Moon Called

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Extract

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I didn't realize he was a werewolf at first. My nose isn't at its best when surrounded by axle grease and burnt oil – and it's not like there are a lot of stray werewolves running around. So when someone made a polite noise near my feet to get my attention I thought he was a customer.

I was burrowed under the engine compartment of a Jetta, settling a rebuilt transmission into its new home. One of the drawbacks in running a one-woman garage was that I had to stop and start every time the phone rang or a customer stopped by. It made me grumpy – which isn't a good way to deal with customers. My faithful office boy and tool rustler had gone off to college, and I hadn't replaced him yet – it's hard to find someone who will do all the jobs I don't want to.

'Be with you in a sec,' I said, trying not to sound snappish. I do my best not to scare off my customers if I can help it.

Transmission jacks be damned, the only way to get a transmission into an old Jetta is with muscle. Sometimes being a female is useful in my line of work – my hands are smaller so I can get them places a man can't. However, even weightlifting and karate can't make me as strong as a strong man. Usually leverage can compensate, but sometimes there's no substitute for muscle, and I had just barely enough to get the job done.

Grunting with effort, I held the transmission where it belonged with my knees and one hand. With the other I slipped the first bolt in and tightened it. I wasn't finished,

but the transmission would stay where it was while I dealt with my customer.

I took a deep breath and smiled once brightly for practice before I rolled out from under the car. I snagged a rag to wipe the oil off my hands, and said, 'Can I help you?' before I got a good enough look at the boy to see he wasn't a customer – though he certainly looked as though *someone* ought to help him.

The knees of his jeans were ripped out and stained with old blood and dirt. Over a dirty tee, he wore a too-small flannel shirt – inadequate clothing for November in eastern Washington.

He looked gaunt, as though he'd been a while without food. My nose told me, even over the smell of gasoline, oil, and antifreeze permeating the garage, that it had been an equally long time since he'd seen a shower. And, under the dirt, sweat, and old fear, was the distinctive scent of werewolf.

'I was wondering if you had some work I could do?' he asked hesitantly. 'Not a real job, ma'am. Just a few hours' work.'

I could smell his anxiety before it was drowned out by a rush of adrenaline when I didn't immediately refuse. His words sped up until they crashed into one another. 'A job would be okay, too, but I don't have a social security card, so it would have to be cash under the table.'

Most of the people who come around looking for cash work are illegals trying to tide themselves over between harvest and planting season. This boy was white-bread American – except the part about being a werewolf – with chestnut hair and brown eyes. He was tall enough to be eighteen, I supposed, but my instincts, which are pretty good, pinned his age closer to fifteen. His shoulders were wide but bony, and his hands were a little large, as if he still

had some growing to do before he grew into the man he would be.

'I'm strong,' he said. 'I don't know a lot about fixing cars, but I used to help my uncle keep his Bug running.'

I believed he was strong: werewolves are. As soon as I had picked up the distinctive musk-and-mint scent, I'd had a nervous urge to drive him out of my territory. However, not being a werewolf, I control my instincts – I'm not controlled by them. Then, too, the boy, shivering slightly in the damp November weather, roused other, stronger instincts.

It is my own private policy not to break the law. I drive the speed limit, keep my cars insured, pay a little more tax to the feds than I have to. I've given away a twenty or two to people who'd asked, but never hired someone who couldn't appear on my payroll. There was also the problem of his being a werewolf, and a new one at that, if I was any judge. The young ones have less control of their wolves than others.

He hadn't commented on how odd it was to see a woman mechanic. Sure, he'd probably been watching me for a while, long enough to get used to the idea – but, still, he hadn't said anything, and that won him points. But not enough points for what I was about to do.

He rubbed his hands together and blew on them to warm up his fingers, which were red with chill.

'All right,' I said, slowly. It was not the wisest answer, but, watching his slow shivers, it was the only one I could give. 'We'll see how it works.

'There's a laundry room and a shower back through that door.' I pointed to the door at the back of the shop. 'My last assistant left some of his old work coveralls. You'll find them hanging on the hooks in the laundry room. If you want to shower and put those on, you can run the clothes you're wearing through the washer. There's a fridge in the laundry

room with a ham sandwich and some pop. Eat, then come back out when you're ready.'

I put a little force behind the 'eat': I wasn't going to work with a hungry werewolf, not even almost two weeks from full moon. Some people will tell you werewolves can only shapechange under a full moon, but people also say there's no such things as ghosts. He heard the command and stiffened, raising his eyes to meet mine.

