




Steel and Pop- pies

Zoë A. Porter

Published unter 

One

The Stranger

Life hadn't been at its best for Maddy Smith lately. She had just been locked up and threatened, her parents had kicked out her loved one, who then had nothing better to do than lock lips with a wild girl and her best friend had betrayed her.

No, life hadn't been very kind to Maddy Smith lately. Maybe this was why she sat alone in Bertie's cafe sipping cocoa. She didn't really want to sit here, because if the three K's came by, they surely would use the opportunity to mock her for being in the pathetic state she was. Although not the brightest, they were clearly good at spotting if someone was miserable, and had a talent of rubbing it in. But going home, were she had to confront her parents, was worse.

So when the doorbell rang, and someone entered, she already had a snide remark ready to greet the K's with, but to her

surprise, the girl who walked in was a stranger. If you grow up in Stoneybridge, you rarely meet someone you haven't met before. And most of the time, strangers that came through were tourists on their way to the Scottish Borders, who had lost their way. Despite it's beauty, Northumberland was far from being a major tourist attraction, and most of the time Maddy liked it that way.

But this girl didn't look like she was a tourist. She wore the green-grey jacket and trousers of the forest administration, so she was probably a volunteer for the national park. That surprised Maddy, because the park keepers where usually also foresters, therefore most often men, and rarely this young.

The girl was tall, slender and -although she wore a woollen jacket- Maddy could see that she was extremely athletic. Long dark hair framed the sharp features of her face, and the grave expression she wore, made her look a lot older than she was.

The most confusing thing about her though, was her scent. For Maddy it was always important how people smelled. Her heightened Wolfblood senses allowed her to pick up things, that humans couldn't, even if she was not in wolf form. The girl smelled very different. She was not Wolfblood, but she did not smell entirely human. Although she wore no perfume, there was a bitter-sweet note in the scent, that was so intense, that Maddy felt a little dizzy, after the girl had passed her. Also she noticed some notion of metal in it. She couldn't help but stare at the stranger.

The girl was too involved in a confrontation with Bertie.

"I just asked for a pint!" She just said.

Bertie nodded. “Yes, and I tell you I won’t sell alcohol to minors. Who do you think I am?”

The girl sighed, and put a card on the counter. “Here.”

“What’s that?”

“My drivers license. Look, it says I’m twenty-one.”

Bertie stared at the card. “Never seen anything like that.”

“It’s Canadian! For gods sake! Just give me a coffee!” The girl turned around, and looked directly at Maddy, who was still staring at her.

“What?” She snapped at Maddy.

Maddy blushed. “Um, you don’t want Bertie’s coffee, trust me. Ask for cocoa!”

She turned back to Bertie. “You heard her.”

Bertie grinned, prepared a mug of cocoa and handed it to the girl. “2.25 please.”

She flipped a few coins over the counter. “Thanks for nothing.”

She grabbed her mug and walked over to Maddy’s table. “Is this seat taken?”

Maddy blushed again and pulled her backpack from the neighbouring seat. “Sure. I mean no!”

The girl sat down beside her. Maddy felt the weird sweet-metallic scent engulf her, and she felt extremely nervous.

The girl nipped on her cocoa and nodded approvingly. “Thanks for the tip. That bloke may be grumpy, but he sure know how to make chocolate. Although I’d prefer a good strong coffee.”

Maddy smiled. “You won’t find it here. You’re in Britain. Are you a volunteer for the park?”

The stranger now smiled for the first time. “Actually, I hope they’re going to pay me.”

“Aren’t you going to school?”

The stranger looked at her in surprise. “I finished high school years ago!” She explained. “Do I look like a school girl to you?”

Maddy just looked back at the girl, the way her mother usually did, when she had stated something obvious. Maddy was unaware of that resemblance to her mother of course.

The girl sighed. “OK, yes I do. That is mostly the problem here, isn’t it?” She took another sip of her cocoa.

“Everyone keeps telling me, that I should be happy about looking so young, but truth is, it sucks when everyone treats you like you’re just a little kid.”

She looked at Maddy. “No offence.”

Maddy grinned. More often than not, she had wished to be a few years older herself. Especially in times like these.

“So, what brought you to Stoneybridge all the way from Canada?” She asked.

“I’m not so much a city girl. Been to London and hated it. It’s too loud and too crowded. I like the forest more. It’s nice and quiet.”

“And why Britain?” Maddy asked. “If that’s OK to ask?”

“I’m not too good with my folks at home, and I wanted to get away. Europe was the first choice.”

For a moment the girl’s face darkened, and she fell silent, as if she was haunted by old memories. Then she shook her head and looked back at Maddy. “What about you? You lived here for long?”

“All my life. My family owns an estate here for generations now.”

“Mm, do you like it here?”

Maddy shrugged. “Most of the time. Sometimes I think living in a city might be cooler, but I’ll miss the woods, I guess.”

The girl smiled. “To that, I can totally relate!”

She finished her chocolate. “By the way, what’s your name?”

“Maddy. Maddy Smith.”

The girl reached out a hand. “I’m Logan. Logan Howlett.”

Maddy laughed, and took the hand. “Nice to meet you Logan. And welcome to Stoneybridge!”

Two

Hunters

Trent Corr sat on a soft old fashioned armchair. His huge hand grabbed some sweets from a crystal bowl, and stuffed them into his mouth. His feet, wrapped in dusty snake-skin boots, rested on the cherry wood side-table.

The square built American looked entirely out of place in the cosy surroundings of a Victorian estate. On the sofa beside him, looking as much as a cowboy as Trent, was Earl Parker. Earl was wearing the same spacey outfit, but he was taller and his clothes were a lot cleaner. He was well better mannered than his companion, and it wasn't hard to see who of this duo was the brains. But Earl didn't team with Trent for his cleverness.

"Would you like some shortbread with your tea?" Mary Driscoll offered. "I made them myself, just this morning."

"Thank you, my dear!" Her husband Bob smiled at his wife.

The garage owner turned his attention to his two guests.

“You see, gentlemen” he explained. “We have tried to take out the lot of them ourselves, but, well, it seems we’re getting too old for this.”

Earl nodded. “They are not to be messed with, these beasts! Need ta’ be wary and quick!” He talked in a broad southern accent. “You say they’re tame?”

“Yes, yes indeed!” Bob confirmed. “They are even driving cars, can you believe that! And they seem to have enslaved some humans.”

Earl looked up. He had never heard of werewolves keeping humans as pets. The other way around, yes. But this was new.

“What makes ya think that?” He wanted to know.

“There was this girl with them. She was human. She claimed to be a hunter herself, and that she had tricked the beasts into trusting her. But then, she helped them escape!”

