

Marie Treador

WOLF HUNT I:
**URBAN
WOLF**

Changeling Press

Wolf Hunt 1: Urban Wolf

Marie Treanor

All rights reserved.

Copyright © 2009 Marie Treanor

WARNING: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this or any copyrighted work is illegal. File sharing is an International crime, prosecuted by the United States Department of Justice and the United States Border Patrol, Division of Cyber Crimes, in partnership with Interpol. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is punishable by seizure of computers, up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000 per reported instance.

ISBN: 978-1-60521-276-0

Formats Available:

HTML, Adobe PDF,

MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:

Changeling Press LLC

PO Box 1046

Martinsburg, WV 25402-1046

www.ChangelingPress.com

Editor: Margaret Riley

Cover Artist: Kassie Thrace

This e-book file contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language which some may find offensive and which is not appropriate for a young audience. Changeling Press E-Books are for sale to adults, only, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

Wolf Hunt 1: Urban Wolf

Marie Treanor

A man wakes up naked and alone in a city doorway – with no memory of how he got there or who he is. The locals assume he's a drunken pervert and try to drive him away. Only journalist Rose Winter believes he's more than that, but even she isn't prepared for the truth.

Following up a story, Rose finds herself hunted through the city at night by a giant wolf. As her wolf story begins to converge with her sexy naked man, her own secret becomes impossible to keep. Loyalty and duty can't prevent these enemies from becoming lovers on the run, but they both know their love is doomed as much by their own nature as by interplanetary politics.

Chapter One

Cold. So cold that his violent shivering hurt his teeth. Wetness pounded into his skin like tiny bullets, splashing on his knees, his face, running all over his body. The smell of people filled his nostrils, overwhelming the nearby cooking scents that turned his stomach. All around him was noise—people shouting, loud, crashing footsteps, the *whoosh* of cars and aircraft.

I'm outside, in the city.

What the hell am I doing sleeping outside in the city?

"Is he dead?" asked a nearby voice.

"Of course he's not dead! His teeth are chattering, for God's sake! Hey, wake up, you piss-head!"

He caught a whiff of bacon mixed with aggression. Then a rough hand seized his shoulder, and he reacted without thought, leaping to his feet and drawing back his fist.

Rain dripped off his hair into his eyes. Between the droplets, he stared at an angry man backing away from him.

"Jesus Christ," the man said. "You're disgusting."

Someone giggled—a young woman in impossibly high heels, and lipstick of a matching shade of scarlet. She was staring at the region just below his middle. So was the friend who clutched her arm.

"Wow," said the second woman, as her friend dragged her off, both of them cackling and whispering.

"Get yourself off the street, you drunken perv!" called an older woman's voice.

The man who'd touched him added threateningly, "Be quick about it, piss-head!" The man's gaze dropped as well, and this time, he looked too.

He was stark naked, his tackle on show for anyone who cared to look. No wonder he was cold. "Off the street" seemed suddenly very sensible advice. Only ... where the fuck was he?

With quick, darting glances, he discovered he stood in a doorway, in a narrow city street of old and crumbling tenement buildings. Even the road needed to be repaired. It was little more than rubble in places. Not a good part of town to be alone – dark, neglected, far from the more acceptable view of wide streets and tall, shiny glass buildings with aircraft darting between. Worse, he faced a group of shocked, angry citizens. If he hadn't been so cold, he'd have blushed.

Would I? Do I blush?

Desperately, he grasped for self-knowledge, a reason for being here, and found nothing. Panic stung him into action, any action. Reaching behind him, he searched for a way out and to his relief discovered a door handle. It gave easily, but before he could dive inside, a man shouted, "Hey, Art! He's breaking in to your house!"

And suddenly, they were advancing on him, their shocked faces turned mean and aggressive.

"Don't let him get in!" someone shouted.

The man who'd shaken his shoulder yelled furiously. "Get out of my house, piss-head!"

Piss-head? Is that all it is? Am I drunk? Must have been one hell of a night...

Certainly it would explain the faint haze of unreality through which he appeared to be regarding the world. Something crashed into his chest, hard and painful, and fell onto the step beside him. A stone from among the road rubble.

"Get away from there!" snarled the house-owner – Art?

Another stone flew at him and he caught it deftly in his left hand. Weighing it, he took a step forward.

Amid a flurry of gasps and warnings and swearing, the crowd fell back. Another couple of stones hit his legs, but he kept moving, determined to plough his way through them and take the road he chose for himself, which was...

He ducked to avoid another flying stone, deflected one with his forearm, which began to bleed. But he'd seen who threw that one – Art – and locked eyes with him. The man looked terrified.

"Hey, what's going on?"

The female voice seemed to cut through his skin. Clear, brisk, curious, with a warm pitch that spoke straight to his cock. Or would have, had that organ not been so shrivelled with rain and cold. A ripple moved through the hostile crowd. Voices muttered and he had to strain to catch the words.

"I know her. I'm sure I do."

"Who is she?"

"She's that girl on the newscreens. Shit, she's probably got a camera. I'm off..."

Threatening arms in the crowd lowered. Stones dropped casually on the ground with a scattering of dull thuds and several people drifted away.

A young woman emerged from the dispersing crowd, pushing down a rain hood to reveal luxuriant long hair of a bright and rare shade of amber, falling around a face that he supposed was beautiful. Certainly, her bone structure was exquisite, her lips full and tempting, her eyes large and brown...

But it wasn't her beauty or her melting eyes that truly caught his attention. It was her smell. Frowning, he tried to place it. Did he know her? Surely that scent was familiar ... Something about it filled his mind with visions of naked, sweating bodies, mainly his own and hers.

She came to an abrupt halt and stared at him. Oh yes, she was highly fuckable, and yet, stronger than his upsurge of unexpected and inconvenient lust was the desire to put his hands around her elegant, swan-like neck and strangle her.

He flexed his fingers.

The older woman was explaining. "Art found him asleep in his doorway when he came home from night shift. Must be a drunk or a down-and-out, some kind of pervert too. Look at him!"

After her first flickering glance, the newcomer seemed to be rather determinedly focusing on his face. "He must be freezing," she said unexpectedly. In an instant, she'd stripped off her raincoat, revealing an orange bodysuit that seemed to match her hair, and bright, chunky beads around her throat. She advanced upon him.

He fell back, giving ground before her as he hadn't before the stone-throwing mob.

She paused. "I won't hurt you. What's your name?"

