Why don't you go now? The weather is still nice."

"I'll go. I'll call you when I figure out what I'm going to do about Jesse."

"I'll be looking forward to that call. Goodbye son."

"Goodbye dad." Brisbane hung up the phone and looked at his paws. He hadn't been to his mother's grave since the funeral. He thought his dad was probably right; he should go talk to her if only to apologize for what had passed between them.

#

Brisbane found himself in an old graveyard, standing in front of his mother's gravestone holding a bouquet of lilies in one paw. He wasn't sure what to do now. He knew some people just came and talked to their loved one's grave. But he wasn't sure how to start; there had been some unkind words that had passed between them. Maybe he should start with an apology.

"Hi mom. I brought you some lilies; I always knew that they were your favorites. I know you weren't happy with me when I gave up on psychology to become a bartender but I think I have helped more people in my current profession than I would have if I had found an office to hang up my shingle in. I know I've helped at least one furson get a better life. I'm not sure if dad has told you this but you're a grandmother. You have an adopted granddaughter. I saved her from a life on the streets where I'm not sure if she would have lasted even for a few more months before I took her in and gave her a home. I think you'd like her, she has that same brassy side that dad said you had when you were younger. He said that she reminds him a lot of you. Maybe I should bring her out here so you can meet her."

Brisbane crouched down to put his paw on the head stone. "Dad told me to come out here so I could talk to you about something that's going on in my life. I've met someone and I think I'm in love but it scares me. I've never felt this way about a femme before, I feel warm just thinking about her. The problem is that she's only a few years older than my daughter and I don't want to hurt Sam, that's your

granddaughter's name. I love my daughter to death and I don't want to hurt her, but I can't help feeling the way I do about this femme. I could really use your advice."

Brisbane just stayed crouched down looking at the gravestone not knowing what to expect. He didn't know if he should feel different, or if he'd hear her talking to him. There was nothing. Simply nothing. Maybe his mother was still angry with him and didn't want to talk. Or maybe he was just being too cynical and not open to the situation. He stood up and started walking a way.

'Maybe I should talk to Hel,' Brisbane thought with a sigh. 'She could probably tell me what I should have felt.'

Just as he finished that thought he felt a hug coming from around his back. "Thanks mom. I always hoped that you still loved me even after everything we said to each other."

#

Jesse woke up from a light doze in a state of total confusion. 'I could have sworn that I heard a fire alarm.'

Chapter 5

Sam was keeping an eye on her dad as he seemed to be in a daze and it was impacting on his work. She looked over at the drinks he had just mixed and they didn't fit with the order that she had just heard given to him. She took two steps side ways so she could get her paw in front of his face and snapped twice. "Hey boss man, you got the drinks wrong."

Brisbane blinked twice and shook his head before looking at the young raccoon. "What are you talking about? I got the drinks right," he said with a slight snarl. He wasn't about to let anyone question his abilities as a bartender, especially not his own kid.

Sam took another side step and grabbed the drink order off the counter top and held it in front of his muzzle. "It says two strawberry margaritas, and a Sea of Sun. Not the other way around."

"Let me see that!" Brisbane snarled angrily, snatching the slip out of Sam's paw. His ears folded flat and his tail dropped as he looked from the order to the tray and back again. "I'm sorry kiddo. You're right and I feel like an idiot."

"You should know by now that I'm always right," she said with a hard slap on the arm. "But you owe me dinner at the Cockroach for getting angry with me."

"I'm sorry about snarling at you. It's just been a very long time since I screwed up and I didn't like having my abilities questioned. I really am sorry." Brisbane offered the extra memory to Sam. "You want this? I'd feel like an idiot if I simply dumped it."

Sam shook her head. "Then you're going to have to feel like an idiot because were too busy for me to pause long enough for a memory," she said, heading back to her own station. "And by the way, apology accepted."

Brisbane took a last look at the glowing drink before dumping it down the drain. He couldn't believe that he had made such a rookie mistake as switching the numbers around. Two strawberry margaritas and one Sea of Sun, how had he gotten that mixed around? He had wet the rim and dipped the glass in sugar as the thought went through his mind. He had been thinking of Jesse of course, he had dreamt about her again last night. Last night they had been on a picnic in his dream. They had been sitting under an oak tree on a hill that had a stream between them and the Citadel. That of course placed them on the other side of the Veil. It also could have put them just about anywhere in the world since the Citadel existed in multiple places at the same time. The hill though, had the feeling of being in Avalon. He had killed another alarm clock when it woke him up from that dream like he had the last time he had been so rudely woken up.

He hadn't been to Avalon since he had commissioned the forging of Complaints Department. Maybe he should take Jesse through the door to the Magickal Realm and over to Avalon. True it was fall there as well, but Avalon was beautiful anytime of the year. It was said that when he was young, Arthur Pendragon had temporarily made it law that it could snow in the morning but that the snow would have to melt before noon. Brisbane was pretty sure that Merlin had enough power to pull off such a feat of magick, but he couldn't see the old fur using his powers for such a thing. Brisbane was pretty sure that the then aging sorcerer would have simply counseled the young king to think things through more thoroughly. Which then made him wonder if Merlin was aging or getting younger when he had come into the bar last year.

Brisbane shook his head again to clear it of the distracting thoughts so he could get back on track; a little over an hour later though he was back to daydreaming. "Hey geezer you did it again," Sam said slapping his shoulder.

Brisbane shook his head coming out of a daze. "I did what again?"

Once again Sam grabbed a drink order and put it in front of his face. "Read this then look at what you just mixed."

Brisbane took the slip of paper from Sam's paw and looked from it down to the drinks in question. "Err," was all he could manage.

"Err, is right. Now either get that fuzzy head of yours in the game or go home," Sam said firmly.

Brisbane did a quick mental survey of himself and didn't like what he saw. "I'll go home. I'll be back at two to help close up and make the night drop. Until then you're in charge."

Sam looked at her dad again, and found herself worried about him, something was really wrong for him to screw up like that. "Dad, what's going on with you?"

Brisbane shook his head in mild confusion not sure what to say. "Wish I could tell you. I'll see you at two."

#

Kukiko sat next to her amp, trying to write the tune for a new song for her band, Harlequin Fire, while Sam was lying on the albino's bed. "Did I tell you about Chase's new hat?"

"No. What about it?"

"He got this wide brimmed hat that looks sort of cowboyish; like something that they'd wear on the trail. That along with that duster of his and the biker boots, makes you wonder why he's a punk and not a country-western type."

Sam looked towards the ceiling and closed her eyes trying to imagine Harlequin Fire's bass player as he had just been described. Once she had a fairly good picture in her mind she decided she liked it. "Actually I think that coyote of yours would look pretty sexy dressed like that. Sort of like a sheriff from an old western."

The harlequin faced vixen gave out a small laugh as she jotted down a chord in her notebook. "Never said he didn't look good. Just said he looked like he'd be more for country music rather than good ol' fashioned punk."

The younger femme shifted in the bed to look at the back of her best friend's head. "I have a serious question to ask you and I'd really like to get your honest and truthful advice."

"I've always been truthful with you," Kukiko said turning slightly so she could get a sideways look at the raccoon. "I've joked around with you before, but I've always been truthful. So what's your question?"

"It's about love..." the masked femme started.

The vixen shook her head. "We gave that a shot before and it didn't work out remember? Trust me, I don't know how you felt about it, but I don't regret what happened, but we agreed that we would just be friends."

"I wasn't talking about us. I'm trying to talk to you about dad."

The vixen closed her pink eyes. "Sorry I jumped to that conclusion. What about Brissers?"

"I think he's in love but I'm not sure what to do about it."

"What do you need to do about it?" Kukiko asked without much surprise, she knew just how protective, and slightly possessive, of her dad the young raccoon could be.

"He's been screwing up at work and it's got me worried. The real problem is that the femme who's got his head so turned round isn't much older than we are. I'm not sure I could handle it if my dad was dating a femme young enough to be my sister." The young bartender went back to staring at the ceiling. "The other thing is that I find her highly attractive myself. If it wasn't for my dad being so screwed up about his feelings towards her I'd take a shot at her myself. Now that would be awkward."

The best friend nodded. "You really are stuck in a tough spot. On one paw you're happy that your dad found someone he's seriously interested in right?" She waited for her friend to nod in return before pressing on. "On the other paw you are sort of concerned by the fact that the femme in question is around your age. To make all of this worse you find yourself attracted to her. Am I getting this right?"

"Basically," came the single word reply.

"So what do you feel is the best possible out come?"

Sam threw her paws up in frustration. "I have no idea. That's my problem. I mean I want to see dad happy, but I have a hard time thinking about another femme being involved."

"You wanted to be the only femme in his life didn't you?"

"Gods I'm a horrible daughter!" The raccoon slapped her paws over her eyes. "My dad deserves to have a femme in his life, in the role of a lover, he really does, but I don't want to share him with anyone."

"Did I ever tell you that I used to have a serious crush on your dad?" Kukiko grinned.

"That's not funny," Sam replied flatly.

The guitarist laughed. "I'm not kidding you. I thought that your dad was hot; with a capital 'Hot'. I never had any thoughts about trying anything because you're my best friend. But mmm."

The raccoon slapped the back of her friend's head. "You know I really could have gone the rest of my life not knowing that."

"I'm just saying," the pink-eyed punk said. "Now back to your problem. What would you do if your dad did start dating the femme? What's her name anyways?"

"Jesse. She is a drop dead gorgeous wolfette. You know I'm not sure. I guess I could try to be a friend. Maybe try to do traditional girl type stuff with her. Depending on how things go try for a girl's night out. I'd have to invite you to help me."

Kukiko sputtered with laughter. "You? Girl's night out? Now that's funny. Unless you've changed a lot in the two days since I last saw you. The only girly thing you do is play slow-pitch softball in a femmes' league, and your team is more of a drinking team with a softball problem."

"Of course it's a drinking team," Sam said with a slight grin. "Why do you think they call it 'D' League softball?"

The slightly older femme slapped a paw over her eyes with a groan. "I walked right into that one didn't I. Anyways back to your problem, and don't try to avoid it. You're still going to have to figure out a way to get to know Jesse a bit better before you pass any sort of judgment on how you'd feel about her dating your dad."

Sam closed her eyes while staring sightlessly at the ceiling. "Well maybe I could ask her to go out on a girl's night out, maybe somewhere I like to go. I think I'd feel more comfortable about the situation if I found something we can both relate to. If she goes along with it and I feel comfortable about hanging around her I'd be willing to try something she likes."

"Even if it involves her playing dress up with you? I could see you in a frilly, pink, dress. Or maybe she'd take you to a stylist and get you a manicure."

Sam's eyes popped open in fear. "Oh please Sif, not that. I don't know if I could stand being the subject of a dress-up date."

"I'm just saying," the guitarist said with a sly grin. "So where would you take her?"

"I think Taylor's Billiards would be a good place for a girl's night out," the ring-tailed femme said thoughtfully. "Pool seems something we could do that is relatively safe and would give us plenty of time for talking so I can feel her out. You would come along right?"

"Depends on my work schedule, and if we've got a gig. We'll look over my calendar and I think we can probably work something out. Don't forget that she has a schedule to work around as well, and you'll want to do this sooner rather than later so you may have to go with out me."

"Please don't say that. I have a strong feeling that I'll need help with this. She makes me nervous."

"What's to be nervous about? You don't even know for a fact that she has any feelings about your dad," Kukiko said stating something that had never seemed to have crossed her friend's mind.

"Ye Gods I had never even thought that," the raccoon said, realizing that her friend of eight years was right. "I could be totally in the clear with this. If she isn't interested in him that'll hurt Dad but at least I won't have to worry about her dating him."

"Well then that's settled. Now you just have to invite her for a friendly game of pool," the founding member of Harlequin Fire said. "Now what do you think of this?"

Kukiko started in on the tune for a new song that the lead singer would have to find words for. Her fingers slid up and down the neck of her guitar pouring out a raging set of notes that would serve as the base for a song that was nothing less than pure old fashioned punk.

Chapter 6

Jesse simply couldn't believe the view from the tower. She leaned against the crenellated parapet looking out over an emerald green valley to the sapphire ocean beyond. The air was cool but oddly it was warm at the same time. Above her was a brilliantly blue sky with a few clouds moving lazily inland looking for all the world like sea foam. She had never seen anything so beautiful. In the distance she heard seagulls and from directly below came the sounds of a small festival.

The young wolfette leaned over the thick parapet to look down so she could see the festival. The ground was covered in brightly colored tents and walking through the spaces between them were all sorts of beings. From daemons to dragons, from fairies to seemingly normal furs, they were all talking, drinking, singing, and simply having a good time. The lovely singer knew they were having fun but she didn't want to join them, she didn't know why at first, but she knew that she simply belonged where she was.

The femme pushed herself back from the edge to where she had been standing and then noticed two large, white, paws on either side of her. Leaning back she felt herself pressing against the reason she belonged where she was.

