As the full moon approached, the second tea party came and went, with Olivia putting in a perfunctory appearance. Grace had been absent, and Olivia had been preoccupied with her work on the house. She'd started the week with good intentions, picking up where she'd left off with her campaign against her wrecked bedroom. She'd already wrenched up the old carpet, aired out the unpleasant mix of wet dog and incontinent cat, then filled and sanded the deep scratches in the woodwork. It felt good to fight against grime and old paint and soggy wallpaper, which gradually relented under her efforts. She even got as far as painting primer onto the woodwork, before the muse struck.

She couldn't ignore it. Leaving her paintbrush in the tin of primer, she sprinted down the hallway to fetch notebook and pen. It'd only be a few minutes while she wrote down a few notes. Sitting on the floor amongst the curls of torn wallpaper, all the right words unexpectedly took shape on the page. She scribbled furiously to keep up with the thoughts and images tumbling through her mind. The paintbrush, forgotten, slowly congealed in the tin of primer.

"What are your plans for this evening, then?"

Verity's tone had been too interrogative to safely ignore, and Olivia paused briefly in her frantic writing, glancing up. "Hm?" Olivia endeavoured to appear politely interested in Verity's question while committing the last of her ideas to paper.

"This evening. Are you meeting up with Grace," Verity spat. "Or are you staying home for it?"

"What?"

"It's the full moon tomorrow night, so you need looking after by someone who actually remembers what that means."

"Oh. Already?"

The muse evaporated like smoke from a snuffed out candle, and Olivia closed her notebook. Grace's
hastily imparted advice came back to her only in scraps. She'd advised Olivia to call in to work sick and stay home in case it came on suddenly or went badly but it had been her day off anyway. Grace had urged her to stay in her room where she wouldn't be a danger to anybody if she became disoriented or upset, and had even recommended that she lock the bedroom door.

"I'll be staying home, I suppose."

Grace had given a hundred and one snippets of advice just before she'd stepped out of Olivia's life. Something about staying away from alcohol, and something else about drinking plenty of water, or was that something someone had told her when she'd been having problems with headaches? Olivia got up, paced, listened to the echo of her footfalls in the hollow shell of the room. Pausing by the window, she watched bulletpoints of rain rattling down the glass. Through the grey mist of its falling she could see the yew tree in the graveyard, and a pinpoint of orange light in the shadows gave away the solitary figure standing there.

"There's cake, if you want some," said Verity, her voice soft, her usually bright eyes downcast - perhaps about to apologise for her earlier unfriendly behaviour. "I brought you a slice, so you don't even have to come downstairs with us if you don't want to." Ah, so there was the catch. "Don't worry, it's our second attempt and it turned out much better this time."

Olivia suppressed a grimace. Verity had been 'helping' Imogen bake, which inevitably meant a horrible mess in the kitchen. "Thank you," she said, taking the offered slice.

"Bye," said Verity, in not much more than a whisper, and turned to leave. She paused in the doorway. "I'll thank Imogen on your behalf, shall I?" She sighed dramatically. "And she so hoped she'd get to spend more time with you now that you've come to live here."

"All right, all right!" Olivia surrendered. "I'll come downstairs and have tea and cake with the two of you. But first you have to tell me something."

Verity's eyes narrowed as she gave Olivia a suspicious sidelong glance. "Go on."

Olivia didn't know how to describe the prickling feeling of being not entirely wanted. "I feel a bit out of place around some of Auntie Imogen's new friends. It's the werewolf thing, isn't it?"

Verity glanced out of the window at the shadows of the trees. "Just a few of the older ones don't like things they don't understand. It's nothing."

"It doesn't feel like nothing," Olivia persisted. "If you tell me the problem, maybe I can do something
about it." Change. Be better. Take more of an interest, or mind my own business.

"It's not something you can do anything about," said Verity. She took a deep breath and explained: "Werewolves have it easy, don't you think? You can blend in with the living almost any time you want, so long as you plan carefully and remember not to stare at things they can't see. You can take their side, or our side, however it suits you. If you can't see why that would cause ill-feeling and mistrust, I can't put it any more simply. It's not any better for me, you know."

Olivia nodded: she thought she understood. "It's nothing personal?"

"It is nothing personal," Verity assured her huffily. "Now come downstairs and have some cake with your auntie who thinks the sun shines out of your behind, werewolf or not."

Olivia had to admit the cake had been a success, and she hadn't realised how much her muscles ached until she sank into the softness of the sofa. Still, the world's most decadent gateau and the most luxurious sofa that money could buy wouldn't have made up for the fact that she was spending her time in the same room as Eli. She settled into a position where she could pretend to be quietly dozing off, opting out of any conversation. With her head tucked into the crook of her arm and her eyes half closed, she could see he kept glancing at her, and she kept having to unclench her jaw to better give the illusion of restfulness.