His throat closed up. Panic threatened to resurface. Her eyes searched his. Every hair on his body stood up in alarm. Though he'd no idea who she was, either, his every instinct was against trusting her.

"Where does he live?" she flung over her shoulder.

Silence and a few shrugs. "Why's he scared of her?" someone muttered.

Scared? Was he? Forcing himself, he stayed still when she took another step nearer to him. Maybe. But it felt like a powerful tug of lust. Mixed with an equally strong urge to exterminate her.

"He's not *scared* of her," answered another voice with a definite snigger. "He *likes* her."

She heard them. He could see it in the color soaring into her neck and face. He even admired the way she deliberately didn't so much as glance at his growing cock. And yet it didn't embarrass him. Perhaps he was an exhibitionist after all.

Reaching up, she placed the raincoat around his shoulders, drawing the two sides together across his chest. Her fingers brushed his naked skin and even through his numbing cold, a jolt of electricity caught at his breath. Her eyes flew up to his.

False eyes. Beautiful eyes, but false, misleading, never to be trusted. But at least the coat felt good, warming.

"Where do you live? Do you want someone to take you there?" Curiously, there seemed to be genuine compassion in her clear, musical voice. He shivered.

"Doesn't he speak?" she asked the crowd.

"Never heard him speak," said Art. "Guess his type don't feel the need."

"Have you called the police?"

Art's gaze slid away. "We don't like the police round here. The more distant they are, the safer we feel."

"Well. You don't like the police and you don't like naked men cluttering up your doorways. What are you planning to do about him? Besides throwing stones?"

Interestingly, her disapproval got to them. Art actually shuffled his feet. "Nothing," he snarled. "So long as he buggers off and doesn't come back! I've never seen him before in my life and I never want to again either!"

"He's not from round here," someone else agreed.

"I've never seen him before either."

On the whole, that was rather a relief, and yet he'd no idea where to go, what to do if they weren't going to make him fight...

"I have," said a reluctant voice, and he jerked up his head to see a youngish man in labouring clothes, whose eyes slid away as soon as their gazes connected.

"I think he's ill. A couple of people carried him into the flat below mine yesterday. Never saw him before that ... it's been empty for weeks."

"Was he dressed then?" Art mocked.

"Oh yes."

"Show us," the woman said.

The labourer looked hunted. "I'm already late for work."

"Then just tell me the address!"

"No way! I don't know you from Adam! Who are you, anyway?"

"Rose Winter," the girl said. "I'm a reporter with the iGazette." She smiled. It didn't reach her beautiful, false eyes. "If there's a story in this, you'll get your names and photos on all the newsscreens."

"No way," the labourer exclaimed in clear alarm.

"Well ... The iGazette pays."

Something passed hastily from her hand to the labourer's. "Come on," he muttered, and began to slouch off down the street.

* * *

Rose Winter glanced uncertainly at the naked man in her raincoat. They said he was a drunk, but she couldn't smell any alcohol on his breath, and in any case, it didn't matter to her. Something about him and his ludicrous plight aroused her pity as well as her curiosity.

At least, she was calling it pity, and it had nothing to do with the toned, naked body beneath her coat. Not even the very fine cock which had risen so flatteringly to greet her. She wasn't so shallow.

Or at least she fervently hoped she wasn't.

"He's taking you home," she assured him—and hoped she was right. The man began to shrug off her raincoat.

"No, no!" she exclaimed in panic, making a grab for it. "Hold it round you."

Unexpectedly, the man's eyes gleamed. Was he making fun of her? Despite her indignation, she couldn't prevent the rush of heat through her body. Well, he was a big, handsome, well-endowed man. It wouldn't be natural not to notice. Though it would be more comfortable if she could just pity him without admiring his muscles, or his long, strong-featured face with those full lips and jutting chin, his shaggy black hair falling around his unshaven face. Or that attention-grabbing cock...

She swallowed. Thank God for the raincoat. But it was hard to break his gaze. The gleam she'd taken for mockery, and perhaps just a little lust, now seemed more like dislike. A pang of something ridiculously like hurt shot through her and was ruthlessly squashed. Maybe he was a nutter, a drunk and an exhibitionist, but she was learning to smell a story and she was damned sure she smelled one on him.

"Shall we?" she said, and began to walk.

Around them, the onlookers got out of the way, muttering to each other. Someone advised her to watch herself, told her not to go into his flat, certainly not without Rob, which was, apparently, the labourer's name.

Straining her ears, she caught the sound of his naked feet splashing across the wet pavement. He walked beside her in silence through the rain like some large,

graceful animal, untamed and unpredictable. Ignoring her, as well as the puddles he simply sloshed through, his gaze swept constantly around the street, and the buildings and shops, passers-by and Rob, who paused at the next corner to wait for them.

Questions almost choked her. But this was not the time. His need for silence was palpable. Casting him a quick glance, she wondered what thoughts filled his head. Though she seriously doubted the crowd's verdict of pissed pervert, he certainly hadn't seemed as embarrassed by his own nakedness as one might expect.

Perhaps he knew he looked good.

Rose gave a twisted little smile and the man spared her a rare glance before Rob halted right in front of them.

"Here," he said.

The man looked upward at the street sign. Wolfe Street. She couldn't tell if it meant anything to him. Did he really not know or remember where he lived?

"Have you had a head injury?" she asked abruptly, wishing she'd had the sense to ask before. She'd been too distracted by his nakedness. One of his hands pushed out of the coat, feeling at his head as he followed Rob inside. He didn't appear to discover any wounds, but at least he understood her.

The common stairs were dark and none too clean. The stranger wrinkled his nose. Rose didn't blame him. It was a shit-hole in a shitty neighbourhood. She could smell urine and rotting rubbish somewhere not too distant. She just hoped it wasn't in the stranger's flat.

On the second floor, Rob paused and pointed to the door marked with an upside down number five. "That's where I saw them take him."

Wordlessly, Rose stood aside and the stranger stepped past her. The loose sleeves of the raincoat brushed against her arms, as he laid his shoulder to the door and pushed.

It opened easily, as if it had never even been locked. Cold air wafted out from an open window she could see across the hall in the kitchen. The stranger walked forward,

going quickly to the window and shutting it. Then he pushed open a door on his right and after an instant's hesitation, disappeared inside.

Rose and Rob exchanged glances.

"I've got to go to work," he said uncomfortably.

"I know."