“Interesting.” Earl mused. “Are you sure, they were what you think?”

“Absolutely!” Bob seemed to be a little offended that his story was doubted. “Wait, I show you something!”

He looked over to his wife. “Mary, my dear, be so kind and get the poppy, will you?”

Mary looked confused for a moment, and then turned to go. “Oh, yes, the poppy!”

She vanished into a kitchen to look for it, while there was an awkward silence, between the three men, which was only interrupted by the crunching sound of Trent’s teeth crunching the sweets.

Mary returned with a single dried flower. She handed it to Earl, who looked at it sceptically.

“This is a mottled poppy.” Bob explained. “It’s a very rare breed. It’s usually white, but it gets these red dots whenever the breath of a werewolf touches it’s leaves.”

Earl nodded. “I heard of these. Thought they were a myth.”

Mary smiled. “My family grows them for generations now.”

Earl handed the flower to Trent, who sniffed at it, and shrugged, handing the flower back to Earl. “I ain’t believin’ no shit!” He claimed. “Just tell me where’s to find ’em!” He crooked his finger as if he was firing a gun.

“Do you know where they are from?” Earl asked.

“They didn’t tell, but their names are Daniel and Emma Smith. Not an uncommon name but a found out, that there is a Daniel Smith living with his family in Stoneybridge.”

“And you’re sure it’s them?”

“It fits perfectly. Stoneybridge is about 48 Miles from here, in the heart of the Northumbrian forest. If I were a foul creature of the night, I would hide there too. Lots of places to hide in.”

Earl grinned. “Well, I think it’s time to pay a visit to the Smiths then, eh Trent?”

Trent just grunted in approval.

Two hours later, the two Americans drove along the back roads of the Northumbrian forest. Earl was behind the wheel, his driving accompanied by a constant stream of complaints, in which at least every second word was *fuck*. He had a hard time driving on the left, and the fact that the car had a manual gear box

didn't help either. "And then they put the fucking wheel on the fucking wrong side of the fucking car!" Earl had complained. More than once, he had entered a roundabout the wrong way, which, when his wasn't the only car, had led barely avoided crashes and even more swearing on Earl's side. To make matters worse, he had insisted on getting what Trent called *a man's car*, in this case a big Japanese pick-up. When they entered the village of Bellingham, Earl had begun to wonder, if that sissy guy at the car rental might have been right: Twice already, they had to make a detour, because their monstrous car was too big to take the corners.

Yet, he felt a bit better, when he saw the white road sign directing them to Stoneybridge.

"Eh' Trent, there it is!" It took him a while to manoeuvre across the narrow bridge that led into the village.

Trent spit through the open window. "Wha's this? Open Pants, Minnesota?"

When Earl stopped the truck on the village square, they drew everyone's attention. Had the mysterious girl that had lately shown up sparked some peoples imagination, these two cowboys would be talk-of-the-town within minutes.

Earl approached an elderly woman, who stared at him, as if he was an alien, who had just climbed out of a spaceship.

"Howdy, lady. Is there a motel or something 'round 'ere?"

The woman remembered her manners. "Oh, there's a bed and breakfast at Bertie's pub over there."

Earl tipped his head. "Thanks, ma'am." And he waved Trent to follow him.

Three

Trails

Jana was on her way home from school. She still had very mixed feelings about what had happened. On one hand, she was really enjoying Rhydian's attention, on the other, she had become to like Maddy enough, that she didn't want to hurt her feelings. Plus, although she found it difficult to admit, despite being tame, Maddy was much more of an alpha than herself. She was fascinated by the way Maddy had managed to put everyone in line without using force, or even express authority. Just by plain reasoning. It was one of the mysteries of the human world, and, even though she wasn't aware of it yet, inside her grew the idea, that this was one of the reasons why humans had been so much more successful than her own kind.

Clearly, in combining the intellect of the human with the strength and agility of the beast made them far superior to

normal humans, at least on a physical level. On the other hand, their whole culture revolved around the wolf, which went as far as spending your entire adult life in wolf-form, as some of her kind preferred to.

And then there was Shannon. Jana had no idea what to make of her. Not that she didn't like the human girl, she was just nothing short of a complete mystery to Jana.

On one hand, she was definitely a friend. From what Maddy had told Rhydian, she had been loyal to her pack to the extend of nearly catching a bullet. On the other, she had spied on Maddy and her family, and had collected all sorts of information, that might expose not only Maddy and her family, but all wolfbloods.

Friendship aside, Jana was sure she had to do something to stop her. Even if that meant acting against Maddy. Or Rhydian.

Her train of thought was interrupted as she was close to her trailer. Someone was there!

"Shannon!", she thought. But as soon as she climbed uphill towards her improvised home, the scent-trail she picked up proved her wrong. There was a stranger in her trailer!

Breathlessly she drew closer, sneaking in, to catch a glimpse of the intruder. The scent was unusual, but she was sure the intruder wasn't a wolfblood. So no one sent by her father to get her back.

"Nice place. Yours?" She jumped as the stranger suddenly appeared behind her. How the hell did she do that, Jana asked

herself. With her heightened senses, it should be near impossible for a human to sneak up behind her.

She turned around, taking a defensive position. Her heart was racing. The stranger was a girl, hardly older than herself, maybe 16 or 17. She looked strong for a human.

She growled at the stranger. The girl didn't seem to be impressed. When the girl took a step towards her, Jana's instincts kicked in. She turned tail and ran into the forest.

She could hear her pursuer behind her. The girl was fast, Jana had to give her that. But Jana knew these woods, she tried to outmanoeuvre her. She ran towards the river, never in a straight line, to confuse her pursuer, and hoping the latter would take a wrong turn.

Near the river bank, she realised that no one was behind her anymore. She stopped and sniffed around. Then she saw the girl, standing in the middle of the shallow river. Jana backed off.

"Don't run!" The girl called. "I'm not here to hurt you! I just wanna talk to you!"

Jana hesitated. The girl didn't appear aggressive, and it might get Jana into even more trouble, when she started talking about chasing a girl through the woods.

"Don't come closer!" She called to the stranger.

"OK. Mind if I step out of the water?" The girl waded to land, and calmly removed her wet shoes and socks, wrenching the water from the latter. She didn't seem to care about the autumn cold.

“Why did you run from me?” She asked. “I don’t bite. Usually.”

Jana tried to keep calm. She knew if the grown-ups found out, that her address was faked and she lived in a forsaken trailer in the forest on her own, they would come for her. She had no idea where they would take her, if they came, but she was sure it wasn’t good.

