

## ***Lunar Light* by Penelope Fletcher**

*Monsters should not walk the daylight, they should cower in the dark. When the full moon haunts the sky, Evangeline prowls the dark as a Wendigo; a fearsome mix of human and beast. The night an injured outcast falls into her claws she must defy her keeper, the laws of nature and her own morality to protect him from the Hunter who wants his head as a trophy. Struggling to reconcile her cannibalistic urges and gentle temperament, Evangeline must move beyond the ancient curse of her ancestors blood, and become legend.*

*A Beautiful Damned Novella.  
Dark Adult Paranormal Romance.*

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### CHAPTER ONE

#### ***Evangeline***

You shouldn't play with food. It is rude, and barbaric, and there is nothing to be had but carnal gratification for the feral.

Lazily dragging a fingernail down the young woman's back, I grimaced at the delight the simple movement evoked. The faint pop as her skin split and the gush of blood that welled to trickle down her peachy skin in thick rivulets was ... positively decadent. I could be creative when I wanted to be.

Blonde head thrashing, arms and legs jerking, she screamed. The sound was feeble and desperate. My heart leaped and pounded hard, making the urge to fool around with her harder to control.

You shouldn't play with food, but that didn't mean you couldn't.

My conscience got the better of me, and placing my hand to the nape of her neck I pushed down, crushing her larynx, savoring each snap and crack as her bones shattered. Her jerking stopped.

Dead food was boring food, but it was a balm to my ragged morality. Using my other hand to rip apart her thermal clothing, I clamped my mouth down on her side. My incisors cut through the flesh and ligaments with the ease of long practice. Even now my stomach squeezed. The contraction so blunt and raw my leg muscles quivered. Hunger. Always am I hungry. The frenzy of my bites slowed and I appreciated the warm flesh, saturated with adrenaline, sliding down my throat. With each swallow came relief and disgrace. At least she was no longer in pain.

I paused. Manic cries were brought to me over the gathering storm. Her companion called to her from down below, from the easterly woods where most backpackers knuckled down to spend squally nights when camping. He sounded worried.

Shame and a self-loathing so powerful it felt hot rolled over me. I shuddered, easing away from the body and became nauseated not by the food, but by not eating it. It was a waste. The emerging beast smiled, making me lean forward to bury my head deeper into the steaming remains sprawled and broken in the snow.

Lightning splintered the heavens, starkly outlining jagged mountain peaks against a sinister and infinite sky. A rumble of thunder followed close behind, so deep it shook the ground. The wind howled, showering the rocky mountainside with hailstones the size of bush berries.

My cold soaked skin grew colder, the silver-grey pallor darkening to chilly blue – the first sign of a full shift – and I sighed in appreciation. I cherished the cold. I lived in it and created it. The storms had always heeded my call and grown more violent in tandem with my savage moods. As did the wolves I ran with, cunning and fierce predators that could make the ferocity of my hunts seem bland. When a wolf pack hunted it was a sight to behold, nothing close to a Wendigo, but impressive nonetheless.

The Wendiga that took me over when the moon was full was a curse. I was a monster in its purest denotation. I was vicious and bound to darkness. The Hunger for human flesh consumed me. It wouldn't be so bad if I was in beast form the entire time. What made me so disgusting, such a grotesque creature to behold, was that a full shift into Wendiga form was only triggered once I had succumbed to the urges that plagued my mind from moon rise to moon fall. When I shifted my outer shell matched the twisted hunger that had held the females in my family captive for generations. It was ugly and gruesome. No matter how hard I tried nor how many chains or locks my Da used, I got out and found my pound of flesh. I was a cannibal. I ate people, and each time I did I liked it ... more.

No animal could slake my hunger; only human tissue plugged the hole. I couldn't help it. Like I said; I am a monster.

My spine rippled beneath my skin. Grunting, I stumbled away from the freezing corpse and fell to my knees on the riverbank. The first shift of the cycle was triggered by the first feeding and was excruciating. I leaned over until I could see my reflection in the still water.

Great chunks of flat ice still bobbed along its glassy surface even this late in spring. It stretched before me in a majestic glory too far for me to leap over. It was at least eighty feet wide, and started at the base of the mountain range, winding its way up from the lowlands until it disappeared into the apex of the rocky hills. They bottled the mineral water that trickled out the other side.

The Land of the Gaels was treacherous and dramatic. Sparsely populated, Baltic and forlorn it was the perfect hiding place.

I forced myself to watch every time the Wendiga broke free and took control. Always in the vain hope one day I might be able to command her. It was a simple, but outrageous hope that one day my human side would stay present enough so that I could stop before I tore apart random strangers in the wrong place at the wrong time. At the very least I could start to spare the good and eat the bad.

