

Changed

Skyla Dawn Cameron

1.

River

I'd always felt weird riding in a car.

I didn't like the sensation of movement without my legs doing the actual moving. It was unsettling. Coltrane, my dog, didn't like it either. Whined and cried a lot. And the humans were always making faces, saying stupid things like, "Oh, we'll be there soon!" That didn't matter to Coltrane anymore than it mattered to me. Riding in a car was like being carried by something that wouldn't listen to you. It felt like being out of control.

And we're never in control of our lives anyways. People or animals. Coltrane couldn't help where I dragged him. I couldn't help where I lived or what I did with my time. As much as it sucked being a human, it would still suck to be a wolf, too. People would build over my home. Hunt me.

But maybe my weird werewolf brain just made too many big connections to something stupid like riding in a car. I was way too human sometimes.

I pushed the lever-y thing so that my seat moved backward, then pulled my feet up to rest on the dashboard. My bare toes had gotten cold, but the afternoon sun streaming through the windshield warmed them.

"I think it's dangerous to sit like that."

I glanced over at Daryl. He hadn't taken his eyes off of the road while reprimanding me.

"Seatbelt is on." I tugged the belt across my chest, proving it was secure. "And it's daylight. Not dangerous." I wiggled my toes in the sun.

"You're a brat."

"That's why you love me."

"Oh, is it?" His dark gaze flickered my way and I thought I saw him smile a little.

That relieved me. Him smiling, that is. Somehow, last year, after everything that happened I got him to come back around. But it wasn't easy. Months and months went by, but he never really was the same. I guess, when someone dies like that, you don't ever really come back after that. Not completely.

But there were smiles here and there. I remembered every one, and little by little, they eased my worry for him.

“You glad school's almost done?”

I gave him a look. “That's a stupid question. You sound like Frank. You're not my dad.”

“Well, we go away for the weekend, and you didn't mention school once. I thought that meant something bad happened.”

I shrugged. Since when did anything good happen? “They made us do a career thing.”

“Career thing?”

“Answer questions. A test. Even the SpEd kids had to. Usually they let me get out of those things. I can't go to college.”

“Why?”

“Because Frank and Cindy shouldn't pay money for me to go somewhere that I'll get kicked out of for disorderly conduct.”

“Disorderly conduct?”

“Yeah, I learned that one the other day.”

He shook his head and sighed. “So what did it say?”

“Huh?”

“The test.”

“Oh.” I stretched my back and wiggled my toes some more. I didn't want to talk about it. “That.”

“Riv?”

Stupid Daryl, always making me tell the truth. “Guidance counsellor.”

“The guidance counsellor made you...? Wait, they want you to be a guidance counsellor?”

I wished I had something to throw at him. “Shut up.”

“Well, it kinda makes sense.”

“No, it doesn’t. It’s stupid.”

“But you’re good at helping people,” he said. Annoyingly.

“Don’t want to help people. Want to run people through wood chippers because people suck.”

“Where’d you hear of wood chippers?”

My bottom lip turned into a pout. He knew me too well. “Movie Cindy was watching.”

“Jewel wants you to come over for dinner tomorrow night.”

I had no idea how he could tolerate living with a deer. I guess he didn’t have a choice, though. He couldn’t afford college yet, so he and Jewel rented a townhouse and he helped with her baby. It was an awful, smelly thing and I hated it. Daryl said that wasn’t very nice to say, but it probably smelled bad to him too. Imagine a human baby smell plus deer. I was torn between wanting to eat it and feeling like throwing up.

“Are we cooking her spawn? Maybe with gravy?”

“Son, River. We call little boys ‘sons’.”

They could call it whatever they liked—it didn’t make it any less creepy to me.

“Don’t wanna go. We can go do something instead.”

“You know she’s almost like my sister.”

I rolled my eyes—he was just as weird as the weredoe. “We should go for a jog at the park. At night. And play tag.”

Last time we did that, it turned into something that didn’t involve tag, and it was a lot more enjoyable than having dinner with deer.