"It's beautiful up here isn't it?" She heard Brisbane rumble in his deep voice. She didn't need to hear it though as she felt it with her entire body.

"It is. I've never seen anything so beautiful in my life. I could live in this moment forever." She turned around and pressed the side of her face against the giant's chest.

Everything around them could be an illusion for all she cared, but he was real. He was solid. He was simply there.

She felt his arms wrap around her, and gently slide up and down her back. She was almost surprised by the softness of the touch. In response she pressed herself in even harder against the bartender's body if that was possible.

'Don't let this end,' she thought to herself. 'Don't ever let this end.'

All of a sudden she heard a voice counting down from ten. The wolfette twisted away from Brisbane looking all over for the voice knowing what would come next.

"Where is that voice coming from?" Brisbane asked in confusion as he too looked around for the source of the voice.

"This can't be a dream!" Jesse screamed burying her face in the giant's chest.

"You're too real! You're too real," she cried sobbing in to his shirt.

#

"BOOM!!!"

Jesse shot straight up in bed with a wordless scream. She snatched the dynamite shaped alarm clock from her end table and flung it at the wall. The clock hit the wall with a loud 'thwack' but it wasn't a hard enough throw to break it. "Damn you!!! I was enjoying that!"

In less then a second she had gone from a moment of pure ecstasy to being highly pissed off. "What a rotten way to start the damn day," she grumbled as she slid, naked, out of bed.

She walked over to her dresser stopping to give the alarm clock a good swift kick, which sent it skittering under the bed, as well as making her toe hurt. "Fuck! That was stupid you idiot!" she yelled at herself.

She grabbed clothes for after her shower out of the dresser and walked down the short hallway from the bedroom to the bathroom. She set her clothes on top of the closed toilet and looked at herself in the mirror. She liked what she saw, tousled hair and bedroom eyes. She had several lovers in the past that said she looked great like that. Didn't matter what she was wearing according to them, she looked incredible when she just woke up. She'd love to get Brisbane's opinion on the matter. She wondered how she'd look in one of his shirts. Probably like she was wearing a dress

she decided. He had a good foot and a half on her which would make anything of his on her seem like she was a little kid playing dress up.

She turned the water on in her shower and got it adjusted to what she wanted. Once she got in the shower her mind wandered back to her dream. She could almost feel his arms sliding over her back. The feeling from that dream had been more incredible than any experience she had ever had with any lover. She just wanted for the dream to become reality. Not necessarily the castle and festival part, just the part about being in Brisbane's arms.

These thoughts about Brisbane connected back to Sam and the age thing. As close as she and Sam were in age she'd basically have to get the young raccoon's permission to date her dad. The question was how to get permission; she needed to find away to ask that wasn't going to seem too awkward. She didn't simply want to walk up to the femme and say something as stupid as "Do I have your blessing to date your dad?" How much stupider could it get than that. She didn't want to sound stupid about it, but she felt that she needed to ask her directly. It was Wednesday so she was going to be at the Mystic Wolf tonight and hopefully so would the raccoon.

#

Jesse walked into the Mystic Wolf that night carrying the lyric screen for that night's customers.

"Hey Jesse! Do you need any help with that?" She heard Brisbane call from the bar. She could hear something in his voice that told her what she wanted to hear. It sounded like he had the same desire for her that she felt towards him.

"That's okay Brisbane I've got it."

It didn't take her long to get everything setup and soon she had a line of customers making requests. It was varied everyone from a couple of college kids wanting something by Owl City, to Bastet jokingly asking to sing "Walk Like an Egyptian." Jesse knew it was going to be one of those nights. Then again at the Mystic Wolf it was always one of those nights.

A couple hours into the night Sam walked over to her table. "I'm on fifteen. Mind if I join you?"

Jesse scooted her chair over slightly, it wasn't really necessary but it was simply a friendly gesture. "Please do, I always like having someone to talk to even if it's only for a few minutes."

Sam let out a small 'woof' as she fell into the chair next to Jesse. "Thanks I just need to get off my feet for a few minutes. After a while it gets a bit hard on the feet to stay behind that bar all night. Makes my knees hurt sometimes as well."

"How long have you been tending bar?" Jesse asked trying to figure out how to best approach the raccoon.

"Almost four years. I started as soon as I was of legal age to do so, which in Minnesota is eighteen. It makes no sense though since I couldn't drink until I was twenty-one, though I did that a lot before I met my dad. Probably a hold over that no one bothered to close when the drinking age was changed."

"Probably," Jesse agreed with a nod. "Out of curiosity how long have you been Brisbane's daughter?"

"Eight years as of last May." The raccoon replied simply. "It was the greatest day in my life when I was released from the hospital and moved in with him. If you want to know how I felt order a First Time Home, it's made from that exact memory."

"Why were you in the hospital," Jesse asked slightly confused. She had never heard of a kid going to an adopted home after being in a hospital, out of a foster home yes, but never a hospital.

"I attempted suicide. Please don't ask about it," Sam said with a shake of her head. The raccoon then smiled. "All I care about now is that I have the greatest dad in the world."

"I'm sure he is. He seems to be a really nice guy." Jesse figured he had to be if he had adopted a teenager.

"You have no idea," Sam said looking over at her dad who was pouring a pint for a faerie. "Actually the reason I came over is I have a question for you, or rather a request."

Jesse raised an eyebrow. "Should I be worried?"

"Nah," Sam said with an amused grin. "I was wondering if you'd like to do a girl's night out with me?"

Jesse smiled; this may be the exact chance she needed to have a femme to femme talk with the young raccoon. "What did you have in mind?"

"Do you play pool?"

"It's been a while since I last played," Jesse said with a genuine smile, she was lying since she played at least twice a week, "but I love to when I get the chance."

"Well I was thinking we could get together and do just that." The young bartender was glad that this would probably work out. "I have a friend I'd like to bring along if you don't mind."

Jesse was unsure about the friend part, she wanted to talk to Sam privately about Brisbane, but she would still probably find a chance to get her alone. "Yeah that's fine with me. Is she any good with a pool-cue in her paws?"

"Not really," the bartender said with a smirk. "Truthfully she's down right horrid. She's even been known to sink the cue ball with out hitting another ball."

The karaoke owner snorted a laugh. "You're joking right? I mean no one can possibly be that bad."

Sam shook her head with a smile. "Amazingly enough she really is that bad. I love her to death, but I won't lie about her skill with a cue. She makes up for it though with her ability to play guitar."

"So it's a lucky at love thing then?"

"Pretty much," Sam smiled. "So anyway how does it sound?"

"I'd love to. So when were you thinking?"

"Well that's pretty much up to you. I don't have any evening shifts for the next couple of weeks."

The wolfette closed her eyes for a second. "Well I'm almost always free on Sundays."

Sam smiled. "That should work out for Kukiko."

"Well you talk to her and we'll figure something out."

#

"These mountains are lovely aren't they?" Jesse asked pressing her back into Brisbane's muscular chest.

"I've never been here before, but you're right it is beautiful here," Brisbane agreed as he put his arms around her. "I've been all over the world but I've never been here before."

The wolfette wiggled deeper into the giant's chest. "Where exactly is here?"

"I don't know, and I really don't care. All that matters is we're here together."

'I don't know if this is a dream,' Jesse thought, 'and even if it is I don't care. Right now he's here and he's got his arms around me. I don't care about the rest of it. As long as his arms are around me nothing else matters.'

The cream and brown wolfette turned round, grabbed the white wolf by the face, and pulled him down into a deep kiss. Brisbane stiffened in surprise at the kiss. "I've been wanting to do that since I first met you. And by the way your lips taste sweet."

"Ten. Nine."

"Damn it! Not again!" Jesse was pissed; this was nothing more than a dream.

"Where is that voice coming from?!" Brisbane asked bewildered.

"Five. Four."

"This is just another dream." The wolfette said crying, and squeezing into the giant's chest as hard as she could. "I don't want my dream to end."

"Your dream?!"

#

"BOOM!!!"

Brisbane shot straight up in bed looking around desperately for Jesse. She was nowhere in the room of course. He knew she couldn't be there since she hadn't come home with him. He had only seen her at the Wolf that night and she had left almost an hour before he had. But the dream had felt so real he was sure that he had been holding her in his arms.

"What was that explosion?" The bartender asked himself. "That's the second time I've been woken up by that."

Getting out of bed he walked over to the dresser to look in the mirror that stood above it. He looked in the mirror and was startled by something in his reflection. "Where did that lipstick come from?!"

Chapter 7

"Tonight's the night," Jesse said looking into the mirror trying to get herself psyched up for the girl's night out she was about to have with Sam and her friend. "Tonight I'm going to ask Sam for her permission to date her dad. I can do this. I can ask her. Nothing's going to stop me. I hope."

Jesse looked down at herself and became unsure about what she was wearing. Her size two jeans, that looked as if she had poured herself into them, and a tight tank top that showed some cleavage. Maybe she should just wear a regular t-shirt instead of the tank top. True a t-shirt would still be snug on her, all of her clothes showed her light frame off, but at least she wouldn't be showing off her well proportioned chest so blatantly. Just an outline rather than a full look at a fair bit of bare fur.

"I hope she doesn't think that I look slutty dressed like this," she thought out loud. "The problem is that everything I own fits like this; like it was painted on. As snugly as it fits it's still fairly easy to get into, and let's me move freely."

Looking into the mirror again she started trying to psych herself up for the night. but was only successful in getting a bit agitated. "I probably should go easy on her at pool or she'll get angry at me and say 'No' when I ask her to let me date her dad. I need to make a good impression on her. That's it I'm putting a t-shirt on; the tank top is too much. Yeah it's warm enough to wear a tank top with my flight jacket over it but I should just wear a t-shirt instead."

The wolfette started pulling out a t-shirt and then thought better of it. "No. I'm wearing the tank top. She should see me in what I'll be dating her dad in. Then again a t-shirt might be better. Agh! I can't decide."

She went over to her end table and picked up a quarter. "Okay heads I go with the tank top. Tails I wear the t-shirt."

She flipped the coin, caught it in her paw, and slapped it over the back of her other paw without looking. She slowly pulled her top hand off the coin and looked at it. Tails. "Well that settles it. I'll wear the tank top and to hell with the quarter."

Once she was finished dressing she looked at herself in her full length mirror and twisted round to get as good of look at her back as she could. "Perfect. I look good enough to eat, then again according to more than a few furs I always do."

She picked up her satchel, and headed for the front door. Putting on her leather flight jacket she checked the pockets for her keys and grabbed her cell phone. Finding that her keys were still in her jacket pocket she left her apartment and went down to the under ground garage where her pickup was parked.

She already knew where Brian's Billiards was since that was where she usually played pool. Her pool-cue was still on the front seat of her truck and she headed out into the early evening.

#

Sam and Kukiko were outside of Brian's when Jesse pulled up just on time.

"Are you ready to have your tail handed to you?" Sam asked the wolfette when Jesse walked up to where the two friends were standing.

"Do you think you're good enough to handle me?" Jesse replied with a wink and an evil grin.

'Gods forgive me for wanting to handle Jesse at something other than pool,' Sam thought, 'it would break dad's heart if I stole Jesse away from him. Of course she isn't setting off my gaydar, so he's probably safe from that.'

"I think I can take you on and wipe that smug grin off your muzzle," Sam replied returning Jesse's grin.

"Aren't you going to introduce us Sam?" Kukiko asked. "I'd kind of like to know the name of the femme who is going to make me look like a fool."

"Oh sorry. Kukiko this is Jesse. Jesse this is my best friend Kukiko."

Jesse's eyes lit up. "Wait I know you! I used to see you around McNally-Smith when I was going to school there. What was your major?"

"Guitar and music production," Kukiko said. "Wait, I place you now. We were in the music theory class together."

"I can't believe I didn't recognize you right off the bat. How many albino vixen's are out there who dye on a harlequin mask?" Jesse asked with an amused snort of laughter. "Sam tells me that you're pretty bad at pool."

"She's not lying. If I can sink two balls in a game it's a miracle," Kukiko said shaking her head. "She's tried teaching me how to play but I'm a lost cause."

"Well maybe I'll have better luck teaching you," Jesse said with a smile. "Well let's head in and see who's the better femme."

As the three femmes walked into the pool hall Jesse was immediately greeted by a couple of the other patrons. "Hey Jesse! I've got a hundred here that says I can beat you tonight!" a tiger called out, reaching into his wallet and pulling out a c-note.

"Save your money Mason," Jesse replied, "I'm with friends tonight. Next time I see you I'll steal your money."

There were a few other people calling for Jesse's attention, several asking for a chance to win money back. All those asking for attention were politely turned down, being told by the wolfette that she was with friends.

"I thought you didn't get much of a chance to play pool," Sam said, realizing that she might actually have someone on her paws who would serve as a real challenge.

"So sue me, I lied," Jesse said grinning at the raccoon. "I'm here at least twice a week, and usually play four or five games, sometimes more."