Like razors, the individual vertebrae of my spine jutted forth and sliced through my skin, which instantly healed over to leave the sharp bone tips exposed. I cried out, my head snapping back and my body convulsing. My torso lengthened, the ribs popping out as my waist collapsed, sinking into unnaturally slender curves. I hunched forward, gripping the icy ledge that unexpectedly gave way to the frigid water. Arms long and sinewy, I trembled as my mass stretched, legs becoming endless and that would push my height to measure over seven foot. I was well built as a human but now my muscles reformed, becoming as hard and light as carbon fiber, gifting me flexibility unlike any other backboned creature. My jaw opened wide and my lips plumped as they peeled back at the sides. Opening my mouth to scream every tooth shot down in sparks of pain, lengthening into fangs, and a hidden row of teeth protruded out of my gums behind the first. My pearly canines would remain exposed, even when my mouth was

closed, reminiscent of the saber-toothed tiger. Sensation after sensation bombarded my senses, tearing them apart only to revert, and crush them together with breathtaking clarity. I keened shrilly as my nails lengthened and curled under into claws, gouging the snow so deeply I felt the frozen mud beneath the surface. I scrunched my toes up, but it did not lessen the hurt as my feet exploded into paws. My heels burned as wicked sharp talons sprung out, lifted high of the floor until only the fleshy pads of my toes touched the ground. I knew my skin was no longer tinged with varying shades of blue, but a deep azure barring my collarbones, feet soles, navel, nipples and palms, which looked like the membrane had been scrubbed too many times, faded. My skin did not have pores like a human's so it was slick, slightly translucent, and exposed navy veins running across my wrists and neck, the inner creases of my elbows. I worked my jaw, running my long tongue over two sets of teeth. My face was a thing of nightmares, haunting, evil and elfin in its beauty. I'd screamed when my mother had shown it to me for the first time when I was a girl. A mesmerizing sight, my hair had always been long, cascading to my waist in a blanket of white silk. It remained the same color even when I returned to human, but was thicker, wilder when I shifted.

Even my Da liked my hair, it reminded him of my mother's. He had seen the beast when I was a child, as I stood on the cliffs trying to understand the power I held. Trying to comprehend why I would ever want to send my voice a thousand miles away on the wind. He'd told me that I looked like an angel blessed by the Almighty. But I'd seen the fear and revulsion in his eyes as he'd told the lie; trying his best to avoid adding to the guilt my mother punished herself with for spawning me. He'd never beheld the dreadful splendor of my fully-grown Wendiga form, nor did he want to. I couldn't blame him. It was not something you could look upon with love.

I rolled over onto my back, my dagger like spines pressing into the ground. Agony took hold of me as my internal organs realigned. Panting, my chest jerked as I worked myself into a panic in fear of the pain to come. The shift was almost complete, but the part I hated the most always came last. The part where the beast took over, and I, Evangeline, disappeared. Each time was like watching a horror movie being filmed except the limbs I tore from screaming people was not simulated. The hot blood that splashed against my body was not a cheap imitation. But I couldn't stop it. Even I stared up into the night sky the low clouds rolled back to flaunt the fat and bright moon.

Lunar light drifted down to bathe my writhing form, and breathe its curse upon me anew.

There was a grunt and a soft thump beyond the tree line as if someone – a big and heavy someone by the depth of the sound – had stubbed their toe on a rock, or bashed their shoulder into a tree by accident.

My mind was becoming fogged, confused, but this strange thing had me clasp onto my human wits. I'd held out on the Wendiga an entire hour before. It had been a dire situation, and I'd nearly driven myself mad, but I'd done it. I knew I could hold on a few minutes to discover what foolish thing dared disturb me.

I rose slowly, not bothered, but curious. Nothing stalked me, you see, and no animal would cross my path unless the alternative was death.

My adjustment to the vibrantly colored world was effortless. I was attuned to the environment as if I'd been crafted from the slate rock of the mountains themselves. Everything had a muted glow and grey tinge. I lost the warmer colors when I shifted; they were beyond the spectrum of light my eyes could decipher. The breath I drew into my lungs was exhaled degrees colder than when it rushed down my throat. Sounds, small and great, were fed to me through

multiple senses allowing me to experience the world in a vast and new way. I tasted the cold, felt the land sing and smelled the reverence as the wildlife acknowledged a superior predator.

In the night I owned the food chain and the sounds of someone trying to be quiet so close was a curious thing.

A scrumptious aroma, almost saccharine curled into my nostrils, tantalizing me with licks of scent. I cricked my oddly elongated neck to peer into the murky depths of the evergreen wood. A startling odor of rotting flesh tainted the bouquet as I inhaled deeply. My mouth watered even as my eyes narrowed, recognizing the distinctive smell of storms and death that abruptly overwhelmed everything else.

“No,” I growled, disbelieving.

This was my hunting ground. Whatever this visiting Wendigo wanted was obviously worth dying for. None crossed my path that I didn’t kill. It was a necessity to stay safe and remain hidden. Few traveled far from the Clan homelands, and most were exiles, sent away for endangering The People. Most outcasts seemed glad when I ended their curse, but none had come this way for over a decade.

The downy hairs that covered my hairline prickled from a disturbance in the air. My hiss of forewarning reverberated; a piercing sound that announced my presence and staked my claim on the Highlands. I knew every beast from the Grampian Mountains to Loch Long and the Lowland Divide would hear me.

A figure wreathed in darkness burst from the trees, heading toward me at speed. In a flash I was on all fours, back hooked. I snarled in warning, spitting malice and venom.

I would not move. This was my territory, my ground and I. Would. Not. Be. Moved.

The Wendigo kept coming, his long powerful stride increasing with each bound, hair whipping behind him in a cloud of black ink. His limbs were cobalt, ridges of hard muscle defined by the moonlight.

His pace was swift, his aim precise.

Ready to bring down his beast with my own, I lifted my chin and boldly caught his eye. In their bottomless depths blazed fury, desperation, and astonishment.

My lids slid closed in a blink, stunned, before he slammed into me and hurled us both off the ledge into the ice-cold river.

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***Lunar Light* is available from Kindle, Nook, iBook, Kobo, and Diesel eStores.**

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