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Must Love Dogs

R. J. Davies



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Wiping the steamy mirror, he could see his eyes burning back at him. It was the shadow of him, a face that he no longer recognized. A lot of things have happened in the past year. A lot of adjustments have been made. A few friends were lost. Isolation was his only companion. Every time he looked in the mirror it was a ghost of a man, of himself staring back, like a dream fading away. Someone he didn't and couldn't recognize any longer.

It was the reason he decided to go out on a blind date; it was the reason he signed up to the dating site. He just needed to get out there and meet people to feel real again, to feel normal, to feel human. It wasn't that he wasn't real. He knew he was real he knew it every day he looked in the mirror at himself. Lately there was just something missing.

Staring back, he wondered. "Are you crazy?" he asked himself. "Maybe you are, and you just don't know it? If you are crazy, would you know it?"

Would he know it? If he was crazy, maybe he was crazy? His situation was crazy. There was no normal girl in the world that would understand him. How could they? It was crazy! But did that make him crazy? Yes, sometimes his situation really made him crazy. But was he crazy?

"Am I crazy?" he stared wide-eyed at himself. Then he laughed, "Crazy people probably don't think they are crazy."

He headed to his bedroom to get dressed. "But if I don't think I'm crazy maybe I am crazy? A crazy paradox?" He mused, "let it go Jack, just let it go."

Quickly pulling on his black denim jeans searched his closet for the light baby blue dress shirt. It brought the blue in his eyes out. At least that's what his last girlfriend said, it was the

night before she packed her bags and left him. She had enough of his secrets. He had a few secrets. There were some things a person couldn't reveal about themselves even to their lovers. Maybe that was his shadow self, talking? The shadow self was the darkest part of a person. His shadow self was more than just a shadow, it was a beast that lurked within him. He could feel that part of him pacing back and forth deep in his soul. There was a beast within him that fought for its freedom. The beast was impatient, and it came out once a month. When it did it went on a rampage. No one was safe. Did he kill anyone? He was suspicious that he might have. He had woken up with blood all over his body on more than one occasion.

“Okay buddy, shake it off. Put your game face on. It's a date Jack; it's just a date.”

He checked himself in the mirror, added a little cologne and ran a brush through his hair again. It didn't matter how many times he had done it. It still looked a little disheveled. There was nothing he could do with it, he wanted to look nice, but chances of a second date were slim, next to nothing. They never went anywhere. He still tortured himself. Slipping his shoes on before he changed his mind, he grabbed his jacket, keys and wallet and then left his apartment locking the door behind him.

It was a short walk to the restaurant where he was meeting Sasha Longfellow. Her name sounded made up, but that's who she said she was. The air felt cool on his heated skin. His palms felt sweaty and warm. His throat was feeling tight all of a sudden, he was having trouble breathing.

Trying to clear his throat he swallowed hard and felt his heart racing. Okay this was how it was. Just like the last one he went on. He almost had a heart attack and passed out over drinks. It's supposed to get easier, the more he went on. He had been on so many; he was becoming an expert.

A monk, he could give up women all together and be a monk. Becoming a priest, or a monk, or signing up for any other religion that required taking a vow of celibacy. Giving sex up altogether was something that didn't appealed to him either however these date things were really taking a toll. His mouth felt so dry and his palms were sweating. The back of his neck was sweating! Why was the back of his neck sweating? Just one hour from now he would be in a better place. He would have the introductions over, they would be eating and she would be deciding on whether she wanted to stay for desert or to go dancing or even go back to his place. Oh god that brought on a whole new set of things to agonized over. What if she wanted to go back to his place? It was clean, he had protection. Tonight wasn't a full moon. He never dated on a full moon night.

Standing outside the restaurant, he really wanted to slap himself to snap out of this. "Focus," he growled at himself. "Just focus and breathe don't forget to breathe."

"Are you meeting someone here tonight?" a soft voice asked, a head tried to peek into the same restaurant.