"Sounds like you play for money."

"I usually walk out of here a fatter wallet than I walked in with," Jesse said by way of answer.

Kukiko looked back and forth between the two of them. "I have the distinct feeling that I'm just going to watch. I'll just let you two work each other over."

Sam gave her friend a friendly slap on the shoulder. "Don't worry I'll give you the usual handicap."

Jesse raised one eyebrow. "What's the handicap?"

Sam grinned. "She plays by 'straight' rules, while I play by 'three bumper' rules."

Jesse turned her attention to Kukiko. "And she still beats you?"

"Yes, I am truly that horrid."

"Okay then I'll give you the same handicap." The wolfette said patting Kukiko on the shoulder. Then she turned her attention back to her new raccoon friend. "I'll make you a deal. So neither of us beat the other solely based on who gets the first turn by nursing, we'll play 'three bumper'. Agreed?"

Sam looked at the wolfette and was happy that she'd finally have an opponent who was willing to play a full game as difficult as 'three bumper' against her. She stuck out her paw. "Agreed. On one condition, no money is put on the table."

Jesse took Sam's paw and gave it a firm shake. "Agreed."

"I'll find us a table, while you get the balls, and Kukiko finds a cue," Sam said to Jesse.

Sam found a table near the back corner of the pool hall and started screwing the two pieces of her pool-cue together. Kukiko was next on the scene with a borrowed pool cue. Jesse was last with the balls and triangle. Once she set everything on the table she assembled her own cue. "So who plays first?"

Sam jabbed a thumb at Kukiko. "I say we let Kukiko play first and it will be a game of play the winner that way we all play roughly the same number of games."

"That leaves it between you and me," Jesse said, stating the obvious. "How 'bout we flip for it?"

Sam pulled a quarter out of her pocket. "Call it in the air."

Sam flipped the coin and Jesse called for 'tails' while it was reaching its mid point. The quarter hit the table and showed just that. "Seems that you're up first."

Jesse racked the balls and let Kukiko break. Sam watched for about twenty minutes as her friend got her tail handed to her. The raccoon tried her best to help her friend but it was of no use.

During the twenty minutes of the game not only had Kukiko been thoroughly thrashed, she managed to sink only one ball, but she had also managed to pot the cue ball four times with out hitting another ball. "I told you I was bad," The vixen said looking at Jesse.

Jesse patted Kukiko on the shoulder. "Don't worry about it. We can't all be sharks. You ready Sam."

"I'll be ready as soon as you're ready to lose," Sam said with a sly grin.

"If it wasn't for our agreement I'd put a hundred on the table right now."

Sam let Jesse break and then for the next forty-five minutes or so, the two of them went after each other hammer and tongs both managing to block the other's shots with well placed shots of their own. Eventually Sam finished the game off dumping the eight ball in the left middle pocket. "Looks like I would have just made you a hundred dollars poorer," she said with a grin.

"Well this is a nice change for me," Jesse said with a smile. "That was the longest I've had a game last in quite a while. I must say it's nice to play against someone on my level."

The next game of course was Kukiko versus Sam and in very little time the poor vixen found herself expertly beaten by her best friend. This time she had been coached by Jesse. The coaching had done her just as much good against her friend as it had when she had played against the wolfette. "Sorry coach. I'm just hopeless."

"Don't worry about it," Jesse said gently. "I'll see if I can beat Sam for you."

Over the next four hours the three femmes had fun talking and taking turns trying to coach Kukiko with no success.

"So Jesse," Sam started, "tell us a little about yourself."

"What do you want to know?"

"Well let's start with your family. Do you have any siblings?"

"I have four brothers," Jesse said, "two on each side. I rough housed with them a lot. My two older brothers used to pound on me in a fairly friendly manner. In turn I pounded on my younger brothers until they got bigger. Once we were all teenagers I learned to fight dirty. Really dirty."

"Sounds fun," Sam said simply. "I don't have any siblings so I always wondered what it would be like. What about your parents?"

"Dad was a marine medic, so he was of the opinion that if it wasn't bleeding too badly or broken you weren't really hurt," Jesse said with a shake of her head. "I had to jam my left shoulder back into place twice, and both wrists a couple of times each. As far as my mother. Well she ditched out on us shortly after my youngest brother turned two. So I was six when she left. I have no idea why she left, none of us do.

"So how 'bout you Sam?" Jesse asked.

"Well as I already told you Dad adopted me shortly before I turned fifteen. I spent about a year and a half on the streets before hand."

Jesse cocked her head to one side. "Why were you on the streets?"

"My mother was a crack head. I ran away after an incident I really don't like talking about. Maybe I'll tell you about it some time later. Anyways Dad adopted me and I've been happy ever since."

Jesse looked over at Kukiko. "And you?" she asked the vixen.

"No siblings either," Kukiko said with a shrug. "My parents are idiots so I moved out as soon as I could. I met Sam in a psych ward after my parents got the wrong impression about my clothes and fur dying."

The conversation went back and forth getting friendlier the entire time. Sam and Kukiko found out that Jesse had lived in Southern California until she was fifteen and then moved out to Las Vegas. They also learned about how she had learned to fight dirty from her older brothers and her father as a way to keep her safe from guys who might want to go further than she was willing to go.

Kukiko talked about what had inspired her to start dying on the harlequin mask, which had to do with a painting she had seen that she fell in love with. The portrait showed a femme with pretty much the same dye job so she had just started doing it herself. Between the dye job, her choice in music, and the mohawk, her parents thought that she was becoming suicidal which was the reason she had ended up in the hospital where she had met Sam.

For her part Sam didn't really talk much about anything before she had met Brisbane, she never did. Neither of the other two femmes pressed her for more information. Kukiko knew the raccoon well enough to realize that she didn't want Jesse to know too much. It didn't really matter to the vixen anyways since she already knew just about everything about her friend.

As the evening progressed Kukiko excused herself to use the bathroom after a thorough trouncing by Sam, giving Jesse the chance she had been looking for all day. "Sam let's make this the last game and put a little wager on it."

"I thought we agreed no money was to be put on the table." Sam said pretty sure she knew what the wager was going to be.

"I don't want to play for money," Jesse started. "As you may realize, I should say probably realize, since we're here. I have a serious romantic interest in your dad..."

"And what you want to know is if I'll let you date him," Sam said finishing Jesse's thought. "Is that right?"

"Basically, yeah," Jesse admitted. "So here's what I want to wager. This last game we play is for the chance for me to date your dad. I win you let me date your dad with out trying to stop me. If you win, I guess that's up to you."

"So let's see if I've got this straight," Sam said seriously. "You win and I have to step aside and let you date my dad no matter how I feel about it. I win and I can say 'No' and you respect my decision. Is that right?"

Jesse nodded, "I'll respect your wishes either way if you win."

Sam nodded in return. "Then I'd better do my best to beat you."

The game got started just as soon as Kukiko got back from the restroom and was told of the stakes so she could witness. The vixen poked Sam in the ribs and whispered in her ear. "You're out for blood, aren't you?"

Sam merely nodded. She then turned her attention to Jesse. "I'll break."

This time the game went for well over an hour. Furs from all over the pool hall who knew Jesse either from getting their money taken by her or simply by her reputation, came to watch. They watched even more intently when they found out what the stakes riding on the game were. Money started trading between paws with the odds set at even since a few of them had seen both femmes beat each other.

At the start of the game Sam didn't know what she was going to say if she beat Jesse. She really wasn't sure which way she would go. As soon as she decided what she would say she redoubled her efforts. She was going to make her opponent all but beg for mercy, and she was damned if she was going to let up.

As the game wore on Jesse was beginning to realize from Sam's facial expression and full demeanor that she was at the mercy of the raccoon. She was good but it seemed that the raccoon was better, and if she was reading Sam's body language right the younger femme wasn't going to let her date her father. The wolfette was crushed. She so badly wanted to have a chance at Brisbane, but it seemed that his daughter was going to keep her from doing just that. She'd never be able to go to the Mystic Wolf again if Sam said 'No'. It would hurt too much to be able to see the fur she desired but not be able to do anything about it.

As Sam expertly dropped the eight ball into the left foot pocket Jesse felt like crying, in fact she did just that, as both her head and tail drooped. "I guess it's all up to you Sam. I'll leave him alone if that's what you want."

Sam took the cue ball and walked up to Jesse. She took the wolfette by the paw and gave her the little white ball. "I'll let you break," she said, kissing Jesse on the cheek.

A smile spread across Jesse's lips. She had the raccoon's permission.

Chapter 8

'I don't care what anyone says about Mondays,' Jesse thought happily, 'they are GREAT!!! If people had a reason like mine to look forward to Mondays they'd agree with me, and to hell with what anyone else has to say!'

The young wolfette was vibrating from excitement, tonight she was going to ask Brisbane for a date. Sam had told her that she could go for it, that she could 'Break' as the young raccoon had put it. She'd ask him after all the customers were gone. Or would she? Now came the hard part though, how to ask him. She had never asked a guy out before. She was used to guys approaching her. She was constantly being asked by guys for the chance to take her out somewhere. Much of the time she had gone along with it as long as the fur realized that she wasn't interested in a one night stand. However there had also been times when she needed to use a well placed knee to emphasize the point that she didn't want the night to end in the bedroom. This date wouldn't lead to be one of them, she wanted that snow white giant. She wanted to know if he felt just as good in real life as he did in her dreams. She wanted to feel his seemingly gentle arms around her more than anything she had ever wanted before in her life. She wanted a night with him to end in the bedroom, she didn't care about sex. They could have it or not, she just wanted to spend the night curled up with him.

The wolfette was still vibrating as she checked that all the karaoke equipment in her van was properly secured. She'd be spending about five hours letting customers sing to their heart's content then at midnight she'd take the stage herself and give people a real performance. Even after the bar closed she'd keep singing like she normally did, she'd sing until Brisbane had kicked her off stage so he could go home.

'I'll ask him out as soon as I get off stage. Otherwise I'll be too excited all night to focus,' Jesse thought. 'Or maybe I should ask him right away so that I don't get nervous. Ack!!! This is worse than trying to figure out whether or not to wear a tank top or t-shirt when I went out to play pool with Sam.'

Jesse got into her van and drove off for her twice weekly gig at the Mystic Wolf. 'Okay there is no reason to be nervous,' she thought, 'I just have to ask as simply as I can. I'll just go up and say something like, 'Hey Brisbane, would you like to go out somewhere?' that's all I have to do.'

'But when do I ask him?' Jesse thought over that question during her entire drive to the bar. 'More importantly how do I ask him? I want to do something with elegance, something with class. I want him to remember it for the rest of his life.'

As she pulled into the bar's parking lot across the street she finally made up her mind on how she was going to ask him out. She opened the back of the van and got out the lyric display screen, and headed into the bar. When she got in the door she heard Brisbane's usual greeting asking her if she needed help, and like last time she could hear a sense of longing in his voice. She knew that when she asked him he would just about fall over himself in enthusiasm.

"No thanks Brisbane. I've got it all well in paw."

"If you're sure."

Jesse smiled at him. "Don't worry I've got it."

Then something totally unexpected happened, Sam came up to Jesse from behind as the wolfette was setting up equipment and placed a paw on her shoulder. "I'm giving you a chance to break. Just don't screw it up and break him, okay?" she whispered in Jesse's ear, giving her shoulder a painfully hard squeeze.

Jesse swallowed and nodded. "I'm playing this one as if my life is on the line. This isn't a game for me. This is about something far more precious."

"Glad to hear it," Sam said, this time with a friendly pat instead of the previous squeeze.

#

"Hey Jesse can I get a shot at Everlast's 'What it's Like' before you take the stage?" Sam asked sliding into a chair next to Jesse.

Sam hadn't been working that night, she had spent the time waiting to see her dad's reaction to Jesse asking him for a date as well as doing her homework. However she liked to sing on occasion, and every time she did it was the same song. She had a life experience that brought the song to life. A year and a half on the streets and she had the bitter memories to dig deep into the lyrics and bring up raw emotion. Hearing her sing 'What it's Like' was like looking at pictures of abandoned buildings with windows of broken glass and cardboard. Pictures of hotels that charge by the hour and change the sheets only on a weekly basis. Pictures of friends dead from overdosing on who knew how many poisons as they tried to escape a world of nothing but pain. It was the same as hearing gunfire hitting the outside of the building she was trying to hide from

the cold in. The sound of the wail of police sirens responding to the night's gunfight. Listening to her sing that song was to listen to depression and sorrow.

Every time something major in Sam's life changed she sang that song. It was a reminder to herself, and to her friends and family, of where she came from. She wanted to let her dad know that this was major, but that she was going to change with it. She wasn't going to get in the way between him and Jesse. She wanted to see the wolfette make her dad happy, she just didn't want to be forgotten.