After a moment he mumbled a thank-you and walked through the door, shutting it gently behind him. I let out the breath I'd been holding. I knew better than to give orders to a werewolf – it's that whole dominance reflex thing.

Werewolves' instincts are inconvenient – that's why they don't tend to live long. Those same instincts are the reason their wild brothers lost to civilization while the coyotes were thriving, even in urban areas like Los Angeles.

The coyotes are *my* brothers. Oh, I'm not a werecoyote – if there even is such a thing. I am a walker.

The term is derived from 'skinwalker,' a witch of the Southwest Indian tribes who uses a skin to turn into a coyote or some other animal and goes around causing disease and death. The white settlers incorrectly used the term for all the native shapechangers and the name stuck. We are hardly in a position to object – even if we came out in public like the lesser of the fae did, there aren't enough of us to be worth a fuss.

I didn't think the boy had known what I was, or he'd never have been able to turn his back on me, another predator, and go through the door to shower and change. Wolves may have a very good sense of smell, but the garage was full of odd odors, and I doubted he'd ever smelled someone like me in his life.

'You just hire a replacement for Tad?'

I turned and watched Tony come in from outside through

the open bay doors, where he'd evidently been lurking and watching the byplay between the boy and me. Tony was good at that – it was his job.

His black hair was slicked back and tied into a short ponytail and he was clean-shaven. His right ear, I noticed, was pierced four times and held three small hoops and a diamond stud. He'd added two since last time I'd seen him. In a hooded sweatshirt unzipped to display a thin tee that showed the results of all the hours he spent in a gym, he looked like a recruitment poster for one of the local Hispanic gangs.

'We're negotiating,' I said. 'Just temporary so far. Are you working?'

'Nope. They gave me the day off for good behavior.' He was still focused on my new employee, though, because he said, 'I've seen him around the past few days. He seems okay – runaway maybe.' Okay meant no drugs or violence, the last was reassuring.

When I started working at the garage about nine years ago, Tony had been running a little pawnshop around the corner. Since it had the nearest soft drink machine, I saw him fairly often. After a while the pawnshop passed on to different hands. I didn't think much of it until I smelled him standing on a street corner with a sign that said WILL WORK FOR FOOD.

I say smelled him, because the hollow-eyed kid holding the sign didn't look much like the low-key, cheerful, middle-aged man who had run the pawnshop. Startled, I'd greeted him by the name I'd known him by. The kid just looked at me like I was crazy, but the next morning Tony was waiting at my shop. That's when he told me what he did for a living – I hadn't even known a place the size of the Tri-Cities would have undercover cops.

He'd started dropping by the shop every once in a while,

after that. At first he'd come in a new guise each time. The Tri-Cities aren't that big, and my garage is on the edge of an area that's about as close as Kennewick comes to having a high-crime district. So it was possible he just came by when he was assigned to the area, but I soon decided the real reason was he was bothered I'd recognized him. I could hardly tell him I'd just smelled him, could I?

His mother was Italian and his father Venezuelan, and the genetic mix had given him features and skin tone that allowed him to pass as anything from Mexican to African-American. He could still pass for eighteen when he needed to, though he must be several years older than me – thirty-three or so. He spoke Spanish fluently and could use a half dozen different accents to flavor his English.

All of those attributes had led him to undercover work, but what really made him good was his body language. He could stride with the hip-swaggering walk common to handsome young Hispanic males, or shuffle around with the nervous energy of a drug addict.

After a while, he accepted I could see through disguises that fooled his boss and, he claimed, his own mother, but by then we were friends. He continued to drop in for a cup of coffee or hot chocolate and a friendly chat when he was around.

'You look very young and macho,' I said. 'Are the earrings a new look for KPD? Pasco police have two earrings, so Kennewick cops must have four?'

He grinned at me, and it made him look both older and more innocent. 'I've been working in Seattle for the past few months,' he said. 'I've got a new tattoo, too. Fortunately for me it is somewhere my mother will never see it.'

Tony claimed to live in terror of his mother. I'd never met her myself, but he smelled of happiness not fear when he talked of her, so I knew she couldn't be the harridan he described.

'What brings you to darken my door?' I asked.

'I came to see if you'd look at a car for a friend of mine,' he said.

'Vee-Dub?'

'Buick.'

My eyebrows climbed in surprise. 'I'll take a look, but I'm not set up for American cars – I don't have the computers. He should take it somewhere they know Buicks.'