"I wouldn't go in there with him. He'll be fine on his own."

"Thanks," said Rose. "I can take care of myself."

Rob gave her a doubtful once over, then an unexpected smile that lit his face to almost handsome before he dashed off downstairs.

Rose turned back to the stranger's flat. Taking a deep breath, she walked in.

The kitchen, though still cold and with a rain puddle on the windowsill, was surprisingly neat and clean. Only its owner's dirty, wet footprints marred the wiped clean floor surface. The cupboards were worn and tatty, but also clean. Like the fridge. Unable to resist, she opened it. A carton of milk, another of orange juice and a pile of four large raw steaks in a clear, bloody plastic bag. It seemed his needs were simple.

Closing the fridge door, she turned and almost cried out.

Chapter Two

He stood quite still in the doorway, watching her, his shoulder leaning very lightly against the wall. He held her raincoat in one hand. Although he hadn't cleaned himself up, he had thrown on a pair of jeans, some sneakers and a worn black T-shirt that did little to disguise the bulging muscles of his arms, or the strength in his broad chest and shoulders. And now that she felt able to look below his waist, he had good, long legs too, with powerful thighs, between which...

Shit, don't go there again!

"Are you hungry?"

So he could speak! Worse, his voice was deep and melting, the kind that reached right into you and tickled your pussy to remind you what it was missing.

"No," she managed. "Fortunately. Steak for breakfast is a bit rich for me." Might as well be blatant about it.

Shifting his weight off the wall, he walked toward her. Her heart gave a lurch that wasn't all fear, but he merely dropped the raincoat into her numb arms and reached for the fridge.

Hastily, she stood aside. He took out the bag of steak and began opening cupboards. There was a healing gash on his arm, some dried blood he needed to wash off.

Rose swallowed. "Are you feeling better?"

"Yes. Thanks."

"Do you remember your name now?"

A sound came from him that might have been a laugh. "Jon."

"Jon what?"

"I haven't the faintest idea." Discovering a frying pan at last, he put it on the old-fashioned stove and lit the gas before glancing at her. "Do I know you?"

"Rose Winter. I'm a journalist with the iGazette."

"So I heard. I just wondered if we'd met before today." He went back to a previously rifled cupboard and brought out a bottle of oil.

"I'd have remembered that," Rose said, just a shade too emphatically. Then, when he merely cast her a quizzical glance, she lifted her head defiantly. "This isn't your house, is it?"

"What makes you say that?" He poured oil into the pan and replaced the bottle in the cupboard. Interesting, because he didn't look like a tidy man.

Rose said, "You don't know where anything is."

"Apparently I only moved in yesterday."

"You were only *brought* here yesterday."

"Well, the clothes in the bedroom fit me," he countered, throwing the steak into the sizzling oil. "And the fridge just happened to contain what I most want to eat. Are you fishing for a story, Rose Winter of the iGazette?"

"Perhaps," she admitted. "If there's one here. Is there?"

He glanced at her over his shoulder. "If you find out, let me know."

"You really don't know your name, do you?"

"Guess I've been on a bender."

"One without alcohol."

"Maybe I'm into drugs." He held his arms out in front of him, as if he'd done it before he meant to, then dropped them with a quick hiss that might have been laughter, and turned back to his steak.

She followed, peering worriedly into his averted face. "I think you should go to the hospital..."

"No!"

One word, curt and violent. Rose stepped backward, her heart truly hammering now, and not with any vague, pleasurable never-to-be-fulfilled lust. Hatred and revulsion glared out of his eyes into hers.

"I can't make you," she said, edging herself back between him and the kitchen door. "But I still think you should."

He threw the spatula into the pan and ran his fingers through his hair. His hand shook. With oddly intense compassion, she realised the man was damaged, that she'd been right all along. He had a story all right. But like this, he was way beyond her ability to deal with.

"Look, I've got to go," she said awkwardly. "I'll leave my card in case you want to talk..."

But at that, his head snapped up. "Oh no, wait a minute."

In two strides, he was across the room, backing her into the door. Panic flared. *Stay calm, don't upset him ... Smart arse. Who can take care of herself?* She was afraid to breathe.

His dark, troubled eyes stared down into hers. "Don't run off. I need to talk to you."

"Do you need to do it while rubbing noses?"

A hint of confusion flickered in his eyes, chased by a gleam of amusement. "No, but I find I quite like it."

He was too quick, too direct, and yet under the darkening of his eyes, her fear drained away. What was left was an excitement that tightened her nipples and made her stomach tingle.

"You're very beautiful," he said softly. He bent his head, breathing in, as though inhaling the scent of her hair, the skin of her face and neck. "And alluring, even if..." He broke off. His warm breath glanced off her lips, her cheek, the tiny hairs at the side of her neck and she shivered. "What are you doing in this classy part of town?"

She swallowed. "Following a story." His hard chest brushed against her breasts.

"About me?"

"God, no. Why do you say that?"

"Because I can't rid myself of the notion that I know you." His head lifted, the dark eyes pierced hers as though pinning her to the wall. It should have been scary, and yet her chief thought was that he had beautiful eyes, deep, dark and intense, the eyes of a passionate and complex man.

Pulling herself together, she said evenly, "You don't. I came down here to find the people who reported seeing a giant wolf last night. Several of them live near here. On the way, I saw the crowd gathered around you."

"And now you want my story too?"

"If it's newsworthy. Would you give it to me?"

His eyes dropped to the region of her lips, and the butterflies in her stomach began to squirm downward. He sounded distracted as he replied, "With my photo on the newscreens? No way."

"It must be frightening not remembering who you are," she said breathlessly.

"Actually, I'm starting to find it curious ... uplifting. I have no baggage, no past to temper what I want to do."

"Which is?"

"To kiss you," he said, and did.

His lips took hers strongly, making her gasp into his mouth in surprise. His tongue drove between her lips, and the tingling in her pussy caught fire. Her hands, which had been reaching up with the vague intention of pushing him away, now clung to his powerful shoulders, drawing him closer instead until his hard chest pressed against her aching breasts.

When he manoeuvred his lower body onto hers, his hardening cock against her stomach, she let out a tiny moan. Her pussy clenched and released a flood of sexual moisture into her panties. His arms were around her, hard and irresistible. She knew she'd never be able to throw him off, but nothing had prepared her for the sheer, overwhelming pleasure of being held helpless in the arms of a stranger, *this* stranger, while he kissed her mouth with wild, sensual thoroughness, and ground his cock into

her, dragging her up on her tiptoes so that he could fit it between her thighs and find the hot, damp tenderness of her pussy. She was so wet she was sure he could feel it, even through her clothes and his.