Her mind was racing. This was a human problem. She needed to think like a human. What would Maddy do? The answer was clear: Maddy would lie. This was one more thing Jana had learned from her tame friends. In the human world it was sometimes necessary to lie. She just needed a good one.

“It’s my place. But... but I don’t really live there! My... my parents fight a lot, and I like to be not around when that happens.”

Thinking of Alric, that wasn’t even a lie. Alric fought constantly with anyone.

That seems to satisfy the girl. She nodded. “Just be careful out here. The forest is not a playground.”

“I know. But I know my way here.” Jana responded.

“So I noticed.” The girl winked.

“You’re not gonna tell anyone, do you?”

The girl shook her head. “None of my business.”

Jana felt a weight lifted from her shoulders. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

Only a few days after their first encounter, Logan ran into Jana again. The girl was on the school yard with a ginger haired girl,

whom Logan had seen in the village before, but hadn't talked to. The two teenage girls seemed to be having a fight. Now Logan was usually more or less uninterested in other people's affairs, or at least she pretended to be, but her instincts told her, that something was in the air. If the kids would start a cat-fight, she thought she might need to intervene, so she slowed her pace, and watched the girls from afar.

"I don't have your bloody laptop!" Jana just screamed.

"Oh, yes?" The ginger girl shot back. "You had the chance, and the motive!"

"I would have taken it, if I'd had a chance" Jana cried. "This wouldn't have happened, if you didn't spy on us!"

"I didn't!" The redhead snapped back. "It's for research!"

"I don't want to be researched." Jana snarled.

"Give it back!"

Jana now growled the way she had done when Logan had first met her, just more aggressively. What happened next was astounding even to Logan, who had seen lots of weird stuff before. Jana's skin grew black veins, her hands clenched to fists, and then her whole features began to blur. The her face was strangely distorted, her body seemed to stretch, and she fell down on all fours. A second later, she was gone. In her place, a young wolf stood on school grounds, ready to attack.

Logan had heard of shape-shifters before, and she had had more than one encounter with Mystique, who was the proverbial mother of all shape-shifters, but this was still astonishing. And dangerous. Logan sprinted towards the school yard, jumped over the low wall, and threw herself onto the wolf, the moment it jumped at the other girl. They struggled for a moment, until

Logan's eyes met the wolf's. She could see the yellow eyes fixing her gaze, and the realisation in them, that she had met the girl before. Logan let go of the wolf. The wolf-girl circled her aggressively. Long metal claws sprang from between Logan's knuckles as she went into defensive position.

"Stop!" The other girl cried. "Don't hurt her!"

And then, to Logan: "She's my friend."

Jana looked from one to another, then turned, and ran, as fast as she could towards the woods.

Logan's claws retracted. "This turns out to be an interesting day." She mumbled to herself.

Only now she realised the other girl, who still stood there, with her mouth open, and stared in fear and disbelief.

"You're OK?" Logan asked her.

It took a while till the girl noticed that Logan had asked her a question.

"Um, yes. What are those?"

She pointed towards Logan's hands.

"Hands." Logan answered.

"And those claws coming out of them?"

"They are metal claws." Logan confirmed. Which left the girl in even more confusion.

Now it was Logan's turn. "You're friend's a shape-shifter?"

"A what?" The girl was now.

"Shape-shifter. Turns into anyone, or anything she wants?"

Logan could smell the girl's nervousness.

"I don't know what you mean. There was this, um, dog, and um, you chased it away!" The girl stammered.

Logan looked at her. “So I didn’t just see your friend turn into a wolf, fight with me, and then run off into the woods?”

The girl shook her head.

“Well, I think I’m gonna go and look for her. She lives in a trailer in the forest, doesn’t she?”

The ginger girl turned even paler. “Please don’t tell anyone! We need to protect her! Please!”

Logan nodded. “I’m gonna find out, what’s going on here, and then we’ll see.”

She turned around and continued her way home, leaving a very confused girl behind.

Four

Revelations

They met in the dark room of the school. Tom sat on the desk and played with a camera. Maddy and Rhydian stood by the door and there was an awkward silence between them . Maddy hadn't been talking to Rhydian much ever since they were back from their fateful trip. Tom did not really know how to handle this situation.

The door opened and Shannon stormed in. "Guys, we have a problem!"

Maddy's reaction was cool. "You were saying?"

Shannon snorted. "This is different. I collected the data to help you."

"And that makes me feel better." In Maddy's voice was more than a streak of irony.

Shannon shook her head. "I confronted Jana earlier. Be-

cause of the laptop.”

“You still believe she’s got it?” Rhydian asked. “If she says it wasn’t her, it wasn’t her, OK?”

“Well, she got really emotional, and well, she wolfed-out.”

Now both Rhydian and Maddy were alarmed. “In public?”

Shannon nodded. “On the school yard. But we were alone there. Almost.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“There was this girl. Never saw her before, but I think she’s working for national park. At least she wore their logos.”

Maddy nodded. “I think I met her. Her name is Logan.”

Tom frowned. “That’s kind of a boys name.” He stated.

“I met her at Bertie’s she seemed to be OK.”

Shannon sighed. “Let’s hope she can keep a secret. She went in when Jana was about to jump at me. I’m pretty sure, she saw her wolf-out too.”

Maddy got up pacing up and down. “We need to find her. See what she knows. Now!”

Shannon tried to calm her down. “She’s got no prove. She can’t go to the authorities.”

“Or,” Maddy shot at her, “she might find the one who’s got your laptop!”

Tom put away the camera. “May be we should call your parents.” He suggested.

Maddy stopped in her tracks. “No!” She said decidedly. “Right now, we keep them out of this.”

“Rhydian, you go and find Jana. Shannon and Tom, you get back the laptop. I will try to find Logan and question her.”



Maddy had been checking the office of the Park Authority, and looked for Logan at Bertie's. The first was already closed and the latter deserted, except for it's grumpy owner, who only told her, he could not help her, and she should buy something or get lost. Stoneybridge wasn't really big, but Maddy could hardly go from door to door, and ask for the girl, could she?

But luckily, she met old Mrs. Jeffries, Mr. Jeffries mother. If anyone knew anything about what was going on in Stoneybridge it was her. So Maddy offered to carry home her shopping bag, and used the opportunity to ask, if Mrs. Jeffries knew anything about the new girl. She wasn't disappointed. Mrs. Jeffries knew that she was from abroad, and that there was gossip, she was on the run. She also knew where the girl lived. The rest of the way she told Maddy about the two very weird cowboys who had checked into the local inn.