"Yeah," he croaked.

"Me too, I hope he's not a loser. The guys I have dated recently have all been losers."

"Yeah, join the club," he couldn't look at her. Whoever she was felt the same way he had. His throat felt so dry. He needed a drink. Maybe he would go get a quick drink at the bar before his date got there. "Come on I'll buy you a drink until our dates get here."

"Sounds good," the woman was nervously looking around. She didn't look at him until they were sitting at the bar.

They ordered drinks, he gulped his back and asked for another one. She turned, facing him and laughed.

“What? Do I have snot hanging off my face or something?” that would be just great. It might still be a better night than some of his dates even with snot hanging off his face.

“No but hi, I’m Sasha Longfellow.” She held out her hand.

He shook it and smiled. “Nice to meet you,” he nodded to the bartender for another.

“God, I hope she gets here soon to get this over with.”

“Well, it’s your lucky day.” The girl beside him chuckled.

“How’s that?” he took his new drink and slugged it back, looking around the room, looking for his date.

“I’m here. I’m your date.”

“You, you’re,” he paused.

The very pretty brunette smiled at him. “Yup, surprise.”

“Holy crap, ah I mean, well, I um,” he prayed a hole in the floor would open up and swallow him whole. What were the odds? Had he been thinking he might have noticed her when they were standing outside! Her green eyes were striking. Her smile warm, bright, friendly and very inviting, he liked her so far.

“Let’s get a table so this excruciating moment can continue,” she teased.

He nodded and followed her. His cheeks were flaring up unless they turned up the heat within the past few seconds it was extremely hot in the restaurant. Sasha looked amazing. They sat down and she reached across the table and grabbed his hand.

“Breathe, remember to breathe,” her eyes lit up as she smiled at him.

He nervously laughed and reminded himself in an hour this would be over. She would be heading home, and he would be heading back to his apartment alone. Women like her didn’t go home with men like him after the first date.

“Must love dogs, I really like that. What kind of dog do you own?” she asked.

Gulping back the rest of his drink he cleared his throat and smiled. “I don’t, not really. I used that to convey a dog lover’s image. Like loyalty, friendship, etc, those trigger words you think of when you hear the word dog.” Plus, I’m a werewolf, he added to himself.

“Oh, I see.”

“Do you have a dog?” he asked.

“In a way yes,” she smiled

“Oh, nice what kind?” he tried hard not to sound so nervous.

“Wolf like,” she looked uncomfortable.

“What’s his name?”

“Wolf.” She looked away. “Let’s order?”

“Sure,” he was grateful for the distraction. They ordered and then continued with some small talk. They had similar likes and dislikes. She got some extra points for owning a wolf-like dog.

They took their time and ordered dessert and were sipping coffee when a waiter came over to them. “We’re closing in ten minutes is there anything else I can get you?”

Jack blinked and looked at his watch they had been there all night, and it was going on one am. “Sasha?”

She shook her head no and smiled at him.

“No just the bill thanks,” he looked back at her. After the initial date thing wore off it was like spending time with an old friend he hadn’t seen in a while.

The waiter slipped him a bill then discretely disappeared.

“Well, I have to say when I first got here, I was a little worried.” She laughed.

“Yes, me too. You’re great. Can I see you again?”

“Are you ditching me?”

“I’m sorry?” he felt like he was missing something.

“Let’s go back to my place or your place and continue. I don’t want this night to end. If you haven’t noticed Jack, I like you.”

“I like you too.” Then he thought about the blood. Swallowing hard he reminded himself it only happened on full moon nights. Tonight, Sasha will be safe. “Alright I just live around the corner want to stop by my place?”

“Sounds good, lead the way,” she got up and grabbed her coat.

He paid for their evening and held the door open for her. Once outside in the early morning air, it was crisp and chilly. They didn’t take their time strolling, it was a brisk short walk. He ushered her through the lobby and up the stairs.