Brisbane looked at the stage when Sam got up and began to sing. 'What's got her singing that tonight?' He wondered. 'I hate when she sings that song, it always reminds me of the night I found her on the street. Of the look on her face when she asked me if I wanted to 'party', a face that was a mixture of hope and of fear. What a horrid night. I'm just glad she'll never have to spend a night on the streets like that again.'

As Sam got off the stage Brisbane motioned her to come over to the bar. As she did she gave Jesse the 'okay' sign. Jesse returned it with a nod. 'What was that about?' Brisbane wondered.

"Okay kiddo, what was with the song?" Brisbane asked, giving Sam a puzzled look.

"I'm sure I have no idea what you mean," she replied with a sly grin.

"Sam, you only sing that song when something major is going on. What happened?"

Just as Brisbane asked Sam the question Jesse got up on stage. "Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to dedicate this first song to our favorite drink slinger," she then let into Taylor Swift's 'Love Story' with a voice that made the talented country singer sound like a jammed pneumatic wrench.

All the drink slinger could do was simply stare at Jesse with his jaw slowly opening and closing. Now he knew why Sam had been singing, though it had actually yet to register as he was still in total shock. 'Jesse is singing a love song, and she dedicated it to me? What is happening?'

Sam was having fun watching her dad. The look on his face was priceless so she took out her cell phone and took a couple of pictures to show to Kukiko, she knew the vixen would get a kick out of it.

As Jesse finished the song she turned to look directly at Brisbane. "Brisbane, will you go out with me?"

There was a loud crash behind the bar as Brisbane dropped a glass on the floor. Everyone in the bar turned their attention to the giant behind the bar waiting to hear his response with anticipation.

The first thing many people heard was a very large gulp. Then came the answer everyone was waiting for. "I'd love to."

Chapter 9

"So where are you taking her?" Sam asked, watching her dad as he tried to pick out the right shirt.

"I was thinking Timber Lodge," Brisbane said shrugging. "Which should I wear? The black or the grey?"

"Doesn't matter as long as you don't wear that Gods awful Hawaiian," the raccoon replied.

"What's wrong with that shirt?"

"You're kidding me right?"

"It's a classic. I love that shirt."

"Dad, that hideous thing should never have made its way into your closet," Sam said with a slight shudder. "Those things went out of style with Hawaii Five-O."

"You do know that they're coming out with a remake," the older bartender countered.

"Trust me, I know. That's the worst entertainment news since they canceled Firefly."

"Yeah it was a sad day when they canceled that show. I know one day that will make me smile though."

Sam raised an eyebrow. "What's that?"

"The day they cancel South Park."

The young raccoon let out an uncharacteristic giggle. "Yeah, that's a pretty bad show."

Brisbane shook his massive head. "Down right atrocious I'd say. Probably one of the worst pieces of drek to ever hit the airwaves."

"It was originally a cable show, so it wouldn't be fair to say it hit the airwaves," came the reply.

"Okay, to hit the bandwidth than. You knew what I meant." The giant went back to his original problem. "Now back to the original question. The black or the grey?"

The younger of the two tilted her head sideways. "Are you planning on wearing a tie?"

"That seems a little formal for a steakhouse doesn't it?"

"I was hoping you'd say that or I'd have to hit you with a clue-by-four. I'm going to have to say the black, it goes with anything."

Brisbane took off the shirt he was wearing accompanied to the bad stripper music that Sam hummed. "Is that really necessary?"

"I could sing 'Too Sexy'. Would that work better?" His daughter grinned.

"That would be disturbing to hear out of my own daughter while I change." The white wolf put on the shirt and buttoned it up. "How do I look?"

"You'll look fine as soon as you change your pants."

"And what's wrong with my pants may I ask?"

Sam put a paw over her face and shook her head. "Look down at your legs, dad. That pair has paint stains from when we painted the guest room."

"Err..."

"Just put on another pair. It's not like you don't have another pair of blue jeans."

"Well could you leave the room then? Or at least turn your head for a few minutes."

"Oh my Gods!" Sam barked. "You're going commando?!"

"Well..."

"Put on underwear you idiot! If you get a hard on it'll show up so badly it won't even be funny." Sam walked over to Brisbane's dresser and wrenched open his underwear drawer, and grabbed a pair of briefs. "Here, put these on. While you get dressed I'll be in the hall until you're ready for final inspection."

The young raccoon walked out of the room and as soon as the door shut behind her she fell to the floor laughing. 'What a twit! Not knowing that you should never go commando on a first date. Gods it's a good thing for him that I'm here, or he'd really screw this up.'

After a few minutes there was a knock on the door. "Sam, I need your help again."

"Hold on for just one second," Sam slid up the door with her back still pressed against it. She walked into the room and looked at her rather confused father. "What do you need now?"

"Err..."

"Spill it."

"Is there anything else I should wear?"

She pressed the fingers of her right paw to her forehead and her thumb to her cheek. "Ditch your usual digital watch and put on the Rolex Sig gave you for your

fortieth. Two; wear the rose quartz pendent I gave you under your shirt, if it works right it should help. Three; polish your Thor's Hammer; it's gotten a little dingy. While you're at it polish your college class ring. Now, I'll be down in the kitchen waiting for you to come down for your absolute final inspection. With those few changes you'll look pretty presentable. Keep in mind that what you wear not only reflects on yourself, but also on me. If Jesse saw you the way you were before I decided to help you she would think I didn't care. I do care. I want to see you have a good time. Now hurry up you're going to have to leave in less than half-an-hour to pick her up."

Sam walked down the stairs and into the kitchen. She grabbed some cheese out of the refrigerator and the container of apple cider. She poured herself a glass of the cider and sliced up some cheese for a quick snack. Sitting at the table she idly flipped through a copy of the most recent Funny Times. She was reading Garrison Keillor's column when her dad walked in.

"So how do I look?" Brisbane asked, spreading his arms out and slowly turning around.

Sam leaned back in her chair and stroked her chin with her right paw with a thoughtful look on her muzzle. "Shirt and pants work well; black jeans with the black shirt would have been too much. The other thing about them is that they are just tight enough to show the cute toosh of yours..."

"Sam..."

The raccoon grinned. "I'm just saying that if she gets a good look at your tail she'll have the same reaction a lot of femmes do. Back to the appraisal. Your Thor's Hammer looks much better as does your class ring. The Rolex really adds a bit of class, I'm glad I recommended it."

"Anything else?"

"Yeah shoes," Sam said, shaking her head. "I hope you weren't planning on going barefoot."

"Oh yeah. What should I do about shoes?"

"Don't worry I thought ahead. I gave your new work boots a quick polish, so they look good. They're comfortable for walking in incase the two of you go for a stroll somewhere." Sam's eyes lit up suddenly. "I know it's warm enough for you to go without it, but wear your leather jacket. You know the one that you were wearing when you got me off the streets. It still looks nice even though it's pretty beaten up."

"Um why?"

"Simple," the raccoon said, replying in such a way that it would show to her father that she was about to reveal a femme secret. "It's supposed to get cooler tonight. Keep the night going for a while at the restaurant and then go for a walk, say the Walker

Sculpture Garden. Unless she's like you and Uncle Sig and never gets cold, she'll get a little chilly and you can let her borrow your jacket."

"What does that have to do with anything?" Brisbane asked, highly confused. "Wouldn't it be better for her to just wear her own jacket?"

The raccoon sighed. "A Masters in psychology and you still don't know anything about the feminine mind. Femmes love to curl up in their boyfriend's jacket, especially if they wear cologne. Which reminds me go splash a little on. The jacket smells like you and feels like one big hug, femmes love it."

"And you know this how?"

"Dad I've had boyfriends before. Darius was a nice guy and let me borrow his jacket a couple of times."

"Why did the two of you break up anyways?"

"Because he's gay," Sam replied as if she was stating the plainly obvious. "He saw me as just one of the guys and thought maybe I was boyish enough to make an attempt with. That's beside the point though. Wear the jacket and keep the date going long enough for her to ask to borrow it."

"Can do. Thanks for the advice."

"Now go put on your cologne, and remember not too much."

Brisbane disappeared upstairs to the master bathroom to splash on a bit of his 'furliest' cologne. He looked in the mirror and smiled, "Lookin' good."

The wolf quickfooted it to the kitchen where his daughter was waiting to give him a send off. "Thanks for all the advice kiddo. I really don't want to screw up tonight."

"Two things before you go. First; these are for Jesse," Sam said giving her dad a dozen roses. "Second; if you need me to scram for the night just call ahead and I'll spend the night at Kukiko's place."

"She has her own place..."

"True, but I seriously doubt her bed will fit you." Sam pulled his head down and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. "Now go out there and have a good time. And be ready for me to pump you for all the juicy details tomorrow."

#

Jesse looked at herself in the mirror and tried to calm herself down. "This is just a date. It's just a date like any other I've had before. Who am I kidding? This is nothing like the other ones. I've never had dreams about just being held by a fur that was more pleasurable than the greatest sex I've ever had. I've never wanted a fur as much as I do now. I need to knock him flat on his tail and make him mine, and at the same time be his. This is going to be the best date I've ever had paws down, even if I have to force it to be."

When her phone rang she looked at the time, seven on the nose. 'He's here right on time. The true sign of a gentlefur, not too early and not at all late.'

She reached for the handset and pressed the talk button. "Hello?"

"Hi Jesse, it's your date, and I'm ready to whisk you away to dinner."

The wolfette smiled, tonight was going to be fun. "I'll be right down. I'm just putting on the final touches."

"I'll wait for eternity if it helps."

Jesse smiled again, knowing that he actually meant it. "I'll be down in two minutes. I just need something."

"I'll be right here."

Jesse hung up and went into her room and grabbed the small bottle of her favorite perfume, 'Poison', and dabbed a couple drops on either side of her throat. In the past the use of that perfume had resulted in lots of neck biting and some very fun bedroom hijinx, which was exactly what she wanted. She rushed out the door only pausing long enough to grab her satchel, which she found scared males far less than a purse.

Just before she reached the front entrance she pulled a lock of hair out of her pony tail and let it fall between her eyes. She may be a tomboy but she had learned some interesting techniques from friends when it came to getting males to do exactly what she wanted. As she reached the front glass door she saw the look on Brisbane's face and it was priceless. His jaw simply fell open, and after a few seconds started moving up and down slowly.

"The...these are f...f...for you." The giant finally stammered, pawing her the bouquet of roses that Sam had provided.

Jesse took the proffered flowers and smiled, she had gotten the exact reaction she had hoped for, the one she usually got, though this time it felt far more satisfying. "Thank you. I love roses."

"I hoped you would."

Jesse brushed the loose lock of hair from between her eyes, which, as she had planned, made the poor giant swallow hard. "Shall we go to dinner now?"

"Y...yes ... I mean please. Err. I..." Brisbane was still having trouble thinking straight. Here he was, looking at a wolfette who's looks put goddesses to shame, and he was taking her to dinner. He was still trying to figure out what he had done to deserve this kind of good fortune. "Here," he said awkwardly as he proffered her his arm.

Jesse took his arm and smiled, things were working out better than she had hoped. "Let's go."

Brisbane led her to his SUV, opened the passenger door, and helped her in. After shutting the door he quickly rushed around to his own side and slid in beside her. "I hope you like steak," he said, all but crossing his fingers.

"I love steak. Where are we going then?"

Brisbane let out a small sigh which made him realize that he had been holding his breath. "I was hoping we could go to Timber Lodge."

"Mmm that sounds good. I haven't been there for a while. A 'Lena' would be great."

"I thought you'd be the kind for an 'Edmund Fitzgerald'," Brisbane said.

"I'm not a huge fan of filet mignon, plus I can eat more than just a 7oz steak. A 10oz top cut sirloin is just right for me," Jesse said patting her stomach. "If I eat too little I'll waste away and lose this girlish figure just as quickly as if I ate too much."

"I'd say you're anything but girlish," Brisbane said.

"Are you saying I look old?" Jesse asked in mock annoyance just to see what her date would do.

"N...no, I...I mean ... um ... that you look more mature. I mean more ... oh Gods how do I put this?" Brisbane started tugging at his shirt collar. "I mean that you have a body that no girl could hope to have. You're no girl, you're too perfectly built. Am I making sense?"

Jesse smiled. "Don't worry handsome, I just wanted to make you realize that you had put your foot in your mouth, and to see how well you'd pull it out again."

"You're cruel."

The wolfette laughed a little. "Let a girl play."

During the twenty minute drive to the restaurant they made idle chit chat which was constantly coming on to more and more humorous subjects. By the time they entered the restaurant they were laughing hard. "You should have seen the look on his face," Jesse said as they reached the host for the night.

"How many in your party tonight?" The host, a fox, asked.

Brisbane raised one paw and 'V'ed two fingers. "Two, and make it a booth by the fire if you can."

"Give me one second," the fox looked at the map of the seating to see if he had such a table available. The host grabbed a young mouse. "Jammie, bring these two over to booth twelve."

"Follow me," the mouse said as she picked up two menus.