It was nearly dark when she finally stood outside the place the girl had checked in. It was an old house, that belonged to an old couple, who had lived here for ages. Both were in need of care, and had therefore moved to a care home in Hexham, were there where closer to their children. Their son had tried to sell the property for a while now, and always had taken in some tenants.

She knocked at the door. It took a while until the door opened. She wore a plain white tee and a pair of jeans. Her hair was in the same untidy fashion as it had been on their first encounter.

“Hi Logan!” Maddy greeted.

The other girl stared, and for a moment Maddy thought she would just close the door again. “Maddy, right?” Logan asked.

“Yes. Can I talk to you for a second?”

“Sure.” Logan stepped aside and made an inviting gesture.

Maddy stepped into the house. Logan led the way to the kitchen, and Maddy looked around. She had never seen a place so spartan. On the way through the hall, she could peer into the bedroom. The closet doors were open, and beside her working clothes, nothing was in it. On the bed was only a woollen blanket.

In the kitchen, Logan went for the fridge. “Beer?” She asked.

Maddy shuddered at the thought of drinking beer. “I’m not old enough to drink.”

“Right.” Logan opened a bottle of beer for herself, and took a sip. “I only have tap water otherwise, sorry.” She added.

Maddy shook her head. “I’m OK.”

“So, what brings you here?”

“I’m here on behalf of my friend Shannon. You met her earlier today. She was, ahem, attacked by a dog on the school yard.”

“Ah.” Logan nodded. “No big. Why send you then?”

Maddy looked blank. “What?”

“If she was to say *Thank You!*, she could have come around herself?”

“Oh, she, ah, needs to attend some urgent business, and I was around.”

“So this doesn’t have anything to do with the fact, that her friend turned into a wolf?”

Maddy’s heart sank. “What are you talking about?”

“The redhead. Well, the other redhead, not your friend.” Logan explained. “The two were arguing, and suddenly, she turned into a wolf.”

“What?” Maddy tried to look surprised. “Where did you get that story from?”

Logan looked at her for a long while. Then took another sip from her beer. “You are a lousy liar, did you know that?”

Maddy blushed. “You know this girl, and you know what she can do.”

Maddy tried to make up a story in her mind, but Logan’s piercing look rendered her efforts useless. Any lie would just make things worse.

“Yes.” She admitted. “I know her. She is my friend.”

“And a werewolf.” Logan added.

“It’s called a Wolfblood. I know this is hard to believe, but you saw it! Don’t freak out, I promise you, she is not dangerous!”

“So you came here, to ask me to keep your little secret?” Logan asked.

Maddy nodded and stared at the ground.

“Relax. It’s none of my business. And believe me, I have seen freakier things than that!”

Maddy looked up.

“Didn’t your friend tell you? I’m a freak myself.” She lifted one of her hands, and in terror Maddy saw long metal claws grow from them. Maddy swallowed hard.

“I’m not scared of your wolf-friend. Maybe it’s better, you’d be afraid of me.”

“Is that a threat?” Maddy asked cautiously.

Logan suddenly looked very troubled. “No.” She finally said. “But shit tends to happen around me all the time. You’d better not be around, when it hits the fan.”

With a metallic sound, the blades retracted into her hands again, and she got up.

Maddy suddenly felt the great burden on the girl’s shoulders. Something terrible had happened to her. Maybe, that was why she came to Stoneybridge, to run from it.

It was clear, that Logan wanted her to leave, so she got up too, and went for the door.

“Maddy.” Logan said, when she had reached the door. “Don’t worry. Your secret’s safe with me.”

Maddy smiled. “Thanks.”

Five

Zapped!

“This place looks like a real werewolf’s den!” Earl remarked, as they walked into the narrow streets of Stoneybridge. “Wotcha think, how many are here?”

Trent grinned. “Let’s see.” He crouched, and put one hand on the ground. Then he listened. His senses sharpened and his perception opened. In this state, Trent could -literally- hear the worms in the earth. He knew that his ability was something very close to what the werewolves did. But he had the advantage, that in his case it was neither addictive, nor could he get confused by electric wires or mobile phone signals. He knew from earlier encounters, that things like that could throw a werewolf off balance, but not him. It made him the perfect tracker.

The beauty that came with such a deep connection with everything alive was lost on him, however. Trent’s idea of beauty

was limited to an ice cold beer in his hand, and a curvy, topless blonde dancing on a pole.

“I found two.” He said. “This way!”

He led the way through two streets, until they reached the parking lot of small supermarket. Or the British equivalent of one. It was so small, it would have been occupied, had Earl parked his car on it.

Earl stopped Trent at the street corner. “Is it them?” He pointed to a couple, who was busy packing their grocery into the back of their car. “Yeah,” Trent confirmed. “Go get them?”

“No.” Earl shook his head. “There’s no use killing them in human form, we need to wait ’til they change!”

“There ain’t no full moon!” Trent remarked.

“Exactly, so we need to make them change!”

Trent grinned, and reached under his coat, where he had his Glock 22 in a holster.

Earl put a hand on his friends arm. “Are you crazy?”

Trent looked mystified. “What?”

“We’ll have the cops on our tails in no time. This ain’t Arkansas!”

Earl looked over to the couple and grinned. “I’ve got a better idea.”

“Huh?”

“We’ll make them come to us!”

Trent still didn’t get his partners idea.

Earl rolled his eyes. “The cub, you moron! She’d be easier to catch, and if we have her, the old ones will come to us!”

Trent grinned. “Good plan.”



Maddy felt a lot better this day, as she and Tom were walking home from school. They got back the stolen laptop, it turned out that Liam took it, to make some money to buy tickets for a football match. Jana had found him, and stopped him before he could look into any of the files.

After that Maddy had had a long talk with Shannon. She could convince Shannon to delete all her research on wolfbloods, but it had been painful for both of them. Shannon was devastated, and knowing to be the reason for her friends despair wasn't making her feel much better.

The three K's had had their share when they tried to spoil Shannon's date with Harry. In the end it had been Tom who had saved the day, and brought them back all together. Rightfully, Tom looked very smug when you reminded him of that. Good old Tom, in moment like this, she just wanted to cuddle him.

And finally, new moon was past, so she felt like a living being again.

"Where's Rhydian?" Tom looked around.

"He's walking Jana home." Maddy explained. Tom raised an eyebrow. He'd always thought Maddy and Rhydian had a thing, and made no secret of his dislike on Rhydian's interest in Jana. "Poor Tom, always so loyal" Maddy thought. Even though they never spoke about it, Maddy knew Tom had a crush on her, at least since 5th grade. The problem was, that, although she loved him like a brother, it was just that: Like a brother. Hopefully, someone who would be able to embrace his

kind nature and his spirit, would find him, because he deserved it.

