

fools. She'd had to disabuse her eldest son of his notion such behavior was acceptable or appropriate.

"We have only a few hours of night left to us. Nathaniel, you will take Daisy to the cottage to wait out the day." Valerie turned her attention to the tall man standing in the courtyard above.

"Jared," she said, and he came instantly to her side. "Please provide them with four pints to share between them—Nathaniel, I assume you have not fed tonight—and the keys to the cottage." With a polite smile she explained, "I would rather not have to keep replacing windows and locks."

Valerie placed her hands upon Daisy's as if they were old friends. The broad, once tanned hands of the Queen encircled Daisy's tiny fingers. "Daisy, my dear, it has been most *intriguing* to have met you. Do mind what Nathaniel tells you for now, and we shall reconvene here in, let's say, four nights?" She looked up at the sky for a moment, and then back again. "Yes, four nights." The short-haired woman hovering near the Queen, brushed a feather's touch across Valerie's exposed neck. They linked arms and walked inside the house.

Jared met with Nathaniel and Daisy, handed them a small cloth bag filled with pints of blood, and he slipped Daisy a pair of keys on a single chain. "A pleasure, Madame," he said and bowed from the neck.

"To you as well," Daisy replied, and gave his hand another pat. As the pair exited through the path along the side of the house, Daisy could hear the whispers fill the night air again, mingling with the song of the cicadas.

Once down the street, Nathaniel shook his head. "It's not right," he said.

"For once, I agree. To force me to stay with you!" Daisy said.

Nathaniel stopped up short. "No," he said, sounding hurt. "You, you're not right."

"What? Why? Because I won't drink human blood?"