Once inside his nice warm apartment he took her coat and they kicked off their shoes. He went to put the kettle on for tea, and she found some soft music to play. It was as if she was coming over all the time. He brought her a cup of tea in, and they began to warm up.

“Tea?” she looked at him with a grin.

“It’s cold outside. Coffee would keep us up all night and I drank the last of the alcohol before I left to meet you, sorry.”

“And being up all night would be bad how?” she teased him.

He laughed. “I can put a pot of coffee on if you like.”

“No, I actually love tea. Thank you for picking up on the hints tonight.”

“Thank you for giving them.”

She sat on his sofa. He sat down across from her in the chair.

“What are you doing over there?”

“I don’t know what I was thinking,” he got up grinning and sat down beside her. She leaned in.

“You smell really good,” her warm breath caressed and teased his skin; she pulled back and looked him in the eyes.

“So, do you. I have this urge to pee on you to mark my territory like an animal.”

“I’ll break your legs.” She laughed. Then leaned over and kissed him. Pulling back just a bit, their noses still touching, her lips just millimeters from his. Looking at him, she whispered, “I know what you mean though. Am I dreaming?”

“That’s what I was thinking,” he leaned forward until their lips were pressing against each other. “Don’t wake me up.”

“What do you mean? Literally like in the morning? Or figuratively?” she giggled.

“Both,” he bit her lip gently.

She retaliated and they moved their play into the bedroom.

The next three weeks they were inseparable. It was a full moon night, what was he going to do? He wanted to tell her, but that would ruin everything. She wouldn’t want anything to do with him. She would think he was crazy. Crazy, it was an ongoing conversation he had with himself about the subject of his sanity.

He had to make an excuse, but what? What would be believable? This woman was amazing. She was everything he ever wanted in a woman. Normal people didn’t believe that there were werewolves. Normal people would never have to worry about this. Why couldn’t he just be normal?

He would die if anything happened to her because of him. She couldn't be around him when he went through the change. In the morning he would be back to being normal again. Tonight, he had to find a valid excuse for not being able to hang out with her tonight. He had agonized over it all week long.

Sasha Longfellow was the nicest, the sweetest and so intelligent, she was the perfect woman for him. She was normal. He really wanted some normal in his life.

His cell rang. Looking down, it was a picture of her face on the screen. She was calling to make plans for this evening. If he didn't answer the phone now it would mean he would have to call her back. No, it was better to get it over with fast.

"Hi babes," he answered.

"Hey honey, I know you were looking forward to getting together tonight, but a friend of mine is going through something and kind of needs me tonight. Can we get together tomorrow night?"

"Uh sure, I completely understand." He had never felt so relieved in all of his life. Problem solved!

"I'll try to call you later, but if I don't, please don't take it personally. She's a real head case so I might not get a chance to call you or talk to you at all tonight. Sorry I gotta go."

"I understand baby, I love you and will see you tomorrow night. Take care."

"You are the best. Love you too." She hung up.

The next six months he didn't have to make any excuses up. Each night when it was a full moon, Sasha was either out-of-town on business, or her friend had called her and needed a shoulder to cry on. It was perfect.

He woke up in the woods and got dressed then headed home. After getting out of the shower he felt full, which meant he must have eaten something last night. Hopefully it was wildlife and not some unsuspecting campers.

“Oh, please don’t be campers,” he groaned turning the news on to see if he had made the news.

There was a knock at his door. He went over and opened it. Sasha looked nervous. She came in and headed for the kitchen. Grabbing coffee and some toast she was pacing back and forth.

“Why do you always have to smell so good?” she groaned. Rolling her eyes, she stopped. “We need to stop seeing each other. I can’t do this anymore. You are an amazing guy, but I can’t see you.”

“Why?” he felt like someone had just kicked him in the stomach.

“There are just some things that can’t be said. I have this thing and I can’t have it passed on to you.”

“Well, I have this theory about being crazy.”

“What?” she looked at him as if he just told her he had three arms or something else strange.