Her own feelings where confusing, to say the least. She should be jealous of Jana, because she and Rhydian seemed to go along so well, but lately she found her thoughts straying to the small house at the end of Main Street, and its lonely tenant, the Canadian girl. Ever since the night of the dance, Maddy had used several opportunities to swing by and say hello to Logan. She told herself, that this was necessary to make sure that Logan didn't talk about what she knew. But the truth was, Maddy just enjoyed the older girl's company. Even though they weren't talking much, Maddy always felt better after their brief meetings. Most of the time it was Maddy, talking about what she did that day, and Logan was only sitting there, listening. Logan was a good, and very patient listener. And when she looked at Maddy with this intense stare of hers, Maddy's mouth went dry, and she somehow felt weird.

Still, Logan was a total mystery to her. The girl never talked about where she came from, and Maddy still didn't know what to make of those metal claws.

Maddy's train of thought was violently interrupted by a bristling sound following by a gurgling noise from Tom. She turned towards him, just to see how he collapsed on the ground with spasms.

"Tom!"

When she tried to catch his fall, she saw the two wires coming from his back. She whirled around, her wolfblood-senses kicking in, but she was too late. When she came to face their attacker, she felt a sting in her chest, as the bolts of the Taser-

gun penetrated her skin. Then an excruciating pain, her body was thrown backwards and she couldn't breathe. As she fell, she saw Tom's wide open eyes, he tried to speak, but she couldn't hear. Someone was pulling a cloth over her face, then again, the pain. And then, darkness.

Tom's whole body ached. Breathing felt like fire, and his eyes burned. Through his blurred vision, he saw the two figures drag away Maddy. He wanted to talk, to scream for help, but all he could manage was a gurgling noise.

Now, a few minutes later, he felt the feeling return to his legs, mostly in form of a stinging sensation. Despite the pain, he got back to his feet, only one thing on his mind: Get help!

Even though thinking was still hard after the electric shock, he had no that these guys didn't pick Maddy at random. They knew exactly what they were doing, and that meant they knew who, and more importantly, what Maddy was.

He made it to Shannon's doorstep, just hammering the door with his fists. Shannon opened the door.

"Oh, my God, Tom! What happened to you?" Shannon caught him, and helped him inside.

"Maddy!" He managed to say between breaths. "They've got Maddy!"

Six

Emergency Meeting

Shannon had handed Tom a glass of water after leading him to the sofa in the living room. He hardly could hold the glass, but managed to take a few sips. And then he told Shannon what had happened.

“Have you seen them?” Shannon asked.

“Not directly, I only saw their legs. One of them wore snake-skin boots.”

“Those two cowboys who arrived a bit earlier!” Shannon stated.

Tom nodded. He had been thinking the same.

Shannon got out her phone. “I’m calling Rhydian! We need to go after them!” She started dialling.

“No!” Tom interrupted. “Call Maddy’s parents first! We can’t handle this on our own! Not this time! These guys are

dangerous!”

Shannon hung up, then speed dialed Maddy’s house. She let it ring a few times. “They’re not home!”

She redialed Rhydian’s number. “Rhydian? It’s Shannon. You need to come here! Someone kidnapped Maddy!” She paused. “Yes. And Tom has been hurt! OK, thanks!”

She turned towards Tom. “They’ll be here in a minute!”

The door opened, and Shannon’s mum entered. “Tom? Oh my God, what happened to you dear?” She rushed to him.

“I got tasered.” Tom explained.

Mrs. Kelly was shocked. “Who did this?”

Tom started to explain, but Shannon shook her head. “We don’t now mum!” She interrupted Tom.

“No, Shannon, not this time! We really need some grown-up help! This is too big to handle alone!”

And to Mrs. Kelly: “The guys who shot me took Maddy!”

Mrs. Kelly was stunned. “You mean as in *kidnapped*?”

Tom nodded. “I’m calling the police!” Mrs. Kelly left the room to get to the phone.

“Oh, great!” Shannon glared at Tom. “What did you do that for? Police sneaking ’round Maddy’s life is the last thing she needs. They’re gonna find out!”

“Shannon, you didn’t see these guys. They are serious business. They’re not like Whitewood. We can outwit her, if we’re clever, because she’s interested in science, but she doesn’t actually want to hurt the wolfbloods. These guys are pros. From the way they pulled this off, I’d say it wasn’t the first time, they snatched someone from the streets. We need help with this!”

Shannon sighed. “I just don’t want to expose Maddy and her family!”

Tom nodded. “I know. Can you try Maddy’s parents again?”

Shannon took her mobile and redialled the Smith’s number.

“Still nothing.”

“We need to find out where they took Maddy.”

Shannon thought for a moment. “That Logan girl? Maddy spent a lot of time with her lately, and she knows about the wolfbloods. Maybe she’s got something to do with it?”

Shannon grabbed her coat. “Tom, you fill in the others. I’m trying to find that Logan! If we’re lucky, she leads us to Maddy!”

Tom tried to get up, but fell back to the sofa, groaning in pain. “Shannon, wait, what you’re gonna do? Ask her nicely?”

Shannon shrugged. “Maybe I’ll ask not so nicely.”

“Shannon, that girl has frikking metal claws growing from her hands. She’s dangerous!”

“Relax, I’m just gonna see where she is, and follow her in a safe distance.”

Shannon had stopped at the school to grab her camera, before she headed into the forest. She knew that Logan had a sort-of-office in a small shed in the forest, and she assumed, if the girl had something to do with Maddy’s disappearance, she would return there, in order not to raise any suspicion. It was a long shot, but the only starting point Shannon had. Other than Maddy, she didn’t even know where the girl lived. It turned out she was lucky. Logan was standing in front of her shed,

in a heated debate with a guy Shannon knew worked for some sawmill somewhere in the Hexham area. Although the whole area was a national park, there was still forestry going on, but it was under strict regulations. Part of what the forest commission Logan worked for did, was seeing that these regulations were met. Shannon got closer, so she could overhear the conversation.

“We had a guarantee to cut down five-thousand there!” The man just said.

“Yup, that was before last years storm season flattened half the forest. If we let you cut down another five thousand trees, there’ll be nothing left.”

“My boss won’t like that! We will bring that before the forestry commission. See how long you keep your job then!” The man trotted off to his car.

“A good day to you too, sir!” Logan yelled after him, and then added, quietly: “What an asshole!”

She went into her office shed, just to come out again, a few minutes later, with a woollen cap on her head, locked the door, and walked away.

Shannon dove into the undergrowth and tried to be as quiet as possible, as the girl passed by her hiding place. When the girl was a little distance away, Shannon started to follow her. It came in handy, that she knew these forests so well, it made it possible to get from one hiding place to another.