When they got to the booth Brisbane sat down and awkwardly slid in because of his large size, "Restaurant booths are always too small," he griped good naturedly.

"Could be worse," Jesse said with a sly grin, "they could be too big."

"Yeah that would be worse I guess. Either way..." he simply shrugged to finish the sentence.

The waitress pawed over the menus. "The special of the day is smoked trout, the soup is wild rice and chicken. Now can I get you something to drink?"

"I'll have a 1919," Brisbane said without looking at the menu.

"And you miss?"

"Water is fine by me for now."

"I'll get your drinks and I'll be back to take your orders," the mouse then left towards the kitchen.

"You only want water?" Brisbane asked raising an eyebrow.

"I'm not a fan of Summit, I'm not big on wine, and I don't like Pepsi products. What exactly is 1919?"

"It's a type of rootbeer. You want to try mine when it gets here?"

"Well I'm not big on rootbeer."

"Trust me this stuff is among the greatest. Not quite as good as Iron Horse but still pretty damn good."

"I guess I can give it a try then," Jesse conceded with a smile.

"The first night you came to the Mystic you said you had lived in Las Vegas, what brought you out here? I'm sure it wasn't the weather, unless you're a masochist," Brisbane ended with a grin.

"I came out here to attend McNally-Smith, best music school for modern music in the world. As some people describe it, the Julliard of modern music."

"I'm well aware of it. I went to the graduation of my daughter's best friend there," Brisbane said.

"Well anyways I went there to study modern vocals and music production. As I'm sure you realize I have a pretty decent set of pipes."

"I wouldn't call them 'pretty decent', I'd say down right incredible. I've never heard anything like them before. You can pull off any vocal effect you want, it's incredible."

Jesse smiled. "Did a lot of drama in high school and picked up a lot of accents which helped with learning to do different vocal styles." Jesse switched her voice from its normal light, airy quality, down to a rich, whiskey soaked one. "Of course certain songs need to be sung with different voices."

"You don't need to prove it to me when you're not singing."

Switched her voice styling again, this time giving it the raspy, yet sexy, sound of a two pack a day smoker. "What on Earth do you mean? I'm still using the same vocal chords, you're just listening to it differently."

"Now you're just showing off."

"You must have a hidden talent as well. What is it?" Jesse asked, having returned to her normal voice.

"I'm just good with alcohol. I can make just about any taste I want using the right alcohols. Of course I use a little magick to cheat with."

"So tell me about the Mystic Wolf?" Jesse asked.

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything. I mean it must have an incredible history. I want to know it all."

Brisbane launched into the whole history of the Mystic Wolf, from its very foundation ten years ago. To right before Jesse had started running the karaoke machines. He told it all.

Chapter 10

"That was fun." Jesse snuggled in against Brisbane. "I'm still amazed how the artist set it up so you'd appear out of no where and then disappear just as quickly only to pop up on the other side of that installment."

Brisbane nodded his agreement, the walk had been fun. "He must have worked for a stage magician. No smoke just a ton of mirrors, and some well placed shrubs."

"By the way thanks again for letting me wear your jacket." Jesse raised the collar up and rubbed her nose in the beat up leather. She may as well have been wearing a dress the jacket was so big on her. "It's very warm, and smells just like you."

'Sam wasn't kidding,' Brisbane thought. 'The best part is that when I finally get it back it will smell like her. And her perfume is driving me nuts. We both get something out of her wearing my jacket, she gets a giant hug from me, and I get her scent when she finally gives it back.'

"So where to now?" Jesse was hoping the answer would have the word home, or something similar, in it. She didn't care whose home, she just wanted to spend the night with him.

Brisbane wasn't sure what to do at this point. This was the point in past dates where he choked. "Well I guess that's up to you."

The answer puzzled Jesse, she had left the option of spending the night with her in his paws but he was leaving it up to her. Most furs jumped at the chance to spend the night with activities involving her and a bed. "Well why don't we go back to one of our places and watch a movie."

Brisbane was glad that Jesse had made the suggestion; it gave him the ability to go back to his place with out seeming to be trying to get her in the sack on the first date. "Why don't we go back to my place? I just need to make a quick call first."

"Your place sounds perfect."

As they headed back to the S.U.V. Brisbane pulled his cell phone out of his pocket. He dialed Sam's number; after the third ring his daughter picked up. "Hey Dad."

"Hey kiddo, could you..."

"I'm already at Kukiko's. Have fun." Sam hung up before her father could ask her how she knew that he was going back to their house.

"What was that about?" Jesse asked.

"Sam just wanted me to call her if we were going to be going anywhere after our moonlit stroll."

Jesse realized what Sam had been thinking. "She's right. My bed is simply too small for you."

Brisbane stopped up short. "When did you talk to Sam? Have the two of you been plotting against me?"

"I haven't talked to her since the night I asked you for a date," Jesse said with a grin. "Just call it feminine intuition."

"I'd call it mind reading."

Jesse shrugged. "Whatever you want to call it. Now about this house of yours..."

#

"Nice," Jesse said as she looked at Brisbane's large Victorian. "This must have set you back a bit."

"The cost of the house wasn't too bad," Brisbane said answering the non-question. "It was the cost of all the contractors I had to hire. I did some of the repairs myself, but I needed a lot of contractors for things I simply didn't know how to do."

Brisbane motioned for Jesse to precede him through the back door into the fairly large, well outfitted kitchen. "Welcome to my humble abode," he said.

Jesse took a look around and was suitably impressed. "Do you cook much?" she asked.

"Actually yes. I rarely ever eat out."

"Okay now where is the TV, and does it have a couch or something where we can cuddle."

"It's on the second floor and there are a couple of futons up there. Just follow me," Brisbane said as he led her up to the second floor den.

"Not bad at all," Jesse said as she looked over the room. There was a large flat screen taking up a good sized chunk of wall. Under that there was a blu-ray player and to the side were several large shelves of DVDs and Blu-Rays. "And those futons are nice and big, just what we need for a good cuddling."

Brisbane nodded his agreement. "Sam made me get those for just that purpose. As in her cuddling up with her friends."

"Boy, or girl?" Jesse asked.

"Either."

"Well enough about Sam." Jesse had a fun plan for getting Brisbane ready for some fun activities to night, and the best part was she was still wearing his jacket which was perfect for her dastardly plan. "Do you have anything in the way of an action, romance movie?"

"A couple."

"Pick one out; I need to use the bathroom. Where is it?"

"Oh just on the opposite side of the hallway."

Jesse disappeared down the hall. Once she was in the bathroom she took off the jacket and started stripping down to just her panties then put Brisbane's jacket back on. 'Brisbane you better watch out. Jesse's coming,' she thought with an evil laugh. Just to make sure Brisbane thought she had actually needed to use the bathroom she flushed the toilet and ran the tap for a few seconds.

As she opened the bathroom door to go back to the den she opened the jacket just far enough to show her soon to be lover that all she was wearing under it was her under wear. 'I hope he doesn't have a heart attack.'

"What are we going to watch?"

Brisbane didn't turn around before he answered her. "I was thinking R.E.D. If that's okay with you?" Brisbane turned to look at Jesse and as soon as he saw her his jaw simply fell open.

"Like it?" Jesse's smile was truly vicious; she had been waiting for this moment all night.

"Gah," was the first thing Brisbane could say. After a few seconds he was able to speak again. "You look beyond incredible. I've never seen anything anywhere near as beautiful."

"That's what I wanted to hear. Now get that shirt off of you I need a fur on fur hug," Jesse said as she started unbuttoning Brisbane's shirt.

"Aren't we rushing this a bit?" Brisbane said as Jesse undid the second button.

"Not at all. I've been wanting to do this since I first met you."

"Jesse I really am being serious; this is our first date. Let's wait for at least one more date."

"But..."

"Please." Brisbane said gently caressing one cheek with a large paw.

Jesse nuzzled back into the paw. "Okay," she agreed, "but at least let me take off your shirt I do want to feel bare on bare fur as we cuddle."

"That's far from being a problem," Brisbane said as he started reaching for the third button of his shirt.

Jesse moved his paws away from his shirt. "Let me do that."

#

The ball room was huge. Inlaid in the floor was a large dragon made of precisely fitted stone and crystal including marble, jade, turquoise, and quartz. Above were massive, crystal chandeliers lit by a myriad of candles. From a gallery above came the elegant music worthy of the Earth's greatest music halls. However the greatest feature of this place, as far as Brisbane was concerned, was Jesse in an elegant dress walking up to him.

"May I have this dance?" Brisbane asked with a deep bow, proffering her his paw.

Jesse took his paw gently. "I would never dream of dancing with another fur."

Brisbane was glad that the music coming from the gallery was a slow waltz because he had no idea how to dance anything else, and right now he had her tightly pressed against him and that was all he wanted. If he didn't know better he would have sworn that he and Jesse had died and were now in some sort of Freya's realm of lovers. But he knew exactly where they were. They were in one of the many ballrooms of the Citadel. Who had arranged it for them to be alone could only have been the Mother Dragon, but why. He could only guess that it was for all the service he had done her children, which was mostly let them come and drink with normal furs and experience the mortal realm safely. For that she had done this for him. He'd have to thank her as soon as he could.

"Brisbane?" Jesse asked.

"Mmm yes?"

"Where are we?"

"We are in the Citadel. The most magickal of all magickal places. We are in the home of all the worlds dragons."

"Well where ever we are I love it here."

#

When Sam got home there was no sign of her dad anywhere on the first floor. 'Gods I hope they made it into the bedroom. I really don't want to find dad alone, 'cause Jesse better be here.'

When Sam made it to the second floor she heard the sound of channel surfing. 'Not a good sign.'

Opening the door to the den she found her dad lying on the larger of the two futons still in his jeans with Jesse curled up asleep on his chest seemingly only wearing his jacket. When her dad saw her, he mouthed the words, 'She's still asleep.'

Sam gave him the thumbs up and quietly shut the door behind her as she left. 'Doesn't look like they had sex but boy doesn't he look comfortable.'

#

Jesse tried to put her arms around Brisbane but she couldn't he wasn't just in front of her, he was all around her. He was in front of her, behind her, and on either side of her. He was simply everywhere. And from every direction he was hugging her.

'So this is what Heaven is like,' she thought. 'Receiving an all encompassing hug from the fur you love far beyond anyone you have ever loved before.'

She could feel his paws slowly working their way up and down her back, the gentle caressing causing her to shudder in pure ecstasy. 'As long as I can feel this I'll never need sex ever again, this is by far better than anything I have ever experienced in the bedroom. May this moment never end.'

#

Jesse slowly opened her eyes causing her to realize that she had been dreaming but that the feeling of Brisbane's gentle caresses had not been a dream. She was still lying on her new lover's chest with his paws slowly working their magic up and down her back. His soft fur mixing with hers. The all encompassing hug she had felt had come from the fact that she was still wearing his oversized jacket.

Jesse gave Brisbane's chest a good hard nuzzle to indicate she was awake. She then put her paws on his shoulders and slowly pushed herself up to look him in the eyes.

"Marry me," they said to each other.

Chapter 11

Sam was sitting in the kitchen drinking coffee when her father came down to get something for Jesse to eat as breakfast in bed. "Morning Dad."

"Morning Kiddo. How was your evening with Kukiko?"

"We watched some movies, talked a lot, and had wild, passionate, lesbian sex."

"Oh is that all." Brisbane didn't even bother to comment on the lesbian sex joke. He had known about Sam and Kukiko's experimentation, and the final results. Neither Sam nor Kukiko had even bothered to try to keep it from him. Sam was very upfront and honest with her father, because he never judged her, and she had told him without him asking.

"So what are you going to do with the rest of your day?" Sam asked.

"Well Jesse and I are heading back to her place so she can get a change of clothes, and then we are going ring shopping."

"Oh is that all," Sam replied, the gravity of what her father said not hitting her. Then his statement hit her like a shovel to the face. "WAIT WHAT?!?!?!" Sam screamed spitting out the coffee she had just taken a sip of.

"Jesse and I are going out ring shopping," Brisbane said simply.

"You've only had one date!" Sam said gesticulating wildly. "The two of you have decided that you're going to get hitched after one date?! Are you nuts?"

Brisbane ignored the comment for a while, while he rooted around in the fridge for a nice breakfast for his new fiancée. "I'm not nuts. You see we've been dreaming about each other ever since we met."

"So?"

"We were crossing dreams," Brisbane said sitting down across from Sam. "Somehow she crossed into my dreams and I crossed into hers with out either of us trying to. By the Gods she doesn't even know any magick and dream walking is fairly tricky magick. So how she did it is anyone's guess, 'cause you know I'd never work that kind of magick."

Sam's eyes went wide in surprise. "The two of you have been accidentally dream walking together since you met?"

"Basically yes," Brisbane confirmed. "We've been beyond real to each other in those dreams. In those dreams we've been acting like psychonauts. You know what a psychonaut is right?"