“Yes, there is this theory about being crazy ...”

She interrupted him. “God, I wish it was something like that.”

“You know sometimes there are some secrets that are best left that way. I have mine and you have yours. We make each other happy. Why rock the boat.”

“What are you saying?”

“I mean I know you have feelings for me I have some for you and whatever it is that has you crazy just don’t think about it.”

“You have secrets from me?”

He laughed. “Just like you have something that you can’t tell me about, right?”

“I guess.” She hesitated.

“I don’t have another woman stashed away. I’m not doing anything criminal,” he hoped.

“I’m a werewolf!” she shouted.

“I’m sorry what?” he thought she said werewolf.

“Haven’t you noticed? Every time there is a full moon, I’m busy?”

Now it was his turn to be suspicious. Was she a hunter? Oh god that would be his luck. Find an amazing woman and she hunts his kind down. Was she toying with him now? She must have found out what he was. There was no way she was a werewolf. He would have noticed, wouldn’t he?

“There is no such thing,” he heard himself saying.

“Oh, there is, and I am one! I wish I didn’t have to say this to you. I just really like you. I love you and I just can’t take it anymore.”

“I see.”

“You see what?”

“Okay so you are a werewolf, when did it happen? How does something like that happen?”

“I was bitten a few years ago.”

It was going on three years for him. “So, you change into a hairy monster every time there is a full moon. That’s what you are saying to me?”

“Yes,” she couldn’t look at him. “I have never told anyone about this.”

“And you shouldn’t either ever.”

“I’m not crazy.”

“I didn’t say you were.”

“It really happens.”

“I am not saying you are lying.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m really not sure.”

She looked at him and he saw fear in her eyes. Was this a trap? It felt like a trap. He had to be careful don’t tell her you’re one too idiot! The shadow self was grinning in delight there was danger and a question of whether she was setting him up for a trap. It really felt like a trap. Then again, he did have some trust issues.

“I completely understand if you don’t want to see me again.”

“Why did you take such a risk and tell me in the first place?”

She looked away. Tears filled her eyes. He watched her swallow and sniffed back a couple tears before whispering, “I love you.”

He didn’t know what to say. It’s a trap! His shadow self-giggled with glee. There was no question about it. It was such a delicious, beautiful trap. Did he take the bait or run?

She closed her eyes tight and wiped her tears away. Should he reach out to her? Should he confess he had feelings for her too? Did he really have feelings for her? Yes, that was already established he reminded himself. What did he do? Standing there like an idiot wasn’t really helping.

There was such hurt in her eyes he didn't want to see it there but didn't know what to do to remove it. She turned and ran out of his apartment.

"Sasha wait!" he called after her but she was already down the stairs when he got to the door.

Maybe she was a werewolf after all she was pretty quick on her feet. Racing back inside he ran to the window to yell after her, but she was already halfway down the street. She was gone.

You're better off without her, his shadow self, conceded. She was only going to bring trouble. She is trouble! A werewolf? How did she find out he was one? He hadn't done anything, did he? God, he hoped he wasn't talking in his sleep again. She had to have an insight into the fact that he was a werewolf and concocted this story. She was trying to draw him out. Don't chase after her, his shadow self, warned. No good can come from it. Next time we change we can hunt her down and kill her for lying to us. No, he was not a killer. Why was he arguing with himself?

"Because you're crazy?" he whispered. Maybe he was crazy after all? Either he was crazy or being a werewolf was making him crazy. He wondered how many more werewolves were there? Was it possible to find a mate? To find a real, live, werewolf mate? What if Sasha was his chance? What if that was his one shot of finding a real mate? He really loved her.

"A trap you fool!" he growled to himself. It had to be a trap. What were the odds of him finding someone who was so compatible in every sense he needed?