A few times, Logan stopped and listened, and once or twice, it looked as if she was sniffing, just the way Maddy did, when she picked up a scent.

“Oh my God,” Shannon thought. “I hope she’s not a wolf-blood herself.”

In that case, she would already have detected Shannon's presence, which she clearly hadn't, or at least Shannon thought so.

When she squeezed through some bushes, the camera's strap got entangled in the twigs, forcing her to stop. Once she had freed herself from the bush Logan was gone!

"Shit!" She murmured, and stepped onto the path, trying to spot where the older girl had turned to. Logan had been headed towards Stoneybridge, so Shannon ran a few yards in that direction. Then, suddenly, she felt a shudder, and looked over her shoulder.

Logan stood in the middle of the path.

"And you were following me, because...?" She asked.

Shannon stumbled backwards. "Er, I...I wasn't following you!" She stammered.

"You've already been lurking in the bushes when I left my office." Logan seemed more amused than threatened.

Shannon took a deep breath. This was the worst place to face Logan. She surly wasn't fast enough to outrun the athletic girl. Logan was quite a bit taller than her, and mostly muscle. Shannon decided to go into offence. "I followed you, because I hoped you'll lead me to Maddy. Where is she?" She asked in her best Barnaby impression.

Logan seemed genuinely confused. "How should I know?"

"You spent an awful lot of time with her lately!"

"Well, yeah, she came over to see me."

"And she told you that she's a wolfblood?"

"Yes. But, well, after she came to me to speak for her friend Jana, it wasn't really hard to figure out anyway. And yes, she

knows about my claws. What's your point?"

"So you gained her trust, so you could more easily kidnap her!"

"What?" Now Logan's cool attitude broke, and there was real concern in her voice. "What happened? Who kidnapped her?"

"Your two fellow Americans did the job. They fired a taser gun at her and Tom on her way home from school. And know you are on your way to meet them, aren't you?"

Logan sighed. "And why would I do that?"

"I don't know, to sell her to some government lab? You tell me!"

Logan took a step towards Shannon. "OK, Sherlock. First, why would I gain her trust, just to have her assaulted in the streets, if I could just invite her to my car and drive off? Second, you don't know me, but if you did, you'd know that I would rather tare the world apart than letting an innocent girl fall into the hands of a government lab. And third, if you are talking about these two cowboy clowns, who arrived the other day: They are not my *fellow Americans*, because I'm Canadian. Clear?"

Shannon's heart raced. "Yes, clear."

Logan stepped back. "OK. Why don't you tell me everything you know about what happened to Maddy?"

Seven

Running With Knives

“What’s she doing here?” Rhydian threw an angry look at Shannon.

“She’s offered her help.” Shannon explained. “We need every hand we can get. What about the police?”

“They came here, and asked me about what happened.” Tom answered. “Now their going to see Mr. and Mrs. Smith.”

“Mmh, alright.” Shannon tried to sound calm, although she felt her heart race.

“Still doesn’t explain, what she is doing here!” Rhydian shot another glance at Logan.

“Look, she offered her help, and we can really use her, right?” Shannon shot back at him.

“Half an hour ago it was ‘Oh my god, she kidnapped Maddy!’ and now we suddenly trust her?” Rhydian didn’t seem con-

vinced.

“Yes, I believe her.” Shannon nodded.

“Oh, it’s that simple then, alright!” His voice was seeping with irony.

Logan stepped forward. “Alright boy, you don’t trust me, I got that. I’m not going to leave here. I happen to like Maddy, and if we want to help her, we should act now!”

Rhydian’s eyes turned yellow, as he stepped closer, putting himself face to face with Logan.

“I don’t think I like you!” He growled.

Logan looked at him coolly. “I’m not very impressed. Are you done playing manly, boy?”

“Guys!” Shannon cried. “Stop that! We have a task here. Find out where they took Maddy! I don’t care if you kiss or kill each other, I want to find my friend, who happens to be your friend too! And if you wanna fight, instead of help, then take it outside, but get out of my way!”

Both Rhydian and Logan looked at Shannon like found out scallywags. “Sorry.” Rhydian murmured.

“Thank you!” Shannon nodded. “Can we focus on finding Maddy now?”

Both Rhydian and Logan nodded.

“Alright, we should start at the crime scene. Tom, do you feel up to lead us?”

Tom got up from the couch. “Yeah, sure.”

The group headed for the door.



When they arrived at the spot where Maddy was taken, Tom looked around. "Where's the police? Shouldn't they secure the crime scene or something?"

"Police are idiots. Don't rely on them, if you want anything done." Logan had started looking for clues immediately.

"Is she always that grumpy?" Tom asked.

"Don't know what Maddy sees in her." Rhydian growled.

Logan however wasn't listening. She was concentrating on all the tracks she could read.

She crouched down and inspected the ground. "See this?" She pointed to some black marks on the ground. "That's rubber from a sole. If this is where she fell,"

"It is, I think" Tom interrupted her.

"If this is where she fell, someone picked her up by the shoulders, and dragged her into that direction." Logan pointed towards the opposite corner of the street.

She followed the trail to the street corner, where it abruptly ended.

"Guess they parked their truck here." Logan stopped and looked around.

"That makes no sense." Shannon shook her head. "Why do this in broad daylight with Tom as a witness?"

"I guess they didn't think I was a threat." Tom shrugged.

"Or they thought they killed you." Rhydian threw in.

Shannon stared at him with her eyes wide.

Rhydian realised what he just said, and added: "No offence", while grinning sheepishly at Tom.

Tom just sighed.

“You think they used that ridiculous car they had? I mean, it’s not exactly low-key” Shannon tried to bring their attention back on topic.

Logan had walked up the road, towards the forest. “They want us to find them.” She just said.

“What? Why?”

“If they wouldn’t, they wouldn’t have gotten through the lengths of a kidnapping. They would have just shot her. And Tom.”

“Logan!” Shannon was appalled by the idea of someone killing her best friend.

Logan turned towards her. “These guys hunt wolfbloods for a living. They know Maddy is one, they also know her parents are. And most likely they know about Rhydian and Jana. They are not just after Maddy. They’re after all of you!”

“How could they know about me or Jana, unless someone told them?” Rhydian stared at Logan challengingly.

“You have not exactly done a good job in keeping a low profile.” Logan explained. “Took me half a day to figure out.”

“So where are they, then?” Shannon asked.

“Somewhere in the woods, I guess.” Logan answered. “They need a place they can overlook, and that is hard to reach by car. But close enough we can get there.”