"Of course," Sam replied with a tone that showed that she felt insulted that her father doubted her knowledge of the occult. "A psychonaut is an entity that is more

real than reality allows for. So in these dreams the two of you have been beyond real to each other? That's amazing."

"Now do you understand why we've decided to get married so quickly?"

"I guess," Sam said slowly. "The question I have for you though is what happens to me?"

"What do you mean?" Brisbane asked, genuinely perplexed.

"What I mean is will I have to move? I mean I can't imagine that Jesse would be happy having me around. Wouldn't I be a bit of a nuisance?"

"We'll worry about that later. But I'm pretty sure you'll be here as long as you want to."

"Thanks."

Brisbane finished getting breakfast ready, put everything on a tray and headed up to the master bedroom.

"Hey handsome," Jesse said sitting up in bed wearing one of Brisbane's shirts. "What's for breakfast?"

"Eggs and bacon."

"Yum!"

"Jesse." Brisbane was thinking of what Sam had asked him and he needed to talk to Jesse about it now. "What are we going to do about Sam?"

Jesse gave Brisbane a puzzled look. "What do we have to do about Sam?"

"She's worried that we're going to kick her out because you and I are getting married, and that you won't want her around."

Jesse looked horrified. "When did she ask you this?"

"She was down in the kitchen when I got your breakfast. I told her that you and I are getting married."

"Hold this." Jesse thrust her tray out at Brisbane who was barely able to keep it from spilling all over the bed.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to give that stupid raccoon a piece of my damn mind!"

"What?! We haven't discussed it yet."

"We don't have anything to discuss." Jesse stormed off into the hall and down to the kitchen.

When Jesse saw Sam the raccoon was looking sort of blindly at the kitchen table. "Sam you and I need to have a talk!"

Sam turned to look at Jesse and was sort of scared of what she saw. "Yes..." she said somewhat timidly, which was so unlike her that it made her wince.

"I want you to stay here as long as you damn well please!" Jesse almost snarled.

"What?" What Jesse had just said made no sense with the way she had just said it.

"I refuse to let your dad just kick you out because he and I are getting married! Do you understand me?"

"You're confusing the fuck out of me. Are you angry that I even thought you'd want me to leave?"

"Damn fuckin' straight I am!" Jesse grabbed Sam into a fierce hug. "I like you shorty. I may be only a couple years older, and will basically be more like a big sister to you instead of a step-mother, but I think you and I can get the kind of relationship going that will do a world of good for both of us. Now stay with us. Please?"

"You got it Jesse," Sam said returning the hug.

"That settles it, now I'm going back to have breakfast. I'll see you later." Jesse gave Sam one last squeeze before she headed back upstairs.

"What the hell did you just say to my daughter?!" Brisbane roared. If Jesse was going to try to kick his beloved daughter out then to Niflheim with her.

"I told that idiot I want her to stay. There is no way I'd even think of asking her to leave."

The wind suddenly left Brisbane's sails. "Oh..."

"Now please let me eat my breakfast with out any more drama. I'm hungry."

#

Brisbane and Jesse were at a jewelry store specializing in wedding bands looking for just the right rings. They wanted a matching set, with Jesse's engagement and wedding ring being the kind that fit together precisely. They had been browsing for about ten minutes when a sales furson came over to help them. "Is there anything I can help you find?"

"Yes, you can," Jesse said. "We are looking for a matching set of rings for the two of us."

"Any particular requirements?"

"Platinum," Brisbane said flatly. "They must be platinum."

The salesfur's eye lit up with dollar signs. "Well let me take you over to show you what we have. Of course these are just the show pieces; we'll make the piece for you so it won't have been tried on by hundreds of others."

Brisbane and Jesse looked at the large selection of wedding bands, Jesse flat out refused anything but engagement and wedding band matches, which quickly narrowed down the selection. This also ruled out the rings that looked like miniature disco balls. The real question was the size of the rock.

"I think anything above a single carat is pushing it a bit," Brisbane said. "It would make Sam think that you only wanted me for my money."

"I agree. Maybe we could go with a set where the wedding ring had a bunch of smaller diamonds and the engagement ring had a large stone."

"That sounds doable," Brisbane said nodding in agreement. Then a thought occurred to him about one of his patron Gods. "Look Jess, I know this may not sound conventional but what if we were to do the engagement ring with a few rubies instead of only having diamonds?"

"Why?" Jesse asked, puzzled at the thought.

"Well Thor is the patron God of young brides, and his color is red. So what if you were to do the engagement with some rubies to gain his blessing?"

"Yeah that does sound like a good idea. Which reminds me that we need to start working on a guest list."

Jesse looked over at the salesfur, who seemed a little puzzled by the conversation. "Could you do the engagement ring with some rubies?"

The salesfur shrugged. "Well we have them made just for the customer so there is no reason we wouldn't be able to do it. Of course using rubies is going to up the cost a bit because we don't normally deal in those."

Brisbane shook his massive head. "I'm buying platinum rings. Do you really think a few hundred more dollars to use rubies instead of diamonds is really going to matter to me?"

"Well these are what we have in the style you're looking for." The salesfur pulled out five ring sets. "Now this one has a one carat diamond, with two smaller eighth carat diamonds on either side," he said picking out one of the sets. "So it fits what you're looking for."

Jesse looked at it for a minute and nodded her approval, this was going to be much faster than they had hoped for. "That one looks good. What do you think love?"

"And you said that you can use rubies instead of diamonds?" Brisbane asked just to double check.

"Of course sir."

"Then we'll go with that one if you like it Jess."

"It's perfect," Jesse said with a smile. "Now to find a ring for you."

"Well what did you have in mind sir?" The sales furson was looking forward to the nice big commission check this month if he could make the final sale with these two.

"I'm not sure. I know I want something more than a plain band but I'm not sure what else I want."

The sales fur looked at the rings in front of them. He picked out one with a series of seven small diamonds in laid deep into the ring. "Well we have this one. It's a fairly simple design the stones aren't very big, but of course they wouldn't be so on a fur's ring."

"Hm. What do you think Jess?"

Jesse looked at the sales fur. "Can you use black diamonds? Otherwise it would never show up against his fur."

"Sure, I guess we can do that. Actually since you want to use black diamonds on his band why not have stones on your wedding band be black diamonds as well so it will look better as a matched set." The use of black diamonds would be another added expense that would hike his commission up another bit.

Jesse nodded her head, in agreement. "How does that sound to you sweetie?"

"Black diamonds work perfectly. How long will it be until our rings are ready?"

"Ten days at the latest," the salesfur said. "Now let's ring you up."

#

"Okay who goes on the guest list?" Brisbane and Jesse were sitting at Jesse's laptop trying to figure out who to invite to the wedding,

"Well I think we're going to at the very least invite the full Norse, Roman, and Egyptian pantheons, as well as some members of several other pantheons," Brisbane said.

"Even Loki and Eris?"

"Unfortunately yes," Brisbane said rather dejectedly. "They'd show up anyway if we didn't and I'd rather have them as invited guests instead of chaos causing gate crashers. The best thing we can do as far as Eris is concerned is to have her frisked for any Apple's of Discord."

"What happened last time?"

"A rather vicious brawl between a lot of goddesses at the Wolf."

"How many pantheons got involved in that one?"

"Four," Brisbane shaking his head in amusement at the memory. "Roman, Norse, Egyptian, and Babylonian. The problem was that if she was to throw one into the reception it could possibly get Lilith involved as well, and she is the last goddess you want involved in a fight."

"We're also going to need to invite a fair number of the Wolf's regulars."

"Actually thinking of how large this wedding is going to be. Where are we going to hold it?"

"Well I'm hoping I can convince the Mother Dragon to let us use one of the halls of the Citadel. I mean since there are going to be fey, Gods, dragons, and many of the regulars of the Wolf, we're talking hundreds of guests. And there aren't any Pagan churches in the area, let alone one big enough to fit everyone into it."

"Well don't forget we have to invite some of my family?"

"Who on your side are we going to invite?"

"Well I guess the only ones will be my dad and my brothers and their families."

"What will they say about what happens at the Wolf?" Brisbane asked highly concerned about the matter.

"That's just it. I really don't know." Jesse knew that she had to have her family at the wedding but she didn't know how to tell them about what she had gotten involved with. "I guess I'll just have to tell them the same thing that Jake told me."

"Which was?"

"That the place defined the word unique. I want my dad to walk me down the aisle and I need to have my brothers there so it's unavoidable."

"Well than that's settled your family is coming."

Chapter 12

Seven o'clock on a Friday and the Mystic Wolf was packed with most of the usual suspects. Jesse and Brisbane had been engaged for two weeks and tonight they were going to announce their engagement to the patrons of the bar. To mark the occasion Brisbane had created a new memory drink based on the memory of waking up with the love of his life curled upon his chest and asking her to marry him. For anyone who drank it they would see the face of someone they loved or a generic but beautiful face based on their preference of gender and species.

As Jesse stepped behind the bar Brisbane hit the small gong above the bar, which was used to signal the beginning and end of happy hour. "Ladies and gentlefurs," he half yelled over the usual rumble of the crowd. "I have an announcement to make. Jesse and I are getting married! In celebration I have made a new memory and I am giving one to everyone here on the house. There is one condition however. We must all drink them at the same time."

A huge roar of congratulations went up from around the bar. Behind the bar all the drink slingers were putting together Engagements as fast as they could. Into the tall-cooler glasses was poured a white drink with glowing gold flecks shimmering through out it. The waitresses were busily bringing them to every one of the packed tables and booths.

Up on stage Kukiko's band, Harlequin Fire, surprised as anyone, broke into Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March' on a three count from the vocalist. Kukiko had to play it her way though, which meant that the lead guitar sounded like it had been dragged through a sewer it was so dirty with reverb.

Once everyone in the bar had an Engagement in front of them Jesse counted down from three and at one everybody took a long pull on the memory in front of them. Everyone's eyes dilated at the same time as the memory washed over them. Brisbane gave the usual twenty count and watched as people's eyes came back into focus. From most of the bar came sighs of contentment as people thought about their loved ones or people they could easily fall in love with.

"I think it's a hit boss," Tanya said to Brisbane from his right.

#

A few hours after the end of happy hour Jesse was facing the bar as two wolves in rich, fey styled, clothing entered from the magical realm. Brisbane looked up as he saw the two enter and immediately recognized them despite the fact that they rarely ever came in. "Well hello Oberon, Titania, it is nice to see you again."

"Hello to you too Brisbane," Titania replied looking at Jesse. "I have come to congratulate you on your upcoming wedding."

"Well thank you."

Jesse turned around ready to thank the Fey queen as well when she was brought up short. "Mother?!"

"Hi Jesse darling. It's been far too long." Brisbane didn't know what to make of what Titania had just said nor the tears forming in her eyes, and by the look of him Oberon was just as puzzled.

Jesse ran into the arms of Titania. "It's so good to see you again Mom," she said as she embraced the queen of the fey. She then took a step out of the hug pulled back one paw and slapped her mother hard across the muzzle knocking the queen to the floor. "And that's for abandoning us. James still blames himself for you leaving."

Oberon grabbed Jesse by the arm. "How dare you strike my wife? I shall strike you down for that."

In an instant Oberon found himself slammed into a wall by a Brisbane who was traveling at speeds no mortal could dream of moving at. This Brisbane was not the jovial one who listened to anyone's woes, this Brisbane was an armor clad warrior wielding Complaints Department in his right paw, and holding Oberon a foot off the floor with his left. "You forget your place Oberon. You have attacked my fiancée in my domain King of Fey, for that you will be exiled from the Mystic Wolf."

"I will have my vengeance on that bastard child. She cannot stay here forever I will have my vengeance," Oberon said remaining defiant in the face of the enraged giant.

Brisbane put the edge of Complaints Department against Oberon's throat. "Then maybe I should kill you now," he snarled.

"Don't make me laugh. That sword cannot harm me."

"Bet your life," Brisbane said with a steely grin as he tightened his grip on Oberon's throat, making it hard for the fey lord to breathe.

There was a flash of light and Sigurd Volsung 'the Dragons' Bane', who had been standing near the bar, was covered in chainmail and wearing a Viking helm, in his paw was the sword Gram. "I know this one will hurt Oberon. This sword is made from meteorite iron," the tiger-wolf said with a malevolent tone in his voice.

Then from the rest of the bar there came the sound of steel sliding against steel as weapons of power were drawn by various Gods and Goddesses. Energy crackled as Jupiter, Thor, and the great Bear spirit summoned lightning bolts. The words 'She is under my protection,' and similar phrases ran through out the bar.

Oberon looked around the bar and realized he was completely out matched in both numbers and power. "Fine let the whelp live."

Titania had picked herself off the floor and walked over to where Brisbane stood still holding onto her husband. "For threatening my child I will leave you for the rest of her life." She then turned to Brisbane. "May I please remain?"

"I leave that determination up to your lovely daughter."

Titania was about to ask Jesse when the wolfette gave her mother another hug. "Let her stay my love."