Somewhere, she knew she had to find a way to end this, that her desire and his was galloping too fast, too out of control. Only she couldn't bear to lose his mouth just yet, or the exquisite torture of his hard, bulging cock roughly rubbing against her desperate clit, arousing all those wicked desires she'd mostly tried not to think about for five years.

It was he who broke the kiss and took her head between his hands. Even her hair seemed to spark with electricity at his touch. He made an audible effort to control his rapid breathing. "Well," he murmured, "I could almost swear I haven't done that before."

She swallowed. "You haven't."

"I want to do it some more, and lots of other things besides. And yet I don't trust you. Why is that?"

"Because you're weird?" She didn't mean to say it. It was stupid hurt that forced the words out. But to her surprise, he actually emitted a sound like laughter and she found herself briefly hugged before he released her.

"You're right there," he confessed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to assault you. I'm just a little too free right now and you're too bloody tempting in what appears to be my house. Did I hurt you?"

There seemed to be genuine anxiety in his voice, which was touching if unnecessary. She shook her head dumbly. Then, while he swore and snatched the frying pan off the stove, she said, "Look, Jon, you need help to sort this out. If you won't go to a hospital, try the police. They should know if you're a missing person, or if you've been in some kind of accident..."

"I'm not injured," he assured her. "In fact, I feel extremely fit and healthy." He laid the pan down again and turned back to her. "It'll come back to me. I'm sorry you were dragged into this. Thanks for your coat."

At mention of the coat, fallen at her feet, she bent and picked it up, more to cover her flushed cheeks than anything.

"And your kindness," he added, which made it even worse. Glancing at him, she could find no trace of insincerity and yet she had the impression he'd said the words to make her blush some more.

Trying to ignore that, she rummaged in her bag and found a business card, which she laid down on the rickety kitchen table.

"If you like," she offered, "I can do some digging of my own. I have access to a lot of research sites and I talk to a lot of people."

His lips quirked. "Good luck with your giant wolf."

"It'll be a dog, magnified in shadows. It always is."

* * *

Rose halted, staring at the ground at her feet, then slowly knelt and touched the unmistakable bloodstains.

She'd just about had enough of this story, interviewing people who swore they'd seen a giant wolf on the rooftops, loping down streets, chasing people, and now, a woman who said she saw it killing a man.

She'd gone to the place the woman directed her, expecting to find nothing, as usual. It wasn't a body, but it was definitely blood. The rain, now mercifully off, must have washed away whatever mud and dirt had covered it when the police had responded to the woman's call last night. Interesting find, but unlikely to prove the woman's story. More likely it had been a dog fight, or even a dog biting someone who'd tried to catch it. Rose had already seen several strays scavenging in this area.

Taking her penknife and an evidence bag from her pocket, Rose scraped off as much of the blood as she could, along with the dust and dirt that came with it, and put it in the bag.

Straightening, she decided enough was enough, and headed back to civilization. In the main street, she caught the express craft to the hospital and went directly to Carrie's lab.

Carrie, poring over a computer screen with one of her colleagues, glanced up at her over her spectacles and grinned. "Rose Winter, ace reporter. What can we do for you?"

"Carrie Flanders, Forensics Expert Extraordinaire, test me this," Rose retorted, dropping the evidence bag into Carrie's waiting hand.

"Aha," Carrie exclaimed, gazing at it with interest. "I've cracked it. This is dried blood!"

"Really?" Rose marvelled, and Carrie grinned again. Her colleague, more baffled than amused by their on-going joke, took himself off and Rose perched on the end of the desk.

"Any chance you could tell me whose it is?"

Carrie shrugged. "There's a chance, but that's all. Depends if its owner's on our database."

"Anything else about its owner would be useful too."

"I'll bear it in mind." Carrie glanced at her watch. "An hour to go. Fancy a drink tonight?"

Rose wrinkled her nose. "I can't. I have to write up this stupid wolf story. Tomorrow would be good, though."

"Not inspired by giant wolves?" Carrie's attempt at shock was unconvincing.

"More inspired by a very sexy amnesiac," Rose confessed.

Carrie tore off her glasses and polished them, replacing them on her nose with relish. "Spill," she demanded.

Rose laughed and got off the desk. "Tomorrow! I'm going to show my face at the office and work there." If she went home, she'd be waiting for a call that would never come. She didn't write well with that sort of distraction.

* * *

Her story done—more of a non-story, she thought critically—Rose pressed the button that sent it to her editor for approval, and sat back in her chair.

"Night, Rose. Not going home?" said Tony, one of the senior reporters as he passed her desk on his way to the office exit.

"In a few minutes. Just waiting for Jo's okay."

"Did you track down the 'wolf'?"

Rose wrinkled her nose. "It remains a mystery," she said grandly.

Tony laughed. "Good night and good luck."

"Night."

The door swung shut behind him and his footsteps retreated along the passage. A moment later, the elevator whined, and halted, and the silence of the empty building pressed in on her.

She gave a sigh of relief and stretched, arching her back and placing both hands behind her head. She could go home and wait for Jo's reply, then publish. But if Jo wanted changes, it would be a pain with her bed calling from the next room.

Bed. Cold, lonely bed. For once, she let her vague but growing dissatisfaction with her life come to the surface. What had become of her enthusiasm, her sense of pride, patriotism and determination? It had faded into an unexpectedly fascinating alternative career, a life among people who were almost but never quite friends because she couldn't let them be. And a cold, lonely bed.

Only twice in the last five years had she been sexually desperate enough to warm it up. One had been a colleague who was leaving for the colonies, the other a stranger picked up in a nightclub when her hormones were clamouring. They'd brought her some release, but little satisfaction. But at least they'd served the purpose of putting her off any further sexual adventures. It was best to simply take care of sexual urges herself, and ignore all those whispering longings for a man to come home to, a man to care for her and for whom she could care. It simply wouldn't and couldn't happen here and she had always accepted that.

Didn't mean she couldn't fantasise about her sexy amnesiac, though ... Perhaps it had simply been his nakedness, but something about "Jon" had brought all her ruthlessly suppressed lusts to the surface, and his kiss ... Fuck, but he could kiss! Just

one and she'd been ready to drag him onto the floor in all his sleeping-in-doorways dirt and screw him there and then.