“In other words,” Tom concluded, “a perfect spot to set a trap!”

Logan nodded.

Shannon stared at the surrounding hills. “Black Knowe!” She suddenly exclaimed.

“Where is that?” Logan asked.

“Up this road there is a forest road to the left. It leads up the hill, and after last years storms they cut down most of the trees there, so it has a clearing on top. And there also is a small cabin, that birders use in the summer. This time of year, it will be empty!”

“Sounds like a good place to start!” Logan nodded.

“Alright, ” she began to assign tasks. “Tom, you try and find Maddy’s parents. I’m sure our kidnappers left them a clue, to make sure they walk into their trap. Rhydian, you go find Jana, and hide!”

“I’m coming with you!” Rhydian shook his head.

“No way! It’s a trap! If you come with me, you do exactly what they expect from you!”

“I have to help Maddy!”

“You help her best, if you take care of Jana, and stay out of the firing line!”

“Don’t tell me what to do!”

Shannon stepped between the two of them. “She’s right, Rhydian! Someone needs to look after Jana, she doesn’t know what happened here, so she’s in danger. And if you go up there, they got you where they want you!”

“So she can run to her buddies and warn them?” Rhydian was not convinced.

“I’m going with her, OK? Just for once, listen to others!”

He looked to Tom for help, but Tom stood there, arms folded. “I’m with Shannon here. Go, look after Jana! Make sure you two stay safe!”

Rhydian threw up his arms in defeat and growled. But he turned around and went back into the village.

Tom nodded to Shannon and Logan. “Be careful out there, OK?”

“Promised.” Shannon grinned, and gave him the thumbs up. She was hoping he had not seen how her hand was trembling.

Tom arrived at the Smith’s house, when the police car was just about to leave the premise.

When the constable saw him, he stopped the car. “Has your friend reappeared yet?” he asked.

“No!” Tom replied. “Have to talked to Mr. and Mrs. Smith?”

“They are not home.” The constable answered.

“And what are you going to do now?” Tom wanted to know.

“There’s not much to do now.” The constable said. “When she is not home by dark, we can start a search.”

“But I told you what happened!” Tom cried. “Those to Americans took her!”

“Yes, sure!” The constable smiled reassuringly. “We will do everything to find them!”

Tom just stared. Obviously, the constable thought this was some sort of a hoax.

Following a spontaneous intuition he walked to the car, opened the rear door, and hopped in.

“You want to find the Smith’s? I think I know where they are!”

The constable sighed.



“They’re coming!” Trent said.

Earl looked up. “The adults?”

“They are in a car, but others are close!” Trent listened. “Their human pet. And another.”

Earl looked down to Maddy. “You’ve got your human pets well trained, if they follow you around like that!”

Maddy set crouched in a cage, that was so tiny, that she could neither stand nor stretch her legs. It was of the sort you would use to safely transport a dog in a car, and it was clearly uncomfortable.

She glared back at Earl. “They are not pets, they are my friends!” She growled.

Earl laughed. “Or is it the other way ’round? And she wants her puppy back?”

Maddy just growled at him. She felt the urge to change, to let go of her human nature, and jump at him, biting and clawing. But she was in the cage, and Earl carried a gun, which was pointed at her most of the time.

Also she knew, that the transformation was what Earl was waiting for. He had not kept his intentions a secret; an adolescent wolfblood pelt, undamaged, would make him a small fortune.

The thought of some rich collector putting her stuffed skin on a trophy wall scared her almost more than the prospect of dying. She tried not to let Earl know how terrified she was, and hoped that her captors didn’t see her fear.



Logan sneaked through the undergrowth almost without making a noise. Shannon was a few feet behind her, trying to keep up, and at the same time, not make any noise herself.

Logan raised her hand, as they approached the clearing. Shannon stopped, and crouched down. From here, they could see the cabin. Trent and Earl were waiting in front of it, and Maddy was locked inside a small metal cage.

Trent suddenly pointed towards them. Logan was sure that he couldn't see her through the groves.

"Come out!" He called. "I know you're here."

"Stay down!" Logan hissed. She rose from the ground, and calmly stepped into the clearing, hands raised.

"Busted!" She said. "I thought I could get into the deal, but you guys were faster. Shame!"

Earl turned towards her. "Wanted to get the price for yourself, eh?"

"Took me weeks to get the girls trust, and then you come along, and snatch her away." Logan replied. "Not very sports-like"

She walked over towards the cage, when Trent suddenly turned around.

"She's lying!" Trent called out. "She ain't come alone! Got the redhead with her!"

Earl grinned. "You really thought we fall for that?" He asked Logan.

Logan shrugged. "It was worth a try." She said, more to herself.

Trent now stepped up behind Logan, pointing the gun at her temple.

“Hey Red!” He called. “Come out, or I’ll blow your friends brains out!”

“Shannon, run!” Logan cried, but a moment later Shannon stepped out of the undergrowth.

Earl looked smug. He turned to Maddy. “OK, kid, last chance: Go werewolf, or my man Trent over here, starts killing your friends!”

Maddy let out a short scream, and pressed herself in the far corner of her cage. Tears were streaming down her face.

“Wotcha’ say, Trent?” Earl nodded to his companion.

Trent grinned; and pulled the Trigger. Blood sprayed over his vest as the force of the gunshot exploded in Logan’s face. Logan was thrown back by the blast falling into the moist leaves that covered the ground.

Earl looked at his partner, stunned. “You fuckin’ asshole! What did you do that for?”

Trent looked blank. “You said, I should start killing them!” He defended himself.

“I didn’t mean *right away* you moron!” Earl screamed at his companion. “And who’s gonna clean up that mess? ‘eh? ‘eh?”

“Well, it worked, didn’t it?” Trent pointed towards the cage. Maddy had wolfed out, and was now desperately howling.

“I hope for your sake, this calls in the elders!” Earl turned back towards the cage.

Shannon had collapsed on the ground. She was staring at Logan’s body in complete horror. Although the sight of the dead body was horrible, she couldn’t take her eyes off it. Then, and if the feeling of terror could get any deeper, it did at this point, the body stirred.

Logan slowly sat up, and turned her destroyed face towards Shannon. Her left eye was missing, and through the gaping wound in her cheek, Shannon could glimpse the same metal, that formed Logan's claws. Logan raised a finger to her blood-smearred lips, and hushed Shannon.

Shannon did not think of screaming. With a mixture of fascination and disgust, she watched how Logan's skin, and even the eye, regrew as if in time-lapse. In the time it took her to get up from the ground, her wounds had completely vanished and healed. She blinked twice, and when she reopened her eyes, the destroyed eye looked as if nothing had ever happened to it.