"As you wish." Brisbane turned his attention back to the King of Fey. He slid the edge of Complaints Department down Oberon's throat shaving off fur and drawing blood. "You are now banished, never to return." He then threw the Fey King through the door and wiped his now bloody paw down the frame of the door and spoke a banishment spell that would permanently ban Oberon from stepping foot in the bar. With the spell woven the giant wiped the blood off of his paws and blade with a dishtowel.

Brisbane headed back behind the bar and as he stepped around his armor vanished to be once again replaced by his black work t-shirt. "Well Titania, it looks like you owe Jesse an explanation."

Jesse and Titania slid up to the bar and took stools next to each other. "First, the lightest wine you have please." Titania requested.

Brisbane took a glass from above the bar put ice in it and topped it off with water to chill it while he went back to the large wine fridge to find an Elvish white. When he got back he emptied the ice water from the glass and poured it two-thirds full with the wine. "Here you go. Now please explain what happened all those years ago."

Titania sighed and looked at Jesse sadly, it was obvious to both Jesse and Brisbane that the queen was going to have a hard time telling the story that was about to come. "Jesse, I met your father during one of my nasty separations from Oberon. Oberon and I are constantly bickering and this time I simply left him for a while, and during that time I met your dad, and I fell in love with him. Well at least as much as any fey can fall in love with a mortal. I still think of him often."

"So why did you leave?"

"Oberon and I made up and I felt that I must return to my immortal husband."

"So you abandoned us?" Jesse didn't seem as mad as Brisbane thought she would be, or at least had every right to be.

"Jesse, darling, you must understand I'm immortal. I don't know if I could have stood watching your father grow old and die, and live to bury him, my children and my grandchildren." Titania looked down at her wine and took a sip as if trying to gather her strength for what she had next to say. "I have always kept an eye on you and your brothers. You are my children, and like any good mother I love you as much as I can."

"So what happens now?"

"Do you think your father would have me back?" Titania's voice was hopeful, showing to both Jesse and Brisbane that she was indeed serious. "I would like to be back in your lives for whatever time you have left. I want to be your mother again."

"Dad still carries a picture of you in his wallet, and as far as I know there is a picture of your wedding day still on the end table by his bed. He has always hoped that you would come back through the door so he could hold you once again." Jesse knew there was something else she needed to tell her mother and it was about her dad. "Dad will be retired in a few months, and he'll have too much time on his paws to think about things. It would do him more than a world of good for you to be there to spend his retirement with. I know it would ease my mind if you were there to spend the rest of his life with him."

Titania threw her arms around her daughter's neck and just about collapsed in tears, which caught both Brisbane and Jesse completely off guard. "Thank you. I am so sorry about what I've done to you and the rest of the family. Especially my poor little James, if he really blames himself for my leaving. And don't worry about your dad. Now that Oberon's out of my life, until something ends yours, I'll have plenty of time to spend with your father. I'll never walk out on him ever again."

Brisbane pulled a handkerchief out of thin air and gave it to the Queen of Fey. "Here, dry your eyes," he said giving Titania the intricately embroidered piece of cloth. "I think you need to call your husband."

"I'll do better than that," Titania said after she wiped her eyes. "I'm going to go walk through the door and see him."

"Do you need his address?" Jesse asked.

"No dear child," Titania said kissing Jesse on the top of her head as she stood up. "I know he lives in Las Vegas now. As I said, I've kept an eye on all of you. I know where he's living now."

"Thanks for coming back mom. I always dreamed that you would be at my wedding."

"I'd never miss it," Titania said with a smile, "You didn't know it but I was at Mikey's and Eddie's weddings as well. There is no way I'd have not been at yours."

"Why show yourself at mine then?"

"I realized that you'd probably have the wedding at the Citadel, and I wouldn't be able to disguise myself there, so I decided I'd show up now."

"Well, for whatever reason, I'm happy that you're back," Jesse said smiling.

"Now I just have to help you get a spectacular wedding dress."

"Mom..."

"There are some incredible seamstresses on the other side of the Veil and it will be my wedding present to the two of you."

Jesse was about to say something when Brisbane interjected. "I'm sure it will make your already beautiful daughter even lovelier."

"It will Brisbane. I will make certain of that." Titania gave Jesse one more hug. "Now I must go see your dad little one."

"Thanks mom."

Titania smiled and simply faded out of the Wolf.

"Well," Brisbane started looking at Jesse, "at least we know who's paying for your dress."

Jesse didn't comment as she smiled, still looking at the place where her mother had just vanished from.

Chapter 13

"It's true you know," Jesse said looking over her now barren apartment, "you never realize just how much crap you have until you have to move it all."

"Well at least we were able to sell your furniture." Brisbane was glad that it had only taken a day and a half to get rid of Jesse's furniture, the joys of Craig's list.

"I still say we should have kept the dresser," Jesse said. "There was no reason you had to buy a new one when mine was in perfectly good condition."

"Didn't match the one already in the room." It was a perfectly simple rationale for Brisbane. He wasn't going to be a bachelor anymore and he wanted things to look nice. "Anyways we still have a lot of clothes, books, and movies to move."

"Don't forget Mr. Snuggles," Jesse said picking up and hugging a battered, old teddy bear. "At least I don't have a ton of shoes."

"Thank the Gods on that part," Brisbane agreed.

"I never could understand why so many of my fellow femmes need twenty or thirty pairs of shoes."

"Simple," Sam started, "some of us think that you need a different pair of shoes for every different outfit and occasion. However I'm like you. I have two pairs for formal occasions, a pair of cross trainers for the gym, a pair of work boots, and a pair of hiking boots."

"Yeah that's about the size of it for me as well. Now let's load this stuff up into the truck."

"I'll head back home now then," Sam said looking at her watch, "and order the pizzas. Do you want your usual dad?"

"Of course."

"I never could understand how you could possibly like anchovies. What about you Jesse?"

"How about we split one?" Jesse suggested.

"Sure," Sam nodded. "A personal is too small and there's no way I could eat a medium by myself."

"We'll split a large then. I'll go with a Hawaiian on my half," Jesse said.

"I'll just make it a whole Hawaiian then." With that Sam headed out the door and to her waiting car.

"You eat anchovies?"

"So sue me, I happen to like them."

"Just brush your teeth before you kiss me after eating your pizza."

"Wha..?"

"Just do it love. I absolutely abhor anchovies," Jesse said, kissing Brisbane on the cheek.

#

Jesse's phone started playing the theme to 'Greatest American Hero', which was the ring tone for her father shortly after she finished the last slice of pizza in front of her. "Hey Dad, how are you doing?" She was almost positive what the call was about but she was going to play ignorant for a few seconds.

"Baby I've got absolutely incredible news!" Her father sounded so excited that Jesse knew that her mother really must have walked back into her dad's life.

"What's that?" She had to play along even though she already knew what the news was.

"You'll never guess who just walk through the door!!! Never in a million years!!!"

"Let me guess. She's a wolfette..."

"Yes..."

"She's in her late fifties..."

"Err, yes..."

"She's about five, eight...."

"How di...."

"And she's the mother of your five kids." She ended with a smile. 'Thank you mom,' she thought with a big grin.

"How on Earth did you know!"

"She's an acquaintance of Brisbane's." It was true of course; she had known Brisbane for a fairly long time. "When she came to the bar to congratulate him about the upcoming wedding I was there. She just broke down and cried when she realized that she was looking at her own daughter."

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I only saw her long enough for her to beg my forgiveness and for her to ask where you were now living so she could go back to you. That and she swore me to secrecy." Jesse was still smiling at the half-truth. "Please tell me she's coming back into our lives. I really want to have a mother again."

"As if I could turn her away. As soon as I saw her I started crying in happiness, and you know very well that I don't cry," Jesse could actually hear the old marine tearing up again. "I want us to pick up things right where we left off. I love her as much now as I did when she disappeared. You know very well I never even thought of having her declared dead even after years and years of there being no sign of her. I always knew she'd come back. I am looking forward to growing old with her."

"I'm so happy that you feel that way. That's pretty much exactly what I told her you'd say. Can I speak to Mom now?"

"Of course but please keep it short I still have to call Mikey and give him the good news."

"Please tell me you already called James." Jesse had to make sure her mother had called the poor kid since he blamed himself for her leaving.

"He was the first on the list. You know James blamed himself, your mother had to call him first so she could beg his forgiveness."

"And?"

"Your mother paid for his ticket to hop the next plane home so she could hold him again."

Jesse smiled, it sounded like everything was going to fall into place for the family. "Now can I talk to Mom?"

"Oh yes of course. Here you go."

There was a brief shuffling sound before Titania got on the phone. "Hi baby."

"Thanks for coming home Mom. Are you going to tell Dad what really happened?"

"Not right away. Actually I was hoping we'd come up and visit you." Titania sounded genuinely hopeful.

"Anytime you want mom. Don't forget we need to introduce dad to the Mystic Wolf sooner or later. Call me whenever you want and we'll figure out when would be a good time for you to come up."

"We'll call you soon then. I love you Jesse, and give Brisbane and Sam my love."

"I will Mom, and of course I love you too. Can you hand me back over to Dad."

There was another shuffling sound. "What do you need kiddo?"

"I only needed to tell you that I love you. That and ask you to give my love to Mikey and tell him I'll call him tomorrow."

"Will do. I love you Jesse. I'll call you later. Goodbye."

"Goodbye Dad."

"What did your dad want?" Brisbane asked as he walked back into the dining room after brushing his teeth so Jesse would kiss him after the anchovies,

"Mom really did go to see him as soon as she left the Wolf last night. She simply walked through the door and back into our lives." Jesse was all smiles as she threw her arms around the giant. "Her coming back into the life of the family is absolutely the greatest wedding gift she could have ever given me."

"I'm going to have to have a talk with Titania soon." If what Brisbane thought was true then Titania may never return to Oberon unless something happened to Jesse that cut her life short.

"What about?"

"It really isn't much, there are just a couple of questions I have for her, and I really can't let you in on the answers, at least not yet."

"Briz, sweetie, I thought we weren't going to be keeping secrets from each other." Jesse wasn't sure what to make of what Brisbane was saying.

"Don't worry Jess it's probably nothing, but I still need to ask her something important."

Jesse gave a sideways glance. "Brizzers unless you want to sleep on the couch tonight you will tell me what you need to ask my mother."

Brisbane pulled out a chair at the table and sat down heavily into it. "Jess, honey, as everyone knows you have an unearthly beauty. Beauty that puts you on the same level of Aphrodite, and no mortal should be that beautiful, yet you are."

"Thank you for being so perceptive." Jesse smiled at the compliment. "So why are you complaining?"

Brisbane vehemently shook his head. "I'm not. Trust me I'm not. The thing is now that I know that you have fey blood running through your system I'm wondering if that's why you possess that beauty of yours. Actually 'wondering' is the wrong word, I now know why you possess your beauty."

"Again what's the problem?"

"I think you may live long enough to bury not only me, which is as it should be since you are so much younger than me..."

"Let's not talk about that." Jesse didn't want to think about out living the love of her life.

But Brisbane continued. "I think you will be there to bury all of our descendents."

"What are you talking about? I couldn't possibly live that long."

"Jesse, with the fey blood running through you, you may very well be immortal."

"Love, even if I am immortal all I know right now is that, **You Are The Fur I Want To Grow Old With**," Jesse said, placing boulder crushing emphasis on the last ten words.

Brisbane sighed in some relief. "I love you too."

Chapter 14

"So how was the flight?"

"The flight wasn't too bad. It was just the massive pain getting through security that was horrid," Jesse's father griped. "I'm a retired marine for Christ's sake. I put my fur and blood in front of the guns for the security of this country. I'm not some towel head who's about to hijack a plane and fly it into Caesar's Palace."

"Carl, honey, watch it," Titania said, in a loving, yet firm tone. "I don't like that religionist talk. You know that."

"I know Tanya. But it still burns me. I don't like being treated like some young, brain-dead, punk who was brainwashed into becoming a suicide bomber, in order to get a bunch of virgins in some pathetic afterlife."

Jesse smiled, that was her father being his old self. He really wasn't that hateful of other people's beliefs, he was just terribly unPC. He was also getting his game face on for meeting Brisbane to see how her fiancé would handle him if he really was a massive jerk. "Come on dad let's find your luggage and head back to the house."

"I hope your mother was telling the truth about this guy who is going to marry you or I'll have to kick his tail." Jesse's father was being grouchier than usual, but she realized that it was most likely the hassle of the security screening at the airport that her father like this.

"He's a very nice young man," Titania, or rather Tanya, said to her husband. "You'll like both him and his daughter."

"How old is his daughter?" Carl asked.

"Sam's twenty-two," Jesse answered her father.

"Christ alive!" Carl exclaimed. "She's older than James. You're engaged to a fur that's old enough to be your father, what are you thinking? How old is this Brisbane guy?"

"He's forty-one, and his age doesn't matter. He's a sweet fur who only wants to make me happy."