'*She's* taken it to three different mechanics – replaced the oxygen sensor, spark plugs, and who knows what else. It's still not right. The last guy told her she needed a new engine, which he could do for twice what the car's worth. She doesn't have much money, but she needs the car.'

'I won't charge her for looking, and if I can't fix it, I'll tell her so.' I had a sudden thought, brought on by the edge of anger I heard in his voice when he talked about her problems. 'Is this *your* lady?'

'She's not my lady,' he protested unconvincingly.

For the past three years he'd had his eye on one of the police dispatchers, a widow with a slew of kids. He'd never done anything about it because he loved his job – and his job, he'd said wistfully, was not conducive to dating, marriage, and kids.

'Tell her to bring it by. If she can leave it for a day or two, I'll see if Zee will come by and take a look at it.' Zee, my former boss, had retired when he sold me the place, but he'd come out once in a while to 'keep his hand in.' He knew more about cars and what made them run than a team of Detroit engineers.

'Thanks, Mercy. You're aces.' He checked his watch. 'I've got to go.'

I waved him off, then went back to the transmission. The car cooperated, as they seldom do, so it didn't take me long. By the time my new help emerged clean and garbed in an

old pair of Tad's coveralls, I was starting to put the rest of the car back together. Even the coveralls wouldn't be warm enough outside, but in the shop, with my big space heater going, he should be all right.

He was quick and efficient – he'd obviously spent a few hours under the hood of a car. He didn't stand around watching, but handed me parts before I asked, playing the part of a tool monkey as though it was an accustomed role. Either he was naturally reticent or had learned how to keep his mouth shut because we worked together for a couple of hours mostly in silence. We finished the first car and started on another one before I decided to coax him into talking to me.

'I'm Mercedes,' I said, loosening an alternator bolt. 'What do you want me to call you?'

His eyes lit for a minute. 'Mercedes the Volkswagen mechanic?' His face closed down quickly, and he mumbled, 'Sorry. Bet you've heard that a lot.'

I grinned at him and handed him the bolt I'd taken out and started on the next. 'Yep. But I work on Mercedes, too – anything German-made. Porsche, Audi, BMW, and even the odd Opel or two. Mostly old stuff, out of dealer warranty, though I have the computers for most of the newer ones when they come in.'

I turned my head away from him so I could get a better look at the stubborn second bolt. 'You can call me Mercedes or Mercy, whichever you like. What do you want me to call you?'

I don't like forcing people into a corner where they have to lie to you. If he was a runaway, he probably wouldn't give me a real name, but I needed something better to call him than 'boy' or 'hey, you' if I was going to work with him.

'Call me Mac,' he said after a pause.

The pause was a dead giveaway that it wasn't the name he usually went by. It would do for now.

'Well then, Mac,' I said. 'Would you give the Jetta's owner a call and tell him his car is ready?' I nodded toward the first car we had finished. 'There's an invoice on the printer. His number is on the invoice along with the final cost of the transmission swap. When I get this belt replaced I'll take you to lunch – part of the wages.'

'Okay,' he said, sounding a little lost. He started for the door to the showers but I stopped him. The laundry and shower were in the back of the shop, but the office was on the side of the garage, next to a parking lot customers used.

'The office is straight through the gray door,' I told him. 'There's a cloth next to the phone you can use to hold the receiver so it doesn't get covered with grease.'

I drove home that night and fretted about Mac. I'd paid him for his work in cash and told him he was welcome back. He'd given me a faint smile, tucked the money in a back pocket, and left. I had let him go, knowing that he had nowhere to stay the night because I had no other good options.

I'd have asked him home, but that would have been dangerous for both of us. As little as he seemed to use his nose, eventually he'd figure out what I was – and werewolves, even in human form, do have the strength they're credited with in the old movies. I'm in good shape, and I have a purple belt from the dojo just over the railroad track from my garage, but I'm no match for a werewolf. The boy was too young to have the kind of control he'd need to keep from killing someone his beast would see as a competing predator in his territory.

And then there was my neighbor.

I live in Finley, a rural area about ten minutes from my garage, which is in the older industrial area of Kennewick.

My home is a single-wide trailer almost as old as I am that sits in the middle of a couple of fenced acres. There are a lot of small-acreage properties in Finley with trailers or manufactured homes, but along the river there are also mansions like the one my neighbor lives in.

I turned into my drive with a crunch of gravel and stopped the old diesel Rabbit in front of my home. I noticed the cat carrier sitting on my porch as soon as I got out of the car.

Medea gave me a plaintive yowl, but I picked up the note taped to the top of the carrier and read it before I let her out.