Part of her wished she had. He'd have done it too. He was up for anything and not just because his amnesia gave him an exhilarating freedom right now. She suspected he'd never had many inhibitions, sexually, and she found that far more exciting than she should.

Restlessly, she dropped her hands back into her lap, pressing the heel of one into her pubic bone to quiet the upsurge of desire. Maybe it was time for another meaningless copulation. Or a naughty do-it-yourself right here in the empty office.

The wickedness of that appealed. Security cameras pointed at windows and doors, bypassing the central area where her desk was located. So far as she knew, but actually she found she didn't care. If anything, the uncertainty made her feel more daring, more aroused. Let some security guard spit out his tea watching her if he felt like it. This was for her.

She just wished he was there with her. Jon...

Deftly, she unfastened the disguised opening between the legs of her bodysuit, and ran her fingers over the damp crotch of her panties, gasping at the sharp pangs of sensation. She closed her eyes and imagined Jon stood in front of her, leaning his hips against the desk, watching her slide her finger under her panties and find her own, swollen clitoris. His breathing would come faster at the sight, as it had when he'd kissed her and ground his cock against her pussy. Fuck, that had felt so good.

She stroked her clitoris and imagined him unfastening his jeans. He'd take his rigid cock out of his pants and hold it in his strong fist, watching her every movement.

She slid a finger inside her aching pussy, circling her hand around her clitoris, pushing her hips upward into her hand. Her quickened breathing filled her ears. She imagined Jon's mingling with it as he pulled and stroked at his cock. Oh yes, that was sexy. She'd love to watch him jerking off, see how he did it, how he liked to be held, the rhythms he found most pleasurable.

He'd like it too. Her avid admiration would encourage him to faster and harder strokes. Maybe he'd talk to her, telling her how beautiful her pussy was and how he was going to fuck her later on, after this steamy little bit of foreplay. He wouldn't care that they could be discovered at any time, he'd be determined to finish what they'd begun here.

"Let me see your breasts," he'd whisper. "Expose them to me..." Her hand closed convulsively over her breast, feeling the hard, desperate nipple hot against her palm. Impatiently, she pushed down the neck of her suit and pulled her breast free, pinching the distended nipple between her fingers. Pleasure shot through her, linking up with the growing storm in her pussy.

Jon growled approval in her imagination. Gasping, she pushed a second finger inside her body and plunged them in and out of her, wildly caressing her clitoris at the same time. Oh yes, she was going to come and in his excitement Jon would drop to his knees, still pulling at his cock. He'd shove her fingers out of the way and fasten his lips to her lower ones. He'd suck her clitoris into his mouth and...

Rose fell over the edge into bliss. As the convulsions shook her, she held desperately on to the vision of Jon sucking her, caressing her as he came, splashing semen over his hand and the office floor.

Perhaps he'd grab her and throw her over the desk for a proper fuck...

But the image was fading with her orgasm. The harsh, artificial light of the office brought back her bare, silent surroundings. And she was totally alone.

Slowly, she took her hand from her knickers and fastened her suit with trembling fingers. Familiar post-orgasmic emptiness wound through her. She accepted it without surprise. What did shock her was her desire to put her fantasy lover in her bed, to imagine coming home to him tonight, and tomorrow night. Every night.

For some reason, she wanted to weep. "You don't even know him," she told herself angrily. "Don't make up some pathetic happy-ever-after fantasy about a naked stranger you just want to fuck you!"

The computer beeped, startling her so that she jumped and guiltily pulled the neck of her suit back into place.

It was a message from Jo, who'd spotted a couple of typos. "Fix them and publish," was her instruction. So Rose did, using the prosaic actions to pull herself together. By the time she stood and reached for her raincoat, she was laughing at herself for fixating on a stranger who deserved her pity more than her inappropriate lust.

And yet she knew it wasn't really pity he aroused in her. Curiosity, yes, and a desire to help that had something, but not everything, to do with compassion. She'd leave it at that. Or perhaps she wouldn't. If she had to live in this bloody place indefinitely, why shouldn't she see him again, maybe even go out with him if the attraction was still there, have a real relationship and worry about the consequences later?

Hmm...

Letting possibilities weave through her head, she took the elevator to the ground level. Her spirits had lifted immeasurably by the time she walked outside into the darkness.

A glance at her watch confirmed that she'd mistimed her departure. The road and air buses had all gone.

She began to walk, hoping to pick up a taxi on the way. She felt ready to drop with tiredness and she'd be bloody glad to get her contact lenses out.

Her footsteps echoed on the damp, empty streets. Rose liked the city at night. She enjoyed walking under the streetlamps, watching the flaring shadows dance on the dark walls, the flash of distant neon lights and vehicles passing close-by. It gave her a pleasurable feeling of isolation and yet connection. Perhaps because she could see the stars, even through the city's light pollution. As long as she could, she was still connected.

A huge shadow slunk around the corner of the next block, on the other side of the street. More from idle curiosity, Rose tried to find its source, peering up and down the street and scanning the buildings.

Her heart jolted. Shit, that looked like a bloody huge dog.

On the roof?

Oh-oh. Have I found my wolf?

Chapter Three

Intrigued, Rose crossed the street for a better view. The shadow didn't move, and it was definitely dog shaped. *Large* dog shaped. And its eyes, shining like lamps in the darkness, seemed to be looking directly at her.

Very conscious of her speeding pulse, Rose stared back. Without warning, the animal moved, disappearing from view.

Rose ran on, seeking a way through to the back of the buildings. Feeling for the tiny camera that never left her pocket, she dragged it out as she dived down the first narrow alley and climbed over a gate into a back courtyard. She landed lightly and gazed around her. Several sets of steps led upward from the yard to the upper flats. Craning her neck, she scanned them, one at a time, all the way up to the roof as she walked slowly around the yard.

A rush of blackness exploded from the steps, charging at her.

Rose pressed the capture button on her camera, and bolted. She didn't think she'd ever run so fast in this city as she did then, her legs pumping toward the enclosing wall. With every step she expected to feel the tearing of the animal's teeth. Over her own panting breath, she could hear it snarling as it ran, heard its soft, pattering footsteps bounding to her left. Fearfully, she gazed in that direction, but couldn't see it.

Hurling herself at the wall, she scrambled over it, dropped clumsily back into the alley and ran on to the right. She'd no idea what was at the other end, but it seemed safer than risking any movement at all in the wolf's direction.