Auntie Imogen, on the other hand, was an island of contentment, sinking further and further into the comfortable depths of her favourite chair. For the first time, she'd been able to surround herself with something that almost resembled a proper family. It didn't matter that it had come to her so late in life that it was actually her afterlife. Finally she had Eli (or Constantin, or whoever he really was) come home to stay, along with her favourite niece, the sister she'd never known in life, and more cats than ever. Not that there were many cats around that night, apart from the jaguar-patterned ghost cat perched on Eli's shoulder.

Auntie Imogen's serene expression turned to a frown when she glanced across at Olivia. "Are you feeling all right, love?"

Olivia looked up sleepily. "Mm? Just tired."

"Ah, you've been working so hard lately. Poor thing, just look at those dark circles under her eyes, Verity. You could pitch in with the decorating, couldn't you?"

"That's really not necessary, Auntie," Olivia cut in before Verity could open her mouth. She closed her eyes, wondering if she ought to go to bed.
At the hiss of curtain rings, she looked up to see Verity loitering by the window, watching the dark sky anxiously. She sighed, and huffed, and paced up and down. "Is the moon up?" she asked plaintively, twitching the dingy net curtains. "I can't see."

"No," Eli didn't look up from his newspaper. "Not yet."

"How can you tell? It's all cloudy, and the trees are so high..."

Auntie Imogen patted Olivia on the hand, running a cold shiver up her arm. "You go to bed if you need to, love," she whispered. "You don't need to stay up with us. It's good just to know you're home."

Olivia shook her head. She didn't enjoy the thought of spending the whole evening in an empty shell of a room, with no distractions from whatever awaited her at moonrise.

"You're looking very pale," said Auntie Imogen. "Is it..." she lowered her voice to an embarrassed whisper, "...is this a werewolf thing?"

"I don't know," Olivia admitted. Maybe she'd just been working too hard, or maybe she was coming down with a cold. She didn't like the way Auntie Imogen had said the word 'werewolf' as if it was some socially embarrassing disease.

"Your friend Grace didn't say anything about it, then? She left in quite a hurry, didn't she?"

"Her boyfriend died. She was upset and some people weren't likely to help matters."

Verity, leaning over Eli's shoulder opposite the ghost cat and 'helping' him with a crossword, didn't miss this comment. "Oh, blame me, why don't you. I know it's me you're talking about over there. Ah! Nine Down!" She stabbed at the newspaper in a manner vicious enough to make Eli flinch. "Verident'."

"That's not a word."

"Yes it is, it's a synonym for green. Trust me, I have a marvellous vocabulary."

Eli, scowling at the page, tapped his pen against his front teeth. "Doesn't fit."

"Yes it..." Verity leaned closer, squinting. "Oh. Hmm."
"She means 'verdant', I expect," said Olivia, despite her reluctance to join in.

Pen scratched on paper. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked sporadically.

"Ooh!" Verity squealed, making the ghost cat dig his claws in, "I know that one too! Seventeen Across: 'Beaulieu'."

Eli waved the ghost cat away, and it disappeared like smoke on the breeze.

"No, you're spelling it wrong, look:" Quick as a flash, Verity grabbed the pen out of his hand, diving in to write down the answer.

"Verity!" Imogen scolded, "You are not a cat., get out of that poor man's lap!"

"Get off me," Eli snarled, pushing away a faceful of the thick black curls of Verity's hair. "Go and play with matches."

"Verity," Imogen warned. "Let him have his pen back, dear."

"No! He's spelled it completely wrong and I'm trying to fix it if he'd just..."

"I'm going out for a walk," Olivia announced. Nobody seemed to hear her, and she hurried out, grabbing her coat and stepping out of the back door into the refreshing chill of the early evening. The rain had eased to nothing more than the finest silver drizzle but she realised she'd better keep moving if she didn't want her tired muscles to stiffen up. She circled the graveyard a couple of times, the warm light glowing from the vicarage windows drawing her eye. It was too late in the day to impose on Reverend Milton's hospitality, though, and she wasn't sure she wanted company. Despite the stiff breeze spraying a fine mist of rain onto her face, she felt overheated and confined in her winter coat. Her chest felt tight, and her skin prickled all over. She scratched irritably at her arm, and a flash of white light caught the glass of her wristwatch. She turned, glancing up in to the patchy overcast sky, just as the bright white circle of the moon drifted from behind the clouds.