Both Trent and Earl were facing the cage, so they didn't see Logan's remarkable resurrection, but now Trent's spider sense was tingling. He instinctively whirled around, which turned out to be a mistake. The moment the barrel of his gun was pointing into Logan's direction, the long metal claws shot from the girl's hands, and into the man's chest. Trent made a gurgling noise, before he went down.

Earl turned around, raising his rifle. Logan catapulted herself forward, to attack Earl, but at that moment, a young wolf lurched from the undergrowth, and sent Earl back tumbling. Earl tried to hold his balance, and used the butt of the rifle to strike at the wolf. He hit it on the head hard enough to force it to let go of him, and used to confusion to stumble into the trees.

Logan looked at the trees for a moment, then to the wolf. It seemed to be hurt. She sighed, and stopped her pursuit. She

knelt beside the wolf. The wolf tried to lift its head. It didn't seem to be seriously injured, but after a blow with the butt of a rifle, a concussion was a likely effect.

"Rhydian, which part of 'Stay away from here and hide' didn't you understand?" She asked the wolf. The wolf transformed back into Rhydian. "Oww!" He moaned.

"Lay still, you caught a serious blow to the head!" Logan looked over to Shannon.

"Hey, Shannon, can you give me a hand here?"

It took a moment, until Shannon realised, that it was over. "He shot you!" She exclaimed.

Logan nodded. "Yes, he did!"

"You were dead!"

Logan shook her head. "Just a little. I've you get shot as often as I do, you'll get used to it."

"What, what are you?" Shannon pointed towards Logan. "You have steel in your face!"

"Adamantium, to be precise." Logan confirmed. "Runs through my entire body. Sorry lass, I didn't have the time to warn you!"

She turned to Rhydian. "You'll be OK." Then she got up, and walked over to the cage. Maddy was still in wolf form, but silent. She had her tail between her hind legs, like a frightened dog.

"It's alright, love, he's gone. It's over. Watch out!" Logan raised her hand, and the claws snapped out. With one mighty blow, she smashed the lock on the cage, setting Maddy free.

Maddy stepped out of the cage, and immediately turned into

her human form. Logan caught her in her arms. “It’s OK, love. I’m here, I’ll protect you. Shh!”

Eight

Epilogue

Only moments later two huge wolfs came running from the undergrowth. Maddy looked at them, as they approached.

“Mom! Dad!” Maddy cried. Emma immediately turned into human form, and rushed to her daughter.

“Oh, darling, my love, mum’s here” She pulled her daughter into a tight embrace and cradled her gently, like a little child.

Logan let go of the girl, to allow Emma to comfort her daughter and got up.

She watched Daniel, who was still in wolf form, sniffing the ground, and then making for the woods, where Earl had disappeared. Quickly, she ran over to him, to block his way.

“Daniel, don’t!” She said. Daniel growled at her threateningly, and tried to get past her.

“You don’t want to go after him. Trust me!”

When Daniel bared his teeth, Logan extended her claws. “You’re about to go to a very dark place. And I cannot allow that! You have to think of your family. Believe me, he won’t get far!”

Daniel took a step back.

“Let me handle this.” Logan urged him.

Daniel turned into human form. “Promise me, you won’t let him get away!”

“I know some people who can track down anyone, anywhere.”

Logan gave him an encouraging smile.

Daniel turned around, and walked over to his family, hugging his daughter.

“Hey Logan!” She heard Rhydian’s voice. “This guy’s still alive!”

She turned towards the voice to see Rhydian and Shannon bent over Trent’s body.

“Must have missed the heart then.” She said, more to herself than to anyone, before she walked over to them.

“You are not like them.” Trent told her when he saw her. “You’re special!”

“More than that, I get cranky, when someone shoots me in the face!”

“You’re supposed to be dead!” Trent stated. “I could sense you from miles away. But you’re no werewolf either!”

“I think,” Logan answered, “you already know. You’re a mutant too, aren’t you?”

“What is it? Telepathy?”

Trent looked blank. For a moment, it looked as if he would faint again.

“I can see things. Things others can’t see.” He whispered.

“I see you. You’re not quite what you look like. The things you’ve seen! The things you’ve done!” He coughed now. “Makes me look like a fucking boy scout.”

He gave a painful laugh. “Does she know? Your little pet? Does she know what you are?”

Logan bent over him, her face only inches from his. “You better shut up now!” And she presented one of her claws to him.

Half an hour later, the place was swarming with police. Tom had led the policemen to the scene, and once they had learned that the kidnapping was real, they had immediately called for backup. Of course they were unaware of the real events. And the Detective Inspector who had come to the scene, made sure that it stayed that way. DI Dickenson knew the Smiths, and it didn’t take Logan long to figure out he was a wolfblood to. These people were a lot better integrated into human society than the mutants. On the other hand: They were their own species, and had been around for millennia.

Trent had done his part in covering up the story, by screaming and shouting about werewolves and an indestructible girl while the paramedics took care of his wounds. He was so clearly a madman, that the whole story sounded even more unbelievable when he told it.

“We’re gonna have a hard time, covering this one up.” Dickenson just told Daniel. “You really got yourself into trouble this time.”

“It’s getting harder to stay below the radar.” Daniel answered.

“With all these reports about so called *mutants*, people are more aware. We really need to be more careful!” Dickenson said.

“Times change.” Daniel nodded.

“People don’t. If they learn about us, they hunt us down. Just like those two.” Dickenson sighed.

“What about the girl?” He pointed towards Logan. “She knows.”

“I’ll take care of that.” Daniel said. “I don’t think she’s a threat.”

“You sure you know what you’re doing?”

“She just saved my daughter’s life, Carl. I owe her!” Daniel shrugged. “Plus, I don’t think you’d be very happy having to deal with her. She single-handedly knocked out two trained killers!”

“All right, have it your way.” Dickenson nodded. “I have to talk to the press, give them a good cover story.”

Later that night, everyone was sitting in the Smith’s living room. Daniel had told Logan the most important parts of the local wolfblood history. She had heard about the wild wolfbloods, and that it was paramount to protect them by keeping their

secrets. Not that she needed any convincing. Preaching to the choir here, baby!

Logan had called Xavier in New York, and asked him if the X-Men would help finding Earl. The Professor had promised her to look into it.

“I appreciate everything you’ve done for us, Logan.” Daniel just said. “But I cannot stress enough how important it is, to keep this a secret!”

“Dad, you already said that. Three times!” Maddy cried.

“Relax, Mr. Smith!” Logan said coolly. “I can keep your secret. If you can keep mine.”

She lifted a hand, and slowly unsheathed her claws.