He spent the rest of the day brooding about Sasha. Then he found himself outside her apartment standing in the shadows watching her window. She was home alone from what he saw, she wasn't having a party nor was she celebrating anything. None the less, he just stood there and

watched until she went to bed around one. He had been at her place more than once, a few times since they had started dating. There wasn't anything that he could remember that would indicate she was working undercover for anyone.

Sasha Longfellow came out the front door! He saw her leaving her apartment. Where was she going in the middle of the night? He decided to follow her but kept a distance. If she really was a werewolf, she would sense someone following her, wouldn't she?

Now she was going to lead him to whoever she was working for! He was ready for it. He would bust in and show them who was boss. Couldn't mess with his feelings and get away with it. Someone was going to pay for messing with him and his feelings. He would bite their throats out. She stopped and was looking up. Looking around he realized she was standing outside his place. How odd. What was she up to? Was she going to call and alert, whoever she was working for that he was ready for ... whatever they were planning?

Confront her! Bite her head off! His shadow self had its fur up on end. Ready for battle! He watched for an hour she didn't move from her spot she made no movement as to call anyone on her cell. What was she waiting for? What was he waiting for?

He crept up behind her and stood just one foot behind her watching her. She didn't move. He could hear her sobbing. Why was she crying? There was nothing worse than a woman crying. Even his shadow self who wanted to rip her head off was quiet and seemed to have disappeared back in the dark shadows of his mind. Stepping closer until he was right behind her. Reaching out he touched her shoulder.

She jumped and screamed. He laughed and felt bad for that too.

"Sorry," he held out a hand to her.

Sasha looked at him and flung her arms around him. Sobbing into his coat she clung to him. He was going to have to wash it later to get the werewolf tears and snot off it. He noticed having her arms around him felt so good. Please don't be a trap.

Once she calmed down, he took her for a walk into the park. It was really dark there and if things got out of hand, he could deal with her there without any witnesses. They stopped and sat down on a bench. She snuggled up to him. He wrapped an arm around her.

"So, who are you working for?"

"You know where I work," she didn't move.

"I know where you told me you work, but who are you working for?"

She pulled away and looked at him confused. "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean."

"No, I don't think I do. Spell it out for me please."

"You claim to be a werewolf, so I'll drop my guard, but I'm on to you. I won't hurt you if you tell me who you are working for." He grabbed her arm and held it firmly.

"You're scaring me, Jack. I don't know what you're talking about?"

He laughed, but the humour didn't reach his eyes. Glaring at her he decided he wasn't going to leave the park without the answers he was looking for. "You're not a werewolf I get it."

"But I am Jack! I really am."

"Stop lying to me!" he growled. "I am a werewolf and I need to find out who you are working for."

"What?" her face dropped as she looked at him. Then her eyes lit up and she flung her free arm around his neck. "Really? This is the happiest day of my life." She kissed his cheek and then his mouth.

Was she really a werewolf? Did he have it wrong? No don't trust her Jack, his shadow self was back. She is trying to get you to drop your guard. She's working with someone you need to find out who Jack!

Swallowing hard he really wanted to believe her more than anything else in the world, but there was a part of him that was scared to give in to it. If he did, what did that mean? Trust, loyalty, friendship, lovers, it was a must love dogs thing.

"I scratched you when we were having sex a while back, I know. It was my fault, wasn't it?" she looked a little sad.

"No, I was one before I met you. So, you really didn't know I was one?"

"I was suspicious but then couldn't allow myself to get my hopes up. I wanted you to be one so bad."

Just kill her Jack! His shadow self was shouting. No one would blame you, kill her dead! "Do you ever hear a little voice inside your head telling you to do things?"

She laughed nervously. "Sometimes, but it's usually just to keep me safe."

"Oh yes that is one way to interpret it," he smiled. Then again maybe he was just crazy! Fine Jack, keep her alive a little longer, but you will have to kill her eventually you know that right? Jack, I know you can hear me. Sasha Longfellow will die soon. He kissed her and prayed that he wasn't crazy and that he could control his inner beast, his shadow self.