Wolf? When had she started calling it a wolf? The shadow charging her had been too blurry with speed to have a proper shape. She just knew it was big and terrifyingly quick. And snarled.

In fact, she could still hear its breath, pursuing her, although she thought it was rather more distant. She couldn't help the surge of relief, even though she knew celebrating her escape just yet was premature.

Stupid job. She'd been hunting the bloody creature all day and now she'd finally found it she was running like hell. Sometimes, life didn't seem to have any meaning...

Focus, moron!

Swerving through an open gate, she ran back through an archway and into a different alley, hoping to throw the wolf off her scent, or at least to make it lose interest. Surely it would move on now?

Eventually, in what seemed to be a warehouse carpark, she felt safe enough to pause, and dragged her phone out of her pocket. The police had to capture this thing.

She'd only pressed two of the three necessary keys before she became aware of the panting. Slowly, she lifted her eyes from the phone screen and met those luminous eyes she'd seen already on the rooftop.

It's hunting me. I'm its prey.

It loped nearer to her, huge, on four legs almost as tall as she was on two. She swerved left and it followed. She tried right and it changed direction again.

Rose bolted, but there was nowhere to go. The wolf was driving her into the wall of the building, which was solid and windowless. She had no way out.

What a stupid way to die. Furious, she whirled round, rammed her back against the wall and began to swing her shoulder bag like a weapon.

The wolf ignored it. It stood right in front of her, coiled back on its powerful hind legs to spring. Even in the blacker darkness of this place, she could make out its curled lips, its white, slavering teeth huge and sharp and terrifying. Its nose twitched. Its eyes narrowed. It was still sniffing.

Please let it have scented something more alluring than me, she prayed, with surely justifiable selfishness.

Her bag had stopped. Afraid of annoying the wolf when it appeared to have relaxed somewhat, Rose kept still, tried not to breathe, although she couldn't stop her knees, her whole body from trembling.

The wolf's mouth opened wide. Rose shut her eyes.

A strange, howling sound broke from the wolf. From her terror, Rose recognised it as agony. She snapped her eyes open, to find out who or what had attacked it.

It was loping away from her, with swift, powerful paces. She could make out the bunching and stretching of muscles as it ran. With trembling hands, she fumbled for the camera, pressed the capture button several times, but she shook so much she'd no idea if it was even pointed in the right direction.

"Shit," she said aloud, dropping her head back against the wall. "I so don't belong in this job."

She forced herself to straighten and dragged herself out of the carpark. This time, she moved directly toward the sounds of traffic.

* * *

He woke with a raging hunger that refused to wait. However, when he threw off the quilt, he was shocked by how dirty his naked body looked. Everything, from the soles of his feet to his arms, looked as if he'd bedded down in mud. Or in Art's doorway, same as last night.

How did you get so dirty from lying in bed?

"You don't," he said aloud. Ignoring the ferocious rumbling of his stomach, he went to the tiny bathroom and stepped under the shower. He'd dreamed of acquiring this dirt. Strange, vivid dreams of running across rooftops and leaping over walls and cars and pausing to rest in cool puddles.

And cornering Rose Winter up against a wall.

Of course he'd done that in real life yesterday too. If he could trust any of his memories. She hadn't seemed to mind then. In fact there had been a very promising passion in her response that had almost led him to throw her over the kitchen table and fuck her with wild abandon.

His cock jumped at the idea, and he held on to it to comfort his furious morning lust.

But he was wandering from the point. In his dream, he hadn't known it was Rose he was chasing. Hunting. Not until he cornered her and gazed into her terrified eyes.

He frowned, his idly stroking hand growing still on his cock. No, that wasn't right. He'd smelled her. Her distinct, sweet and oh so tempting smell. Surely that's what had led him to her, what he'd been following? And yet he was up close to her before he recognised the scent as hers. As someone who'd been kind and helped him. And who made his cock bone hard just by glancing off his thoughts.

He stroked faster.

She'd been ready to fight too. Bravely swinging her bag like a medieval weapon. And he'd run off. But he remembered an unsatisfied feeling. A sense of disappointment because he hadn't found anyone else to kill.

And yet there had been people. He'd passed men and women, ignoring them because ... Because they smelled wrong. They weren't Rose.

Rose ... Her image swam in front of his face once more. Not Rose in the dream, but the real Rose, in his arms, kissing him, her mouth urgent and sensual, her tongue tangling with his, as she slid onto his cock and began to ride him. She would have smooth, warm skin, as flawless as her face. Her breasts, which he'd felt crushed against his chest yesterday, were just the right size for his hands, pert and long nipped. She would love him to suck on them while he fucked her, loving her tight, strong pussy's caressing hold on his cock. He'd roll her under him and their loving would grow wilder, harder. He'd knead her buttocks, spank them, and she'd howl and bite him, bucking and writhing while he pounded her across the bed until she screamed out her fierce orgasm and he fell into the most violent pleasure of his life...

He gasped as warm seed splashed over his hand. Leaning back against the shower wall, he let the climax take him in its intense, pleasurable hold. Even then, he knew his fantasy was as close as he'd ever come to fucking Rose Winter.

Partly because there was something wrong with him. He'd no idea who he was. And he sleepwalked to the weirdest dreams. Perhaps she was right and he did need to see a doctor. But some instinct warned him against it, and he didn't know why.

He didn't know anything. He'd spent most of yesterday raking through the flat for clues as to his identity. He'd found some money, but no credit cards, nothing with his name on it. Not even a bill. He was pretty sure that was strange too.

Switching off the shower, he got out and wrapped a towel around his waist. Well, today he was going out to make his enquiries. Right after breakfast. His mouth began to water.

As he crossed the hall toward the kitchen, he heard a knock on the front door.

For an instant, shock held him frozen. He felt so isolated in his lack of self-knowledge that the idea of someone knocking on his door was totally alien. His heart began to beat faster. It could be someone who knew him.

He strode across the hall and opened the door.

Rose Winter stood there, a bag of groceries in her hands. Her cheeks were rosy, as if she'd been running. Or she was embarrassed being here. Or she knew who he'd been fantasizing about as he'd jerked off in the shower.

She looked incredibly bright and pretty, her amber hair tied loosely behind her head. Today she wore a full, colorful patchwork skirt and a sexy yellow top that managed to look loose and comfortable while still showing off the shape of her full, oh-so-tempting breasts.