"He really is in love with our little baby Carl. He told me about her shortly after the two of them met, though I didn't know that he was talking about our little Jesse-Poo."

"Moooom. I'm twenty-five. I'm not Jesse-Poo."

"I'm your mother and you'll always be my little Jesse-Poo."

"Ugh," was the only response Jesse could muster.

"Come on let's find our luggage," Carl said.

#

"We should stop by the hotel before we go to your new home," Carl grumped from the passenger seat of Jesse's truck.

"Dad I told you before that we have a perfectly good guest room. There's no reason that you and mom should spend a hundred a night for a hotel room," Jesse said.

"I don't know about your mother but I think it would be awkward for us to stay at your new place if I don't like him."

Tanya leaned over Carl's shoulder. "I know you're going to like Brisbane dear. However Jesse, your dad has a point. It would feel a bit awkward. You know that he wouldn't like playing nice just for your sake."

"I guess I just wanted to save you some money. At least let us pay for your room."

"I couldn't do that either sweetie," Carl said patting his daughter's leg. "I don't want to seem ungrateful, but I just don't want to feel indebted to your future husband."

"But..."

"Jesse-poo, just give up," Tanya said. "Your dad has his mind set, and I agree with him on this. I know they're going to like each other well enough but I think it's better this way."

"I just hope your fiancée is better than those two tramps that your brothers married."

"They are not that bad dad."

"No, they're worse. Your brothers deserve better than what they got. "

"Oh you're just picky. Their wives are nice enough."

"I'm telling you, it's only a matter of time before Elise cheats on Mikey, and he'll take her back no matter how many times she does it. She's got him tied round her little finger."

"Come on you two," Tanya said, "we're not talking about Mikey and Eddie's wives right now. We're going to meet Jesse's fiancée and he is a really nice boy."

Carl turned in his seat to look back at his wife. "Just how long have you known him?"

"Almost ten years now; ever since he opened his bar," Tanya said almost casually

"You've been out here ever since you disappeared?" Carl asked. He had been pressing his wife for more and more details about her leaving him and she had always remain vague on the matter.

"In a way," Tanya said as if it was an off hand remark.

"In a way?" Carl repeated in a questioning tone

"I'll tell you about in time. Now is not the time."

"When will be the time?"

"Soon dear. Very soon. How about I tell you over dinner at the Mystic Wolf tonight?"

"Does this Brisbane guy have something to do with this?"

"No, he doesn't, but... Well it's very, very complicated."

"I think I deserve an answer without others being around."

"Okay," Tanya relented, though it was a lie. She couldn't use her magick to mask who and what she was at the Wolf, her magick wasn't as powerful as that of some other people. "We'll discuss it before dinner. But only after a drink at the Wolf."

"I guess I can live with that," Carl finally agreed. "Look I'm just glad that you came back. I really don't care what happened in the time you were gone. I'm just happy you're back. I... I..."

"I love you too," Tanya said, patting her husband on the shoulder. She knew he sometimes had a hard time expressing his feelings but she always had known what he had meant. She hoped he would sometime get better at telling her how he felt about her. "I always loved you and I did what I did to protect you for some nasty things in my past that I needed to take care of before it hurt you and the kids."

They drove in silence for a while with Carl and Tanya holding paws while Jesse kept his eyes out for the right exit. Oh how she wished that they had chosen a hotel that was closer to the city. After about twenty minutes she spotted the hotel. "Here we go," Jesse said as she pulled into the front of the hotel so her parents could unload the back of her truck with their luggage and check in while she found a parking spot.

Jesse met her parents at the front desk just as they got their key cards. As they walked down the hall towards the room Jesse got a warm, fuzzy feeling as she saw her parent's holding paws. She hoped that when she was their age she and Brisbane would be doing the same thing. It was a small gesture of love, but it was always the little things that mattered. Her aunt had once told her that you don't always need flowers or candies, it was the small things that mattered, and that as small as it seemed just holding paws was always a good sign of affection.

#

"You know he's going to have to pass a test; right?"

"Yes Dad I know. He'll pass it unlike any other guys I was serious about." Jesse's dad had always made her boyfriends try to pass some sort of test or other before she

would give her his permission to date them. The tests were never the same, and they were so hard to pass that no one had ever managed to pass one. The tests weren't multiple choice, short answer, or even essay; they were far more difficult. Her boyfriends had to deal with him trying to scare them off in one way or another. One of the tests had involved Carl field stripping his AR-17 Armalite rifle, the civilian equivalent of the M-16, while he talked to the poor kid. That guy didn't last. Jesse knew Brisbane could handle anything her dad could dish out and come round for seconds, maybe even thirds. The tests were one of the ways her father showed how much he cared about her. He wanted her to be safe and not deal with a loser; he had always managed to scare the type off.

"I know I can't change your mind about that fiancée of yours, but I still want to make sure he's worthy of your time. It's just that well you've..."

"I know dad. I know I've dated some real losers and you've always helped me see that. But I know Brisbane will pass."

"He'll pass sweetie I've known him long enough to know what he's made of." Titania had seen what Brisbane was capable of and knew in her heart that he was probably the only fur who could ever hope to pass one of Carl's tests. "He adopted a teenager off the street who had been prostituting herself, because she had nowhere else to go, and all she really wanted was a loving family. He did it because of the gentleness of his soul. I have also heard about him taking apart a guy for groping waitresses at his bar, to the point where the deviant was begging the cops to take him away. Brisbane is a fur who can be both tougher than any battle hardened soldier; yet he often shows the gentleness of a man of peace. He'll pass your test."

"Did he really beat the tar out a guy for groping a waitress?" Carl asked, turning to look at his wife.

"Broke one of the guy's arms, and then shattered his jaw as he bounced him off the top of the bar. At least that is what my understanding from several people who were there." Titania hadn't actually seen the event but she would have loved to.

"And he didn't have assault charges pressed against him?" Carl asked incredulously

"Apparently the guy was too scared by the fact some of the best lawyers in the area are regulars. And it was made very clear that they would have taken any case against Brisbane pro-bono."

Carl was all of a sudden very quiet and seemed to be deep in thought. Jesse was hoping that the thoughts were good for Brisbane's cause. "Stop by the nearest liquor store there is?" Carl said causing Jesse to realize what the test was about to be.

"Okay. But dad you really don't have to do this."

"Yes I do I just need a six pack and we'll be good."

"Carl, sweetie, what are you about to do?" Tanya asked, she had heard about the tests, and didn't want to see what was about to happen.

"I'm going to see how he handles a belligerent drunk who is about to become family."

"Won't work Dad. He sees drunks constantly."

"Oh but this will be different. I'm about to be family"

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"Ready to meet your future father-in-law Dad?" Sam asked her nervous father.

"I hope so. I haven't done the 'meet the parents' deal since I was in high school."

"Hey you're already half way there, considering you've known Titania longer than you've known Jesse and she likes you," Sam said. She walked behind the chair her dad was sitting in. "Here let me give you a shoulder rub maybe that will help you relax a bit."

"Where are they?" Brisbane asked himself looking at his watch for the fifth time in as many minutes. "Jesse said their flight had arrived shortly after she had gotten to the airport."

"They probably wanted to go to their hotel room first and freshen up a bit."

"Should I change before Jesse gets here with her parents?" Brisbane asked his daughter for the third time. "I mean I don't want to look like a slob in front of a marine."

"You look fine," Sam said, trying to reassure her father.

"I feel like I'm going to throw up."

"Hold on. I'll get you something for that." Sam ran out of the room and into the bathroom to get an antacid. Shortly after she got back into the room she heard the front door open. 'Crap! I guess Dad's just going to have to make it through this with out the Tums."

"Hi honey, I'm home!" Jesse called from the front door.

Brisbane walked nervously from the living room into the hallway. "Hey sweetie."

In the hallway with Jesse was her dad with a six pack that only had two cans of cheap beer remaining in it. Jesse hadn't warned Brisbane that her father was a drunk so it was a bit of a surprise that he was holding an almost empty six pack which meant that he must've had at least four beers from the airport to here and who knew how many of those small bottles of liquor on the plane.

"Brizzy I'd like to introduce you to my dad, Carl. Dad this is my fiancé, Brisbane."

Brisbane extended his paw to shake Carl's. "Nice to meet you sir."

If Carl was intimidated by the bartender's sheer size he didn't show it. "Don't sir me pup," he barked, glaring up at Brisbane, with beer stinking up his breath. "I work for a living."

"Err... Yes ... a ... Mr. Daniels."

Jesse had to suppress a giggle, her dad was already in the mode of being a jerk trying to see what her future husband was like.

"Carl dear, be nice." Tanya said.

Carl still glared at Brisbane but eventually took his paw and shook it grumbling a, 'nice to meet you.' The retired marine looked around and admitted to himself that the place was tidier than he had expected. Jesse had always been a bit of a slob growing up, so it was either Brisbane or the giant's daughter keeping the place clean.

Sam walked from the living room into the hallway. "Can I get anyone anything?" she asked.

"Hey Sam, could you get me a Coke?" Jesse asked.

"Can I have a cup of Earl Grey, dearie?" Tanya asked sweetly in her elegant British accent.

"I'll jus' have another one of these," Carl said holding up the remains of a six pack three of the unopened cans were still in Jesse's truck, the fourth can he had gargled with a then tossed into a trash can at a gas station.

"Oh no you won't," Tanya said with a slap to the back of her husband's head. "He'll have coffee nice and black."

"I said I want another..." Carl started before his wife interrupted him.

"No you won't. You'll have coffee for the rest of the night."

Sam looked at Titania and had an odd feeling that something wasn't right but turned back to her dad. "Dad?"

"The usual." Brisbane wasn't sure he could handle anything else.

"Okay, that's an Earl Grey, a coffee, black, a Coke and the usual for dad. The coffee and tea are going to take a few moments."

Carl gave Brisbane a hard stare when Sam left for the kitchen. "What's the usual? It better not have alcohol in it. Or are you some drunk who is going to get into a car accident and kill my little girl?"

"It's just a Coke with a wedge of lime," Brisbane said easily. He had gotten into the habit of drinking them after his cousin, Sigurd, had started ordering them. Though from the way his future father-in-law was acting he wasn't one to talk about not getting drunk. This guy seemed to be positively hammered, and he definitely smelled like it.

Carl raised one eyebrow to look at Brisbane closer. "Are you sure there's nothing else in these Coke and limes of yours? No rum or anything?"

Tanya kicked her husband in the shin. "Knock it off Carl. Now you're just being a jerk."

"I just want to make sure this fur is worthy of our little Jesse. I don't want her marrying some louse."

"Dad, why don't you have a seat there on the couch? I'm sure it'll be more comfortable than just standing there," Jesse said as she gently maneuvered her father over to the couch. Tanya took Carl by his other arm and helped Jesse guide him.

"Well at least he doesn't look like one of those damn tourists who keep showing up and keep fucking up the traffic back home. You can always tell a Midwesterner by their hick accents and always saying how at least the heat is dry. I'm always sick of hearing about dry heat. Whoever came up with the slogan what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas should be shot because it brought all sorts of hicks there."

Brisbane closed his eyes briefly and took a calming breath, the guy was hammered and just being an asshole because of it, he thought. He knew he could get past this and force a smile. "Well you do know that we had the exact same problem when they opened the Mall of America?" Brisbane said trying to show his future father-in-law that he understood the problem.

"Yeah I'm sure you may have for a little while, but for you it died down, for us it's all the time with no relief. But I hear you have your own problems to deal with. According to my little girl this place is swarming with Gooks."

Brisbane turned to look at Jesse; he simply couldn't believe his ears. "Um Jesse?"

"Don't worry she wasn't the one calling those little Asian bastards Gooks. She doesn't even know what a Gook is, but I do and I know what they're good for."

"And what would that be?" Brisbane asked knowing that he wasn't going to like the answer.

"Nothing but target practice." Carl said with an evil smile. "I should'a killed more of those commies when I had the chance. Now they're practically crawling all over the

good ol' USA, pretty soon they're going to infect this great land with their commie ideas."

As Carl continued going off about the commie gooks, Brisbane remained silent, but started looking at the old furs eyes, they weren't tracking properly. They were tracking too smoothly, not the staccato fashion of a drunk. This belligerent jackass was playing at being drunk. No wonder Jesse hadn't warned him about her dad being like this. He wasn't; he was apparently testing him.

Carl had moved on to blasting everyone from Somalia as being Islamic terrorists when Brisbane started laughing. "What's so funny pup," Carl snarled. "It's true, those towel heads are trying to destroy the country I gave my blood for."

"Well first of all I have yet to see a fur from Somalia wear a turban. And secondly, you can stop playing at being drunk; your eyes are tracking properly. They wouldn't be following so smoothly if you were as drunk as you're pretending to be."

The announcement that Brisbane had caught Carl in his bluff got a laugh out of both Tanya and Jesse. "Well played pup, well played." Carl then turned to Jesse. "He'll do."