MS THOMPSON, it said in heavy block letters, *PLEASE KEEP YOUR FELINE OFF MY PROPERTY. IF I SEE IT AGAIN, I WILL EAT IT.*

The note was unsigned.

I undid the latch and lifted the cat up and rubbed my face in her rabbitlike fur.

'Did the mean old werewolf stick the poor kitty in the box and leave her?' I asked.

She smelled like my neighbor, which told me that Adam had spent some time with her on his lap before he'd brought her over here. Most cats don't like werewolves – or walkers like me either. Medea likes everyone, poor old cat, even my grumpy neighbor. Which is why she often ended up in the cat carrier on my porch.

Adam Hauptman, who shared my back fence line, was the Alpha of the local werewolf pack. That there was a werewolf pack in the Tri-Cities was something of an anomaly because packs usually settle in bigger places where they can hide better, or, rarely, in smaller places they can take over. But werewolves have a tendency to do well in the military and secret government agencies whose names are all acronyms, and the nuclear power plant complex close by the Hanford site had a lot of alphabet agencies involved in it, one way or another.

Why the Alpha werewolf had chosen to buy land right next to me, I suspect, had as much to do with the werewolf's urge to dominate those they see as lesser beings as it did with the superb riverfront view.

He didn't like having my old single-wide bringing down the value of his sprawling adobe edifice – though, as I sometimes pointed out to him, my trailer was already here when he bought his property and built on it. He also took every opportunity to remind me I was only here on his sufferance: a walker being no real match for a werewolf.

In response to these complaints, I bowed my head, spoke respectfully to his face – usually – and pulled the dilapidated old Rabbit I kept for parts out into my back field where it was clearly visible from Adam's bedroom window.

I was almost certain he wouldn't eat my cat, but I'd leave her inside for the next week or so to give the impression I was cowed by his threat. The trick with werewolves is never to confront them straight on.

Medea mewed, purred, and wagged her stub tail when I set her down and filled her food dish. She'd come to me as a stray, and I'd thought for a while that some abusive person had chopped her tail off, but my vet said she was a Manx and born that way. I gave her one last stroke, then went to my fridge to scrounge something for dinner.

'I'd have brought Mac home if I thought Adam would leave him be,' I told her, 'but werewolves don't take to strangers very well. There's all sorts of protocols they insist upon when a new wolf comes into someone else's territory, and something tells me that Mac hasn't petitioned the pack. A werewolf won't freeze to death sleeping outside, however bad the weather. He'll be all right for a little while.'

'Still,' I said, as I got out some leftover spaghetti to nuke, 'if Mac's in trouble, Adam might help him.' It would be

better to introduce the subject gently when I knew what the boy's story was.

I ate standing up and rinsed out the dish before curling up on the couch and turning on the TV. Medea yowled and jumped on my lap before the first commercial.

Mac didn't come in the next day. It was a Saturday, and he might not know I worked most every Saturday if there were cars to fix. Maybe he'd moved on.

I hoped Adam or one of his wolves hadn't found him before I'd had a chance to break the news of his presence more gently. The rules that allowed werewolves to live undetected among humankind for centuries tended to have fatal consequences for those who broke them.

I worked until noon, then called to tell the nice young couple that their car was a lost cause. Replacing the engine in it would cost them more than the car was worth. Bad news calls were my least favorite job. When Tad, my old assistant, had been around, I'd made him do them. I hung up almost as depressed as the hapless owners of the shiny, decked-out, well-loved car now destined for a boneyard.

I scrubbed up and got as much of the gunk out from under my nails as was going to come and started in on the never-ending paperwork that had also fallen to Tad. I was glad he'd gotten the scholarship that allowed him to head to the Ivy League college of his choice, but I really missed him. After ten minutes, I decided there was nothing that couldn't be put off until Monday. Hopefully by then I'd have an urgent repair, and I'd be able to put off the paperwork until Tuesday.

I changed into clean jeans and a T-shirt, grabbed my jacket, and headed to O'Leary's for lunch. After lunch I did some desultory grocery shopping and bought a small turkey to share with Medea.

My mother called on the cell as I was getting into the car and tried to guilt me into driving up to Portland for Thanksgiving or Christmas. I weaseled my way out of both invitations – I'd had enough of family gatherings in the two years I'd lived with her to last a lifetime.

It's not that they are bad, just the opposite. Curt, my stepfather, is a soft-spoken, no-nonsense sort of person – just the man to balance my mother. I later found out he hadn't known about me until I showed up on his doorstep when I was sixteen. Even so, he opened his house to me without question and treated me as if I were his own.