With an effort, he dragged his lascivious gaze back to her flushed face.

"I brought you some provisions," she said, a trifle lamely.

He frowned. "Why?"

She floundered. "I don't know. I thought you might need them."

Rose Winter, Rose Winter, step into my lair ... He stepped aside and bowed her in with an ironic flourish.

"Brr, you do like it cold in here," she observed, laying the groceries on the table.

The window was open again. He hadn't opened it last night, had he? Only in his dream. Shit, when he was sleepwalking, did he come and go by the window?

Reaching up to close it, he glanced outside. It was a difficult jump to the outhouse roof below, but not impossible. There were smudges on the outside sill too. At least they didn't look like footprints.

As if savoring the treat, he turned his gaze back to Rose. Only when her eyes slid away did he remember that he was only wearing the towel. He laughed. "Damn, you'll never know me with my clothes on at this rate."

"I'm very early to be visiting," she mumbled. "Got a lot to do today."

He moved toward the kettle. "Find your wolf?"

"Yes, actually."

"Dog?"

"Buggered if I know. It was big, though. Massive."

He glanced at her, frowning. "Really?"

"Really. Look." She delved into her jacket pocket and brought out a tiny camera. With the touch of a button, a little screen unfolded itself and she scrolled down a list until she found what she was looking for. She passed the camera over.

It was big. A dark, blurry shape with ears and teeth. It could have been anything.

Rose pressed something else and it began to show other pictures, mostly of the same shape running away. He stopped paying attention after he recognised the wall.

A random shot of a commonplace wall, probably taken by accident as she'd gone toward it. No big deal. The trouble was, he recognised it, from his dream of cornering Rose against it.

"Shit, this is weird..." He shoved the camera back at her. "Rose, where can I get access to a computer?"

She blinked. "The library down the street."

Why didn't he know that? Actually, now she said it, he did know he should go to a library, but something told him he wasn't used to doing that.

Something beeped in her pocket and she took out a phone, glancing at the screen.

"I've got to go," she said, casting him a quick look that might have held disappointment.

He said, "Let me pay you for the stuff."

"Next time," she said, making for the door.

Next time. She wanted there to be a next time. *Rose Winter, come to bed with me now. Let me push my cock into you and fuck all this shit away...*

Blood pounded in his head through his entire body. He wanted to grab her as he had yesterday, persuade her to stay and do all those and many more things. Only his sudden knowledge that she deserved better than being his instant of forgetfulness kept him from acting on it. Besides, his towel was tented around his raging hard-on. Guaranteed to frighten anyone off. It was best he let her go. Just to make sure there was a next time.

As her footsteps receded across the hall, he sank down into the old kitchen chair and thought about a little more self-abuse. Fortunately, he didn't do that either, for she suddenly stormed back into the kitchen, grabbed his face between her hands and kissed him hard on the mouth.

"Christ, you're a hard man to hint to!"

In spite of everything he'd just been thinking, he began to smile. "Trust me, I am a very hard man," he assured her, and because her mouth was still close enough, he took it back.

God, she was sweet. He didn't care that he couldn't trust her.

Where did that come from anyway? She was the only damned person who'd done anything for him and she melted into his mouth like butter, like rich, delicious chocolate. He wanted to taste all of her, her breasts, her pussy...

He could smell her arousal, felt triumph soar. He moved his arms, meaning to hold her, but one hand had been in his lap, and the first place it touched was the hot dampness between her legs. She gasped into his mouth, but didn't stop kissing, and so he left it there, under her bunched-up skirt, felt the sweet moisture warm and wet his hand while he fucked her mouth with his tongue. When he began to move his fingers,

she gave a sound like a sob. He felt the pulsing of her pussy, the hard nub of her clitoris through her panties.

It was unbelievably sexy doing this to her with his hand while only kissing her. She seemed to feel the same way. Excitement trembled through her body and he realised she was already close to the edge. He teased her, shifting his finger away to spread the fabric of her panties over her wet entrance then push inside just a little. Her hips began to move, writhing against his finger, his knuckles.

He sucked her tongue into his mouth, and bit it softly while he slid his fingers back to her throbbing clitoris. He tapped it, drummed his fingers the length of her slit and felt her fall over the edge with a cry of bliss. He gripped her pussy hard as she came, as if absorbing all her pleasure while he gave her even more.

She shuddered and writhed in his hand, her mouth open in helpless ecstasy. He kept kissing her until the spasms stopped, then slowly withdrew his hand and his mouth at the same time.

Her eyes opened, cloudy and soft with satisfaction. Yet an instant later, a flash of something, shame perhaps, or uncertainty, broke into them. She was staring at him, as if searching for signs of mockery or contempt. Her vulnerability mixed with such uninhibited passion touched him.

He murmured, "I'm good at goodbye kisses."

Her eyes lightened, just as he'd intended. "How are you at hello?"

He smiled. "Try me next time."

Her lips curved. "Perhaps I will," she said, and straightened.

"Rose?"

She turned back at once.

He said, "I've no idea who or what I am or anything that I've done. You tempt me beyond sense, but I've no desire to hurt you."

She frowned, uncomprehending. Of course, she didn't know about the dream. Whose photographic proof was in her pocket. "Then don't," she said lightly, and

walked across the hall to the bathroom. Her hips rolled, as though pleasurable tingles still rocked her pussy.

He gazed ruefully down at his raging cock and addressed it sternly. "What the hell am I going to do with you?"

* * *

By the time Rose arrived at the hospital lab in response to Carrie's phone summons, she was still in a curious state of alternate excitement and numbness. How could she have let what was meant to have been a provocative kiss to get him to ask to see her again turn into a grope that brought her to climax? Nothing like this had ever happened to her before. Not here or anywhere else. There was just something about "Jon." His touch, his conflicting strength and vulnerability, the way he almost smiled, almost laughed. And his almost total lack of physical inhibition.

She'd made a decision in his hall, just before she'd marched back in to the kitchen to kiss him, that had changed everything. She'd started something and she wanted it go on. To hell with guidelines. She'd been here for five years with little more than a couple of one-night stands to relieve normal sexual tensions. None of them had made her feel like this.

It was frightening. It was probably wrong. But she'd never felt so wonderful in her life.

About to swing through the lab doors, she almost collided with Carrie herself coming out. "Ah," Carrie said, immediately turning and going back in. "Just in time. We've got the lab to ourselves right now, but we'll have to be quick."