My mother, Margi, is vivacious and cheerfully flaky. It's not difficult at all envisioning her getting involved with a rodeo rider (like my father) any more than it would be difficult imagining her running off to join the circus. That she is president of her local PTA is far more surprising.

I like my mother and stepfather. I even like all of my half siblings, who had greeted my sudden appearance in their lives with enthusiasm. They all live together in one of those close-knit families that television likes to pretend is normal. I'm very happy to know people like that exist – I just don't belong there.

I visit twice a year so they don't invade my home, and I make certain that it isn't a holiday. Most of my visits are very short. I love them, but I love them better at a distance.

By the time I hung up, I felt guilty and blue. I drove home, put the turkey in the fridge to thaw, and fed the cat. When cleaning the fridge didn't help my mood, though I'm not sure why I expected it to, I got back in the car and drove out to the Hanford Reach.

I don't go out to the Reach often. There are closer places to run, or, if I feel like driving, the Blue Mountains aren't too far away. But sometimes my soul craves the arid, desolate

space of the preserve – especially after I get through talking with my mother.

I parked the car and walked for a while until I was reasonably certain there was no one around. Then I took off my clothes and put them in the small daypack and shifted.

Werewolves can take as much as fifteen minutes to shift shape – and shifting is painful for them, which is something to keep in mind. Werewolves aren't the most friendly animals anyway, but if they've just shifted, it's a good policy to leave them alone for a while.

Walkers' shifting – at least my shifting, because I don't know any other walkers – is quick and painless. One moment I'm a person and the next a coyote: pure magic. I just step from one form into the next.

I rubbed my nose against my foreleg to take away the last tingle of the change. It always takes a moment to adjust to moving on four feet instead of two. I know, because I looked it up, that coyotes have different eyesight than humans, but mine is pretty much the same in either form. My hearing picks up a little and so does my sense of smell, though even in human form I've got better senses than most.

I picked up the backpack, now stuffed with my clothes, and left it under a bunch of scrub. Then I shed the ephemera of my human existence and ran into the desert.

By the time I had chased three rabbits and teased a couple in a boat with a close-up glimpse of my lovely, furred self on the shore of the river, I felt much better. I don't have to change with the moon, but if I go too long on two feet I get restless and moody.

Happily tired, in human shape, and newly clothed, I got into my car and said my usual prayer as I turned the key. This time the diesel engine caught and purred. I never know from day to day if the Rabbit will run. I drive it because it

is cheap, not because it is a good car. There's a lot of truth in the adage that all cars named after animals are lemons.

On Sunday I went to church. My church is so small that it shares its pastor with three other churches. It is one of those nondenominational churches so busy not condemning anyone that it has little power to attract a steady congregation. There are relatively few regulars, and we leave each other mostly alone. Being in a unique position to understand what the world would be like without God and his churches to keep the worst of the evil at bay, I am a faithful attendee.

It's not because of the werewolves. Werewolves can be dangerous if you get in their way; but they'll leave you alone if you are careful. They are no more evil than a grizzly bear or great white shark.

There are other things, though, things that hide in the dark, that are much, much worse – and vampires are only the tip of the iceberg. They are very good at hiding their natures from the human population, but I'm not human. I know them when I meet them, and they know me, too; so I go to church every week.

That Sunday, our pastor was sick and the man who replaced him chose to give a sermon based upon the scripture in Exodus 22: 'Thou shall not suffer a witch to live.' He extended the meaning to encompass the fae, and from him rose a miasma of fear and rage I could sense from my seat. It was people like him who kept the rest of the preternatural community in hiding almost two decades after the lesser fae were forced into the public view.

About thirty years ago, the Gray Lords, the powerful mages who rule the fae, began to be concerned about advances in science – particularly forensic science. They foresaw that the Time of Hiding was coming to an end. They decided to do damage control, and see to it that the

human's realization of the world's magic was as gentle as possible. They awaited the proper opportunity.

When Harlan Kincaid, the elderly billionaire real estate magnate, was found dead near his roses with a pair of garden shears in his neck, suspicion fell upon his gardener Kieran McBride, a quiet-spoken, pleasant-faced man who had worked for Kincaid, a prize-winning gardener himself, for a number of years.

I saw bits of the trial, as most Americans did. The sensational murder of one of the country's wealthiest men, who happened to be married to a beloved, young actress, ensured the highest ratings for the networks.

For several weeks the murder occupied the news channels. The world got to see Carin Kincaid, with tears flowing down her California-tanned cheeks, as she described her reaction to finding her dead husband lying next to his favorite rosebush – which had been hacked to pieces. Her testimony was Oscar-quality, but she was upstaged by what happened next.

Kieran McBride was defended by an expensive team of lawyers who had, amid much publicity, agreed to work pro bono. They called Kieran McBride to the stand and skillfully baited the prosecuting attorney into asking McBride to hold the garden shears in his hand.

He tried. But after only an instant his hands began to smoke before dropping them. At his attorney's request he showed the blistered palms to the jury. He couldn't have been the murderer, the lawyer told the judge, jury, and the rest of the world, because Kieran McBride was fae, a garden sprite, and he couldn't hold cold iron, not even through thick leather gloves.

In a dramatic moment, McBride dropped his glamour, the spell that kept him appearing human. He wasn't beautiful, just the opposite, but anyone who has seen a Shar-pei

puppy knows there is great charisma in a certain sort of ugliness. One of the reasons McBride had been chosen by the Gray Lords was because garden sprites are gentle folk and easy to look at. His sorrowful, overly large brown eyes made the covers of magazines for weeks opposite less-than-flattering pictures of Kincaid's wife, who was later convicted of her husband's death.

And so the lesser fae, the weak and attractive, revealed themselves at the command of the Gray Lords. The great and terrible, the powerful or powerfully ugly, stayed hidden, awaiting the reaction of the world to the more palatable among them. Here, said the Gray Lord's spin doctors who had been McBride's lawyers, here are a hidden people: the gentle brownie who taught kindergarten because she loved children; the young man, a selkie, who risked his life to save the victims of a boating accident.

At first it looked as though the Gray Lords' strategy would pay off for all of us preternaturals, fae or not. There were New York and L.A. restaurants where the rich and famous could be waited on by wood sprites or muryans. Hollywood moguls remade *Peter Pan* using a boy who could actually fly and a real pixie for Tinkerbell – the resulting film made box office records.

But even at the beginning there was trouble. A well-known televangelist seized upon fear of the fae to increase his grip over his flock and their bank accounts. Conservative legislators began making noise about a registration policy. The government agencies began quietly making lists of fae they thought they could use – or who might be used against them, because throughout Europe and parts of Asia, the lesser fae were forced out of hiding by the Gray Lords.

When the Gray Lords told Zee, my old boss, that he had to come out five or six years ago, Zee sold the garage to me and retired for a few months first. He'd seen what happened

to some of the fae who tried to continue their lives as if nothing had happened.

It was all right for a fae to be an entertainer or a tourist attraction, but the brownie kindergarten teacher was quietly pensioned off. No one wanted a fae for a teacher, a mechanic, or a neighbor.

Fae who lived in upscale suburbs had windows broken and rude graffiti painted on their homes. Those who lived in less law-abiding places were mugged and beaten. They couldn't defend themselves for fear of the Gray Lords. Whatever the humans did to them, the Gray Lords would do worse.

The wave of violence prompted the creation of four large reservations for fae. Zee told me that there were fae in the government who saw the reservations as damage control and used fair means and foul to convince the rest of Congress.

If a fae agreed to live on a reservation, he was given a small house and a monthly stipend. Their children (like Zee's son Tad) were given scholarships to good universities where they might become useful members of society . . . if they could find jobs.

The reservations sparked a lot of controversy on both sides. Personally, I thought the Gray Lords and the government might have paid more attention to the innumerable problems of the Native American reservations – but Zee was convinced the reservations were only a first step in the Gray Lords' plans. I knew just enough about them to admit he might be right – but I worried anyway. Whatever ills it created, the reservation system had lessened the growing problems between the human and fae, at least in the US.

People like the visiting pastor, though, were proof that prejudice and hatred were alive and well. Someone behind me muttered that he hoped Pastor Julio recovered before next week, and a round of mumbled agreement cheered me a little.

I've heard of people who've seen angels or felt their presence. I don't know if it is God or one of his angels I sense, but there is a welcoming presence in most churches. As the pastor continued with his fear-driven speech, I could feel that spirit's growing sadness.

The pastor shook my hand as I left the building.

I am not fae, broad though that term is. My magic comes from North America not Europe, and I have no glamour (or need of it) to allow me to blend with the human population. Even so, this man would have hated me had he known what I was.

I smiled at him, thanked him for the service, and wished him well. Love thy enemies, it says in the scriptures. My foster mother always added, 'At the very least, you will be polite to them.'