"What's the matter?" Rose asked, amused. "The boss hasn't found out about the little favors you do for me, has he?"

"No, and he'd bloody better not find out about this one," Carrie said with a shade of grimness. "This is totally weird, Rose. Look." She touched the screen a couple of times and the familiar graph of DNA strands came up.

"Err – what am I looking at?"

"The DNA from that blood sample you found."

"And?"

"And it's not human."

"Dog? I thought it would be."

"Not a dog. Nor a wolf, nor a sodding cow. Nothing on Earth." Rose frowned, glancing at her for elaboration. "Nothing on Earth," Carrie repeated with emphasis. "Rose, it's alien DNA. It has to be."

The shock of it drained the blood from her head so fast she felt dizzy and had to make a grab for the desk to steady herself. Her heart pounded with huge, loud beats that felt as if they were coming right through her chest.

"Alien?" she said, recovering, although her voice sounded too high, too unnatural to her critical ears. "That's a bit of a leap, isn't it? Couldn't it just be something new that you haven't come across before?"

"Ah but I have," Carrie said flatly. "Three years ago, a sudden death was brought to me for autopsy. He had DNA like that. And I never did discover what killed him," she added with what was clearly old irritation. "They removed the body long before I could get to grips with it."

Rose swallowed and sank down onto the nearest stool before her legs gave way. "Who did?" she managed. "Who removed the body?"

Carrie shrugged impatiently. "Government types with every authority you can think of from God Almighty down. And guess what? All traces of the work I had done were removed from my computer by next morning. So were the back-ups. There was no sign anywhere that the guy had even died. Or lived, for that matter. I checked that too, until word came down I had to stop making a fuss or lose my job. Or worse."

Rose stared at her. "Worse? How much worse?"

"I didn't ask. I'm nosy and I'm thorough. I don't like people to die for nothing. But more than that I don't want to disappear into some hospital and appear several months later with a fixed smile and half my memories missing. I shut up, and you have to, too. Drop the wolf story, Rose."

Rose nodded, dumbly. Her heart was chilled by her friend's words. Of course there were rumors of such disappearances and personality changes as Carrie feared, but she'd never met anyone so treated...

Jon! What about Jon?

Jon. The government took Jon's memory? Why? What had he done? "Thanks, Carrie," she mumbled, knowing only she had to get out of here to think. Probably away from Carrie for good if things were stirring...

"Don't tell anyone," Carrie warned, hitting the delete button on her computer. "None of this must come back to either of us."

"Got it," said Rose, turning away.

"And Rose, one last thing..."

Rose glanced back at her. Carrie said, "The wolf is not the alien."

"I know," Rose whispered.

The wolf had injured or killed an alien. Carrie knew it because she'd had an alien on her autopsy table three years ago, and he'd looked exactly like a human. And Rose just knew it.

Chapter Four

Having consumed the three steaks that were left in his fridge, along with most of the loaf and the milk that Rose had brought round, Jon spent all day on the library computer.

He didn't mean to, and the library staff clearly thought it was time he went and did something else. Since just about everyone had computer access at home, or on mobile devices, library computers were meant to be for short, sharp flurries, for the occasions you couldn't get home easily and your mobile battery had run out of charge.

Which raised another matter. He clearly knew how to use computers, so why didn't he have one in the flat? Admittedly, it was a dodgy area, but he appeared to have money, and as the day wore on, he realised he was an educated man. Didn't mean he couldn't sleepwalk and think a lot—an awful lot—about sex, rough wild sex. It was a side of him he rather thought wouldn't appeal to Rose.

Although she'd liked his directness. She'd liked it a lot. He'd made her orgasm, easily, and it had been good for her. That much was obvious. Next time, though, she'd be naked. He'd have her from behind, ramming her...

Shit, he really had to focus. Especially if there was ever to be a next time. He spent a long time trying and failing to track down the ownership or tenancy of his flat. Then, giving up, he moved onto missing person sites, reading police reports, hospital lists, news articles, tracking various reports of them from place to place.

None of the pictures were of him.

He did find an unnaturally high rate of military disappearances, which was odd when there hadn't been a conflict in the world for a century. These weren't listed on

police reports. They were on private sites, some of which complained their previous ones had been taken down.

Someone was trying and failing to cover. The other too frequent report he saw was of people who weren't sick, according to their families, going into hospital and returning several months later "changed." Again, these were on odd private sites and in lesser-read newscreens, some of which weren't even indexed. Deliberately, he suspected. He came across them by accident—some of them as he took a break from his research to hunt down Rose Winter's work in the iGazette.

Her stories were largely of the human interest variety. Very little politics or controversy. But she wrote with an incisive, yet compassionate style, and she was clearly very perceptive. And she was well travelled. One article described pioneer life on the Earth Colonies, and her feeling for space and other worlds was extraordinary.

She was deep, a little mysterious and entirely intriguing. And he liked her even better for it.

With odd reluctance, he returned to himself. Since it had already crossed his mind that he was one of those hospital "victims" he'd read about—it would certainly explain his unreasonable fear of going near doctors—he began to pursue all the hospitals which had been named, finding photographs and staff biographies, although patient information was understandably absent from public access.

On the other hand, there were ways around that ... a few by-pass tricks and a password conjured up from nowhere, and he found himself staring at the private records of the Government Military Health and Science Board.

That was more interesting. He was definitely on to something ... There were several establishments scattered across the world and even on a couple of colonies, where various top-secret projects took place. Weapons research, disease eradication, lifespan expansion. In another hasty by-pass he managed to get to the staff lists, scrolling down until a name leapt out at him.

He hadn't written it down. He hadn't written anything down but he remembered everything. And this name, Linnet Lewis, was one of the missing military personnel. And she was assigned to a project called...

With a crackle of static, his screen went dead.

Jon swore under his breath and hit the power button. As it hummed back into life, he found it hard not to drum his heels and his fingers in impatience. Why would Linnet Lewis's family not know that she was still working for the military? That staff list was up-to-date, and there was no record of her departure, transfer or death. Why did Linnet herself not inform her family? Because she wasn't allowed to? Because she couldn't? Because her memory had been wiped?

And if he was in the same boat as Linnet Lewis—he had the fast reactions of a soldier, after all, and a willingness to fight his way out of a jam—why was he here rather than there? Had he been chucked out? Had he escaped?

Hastily, his fingers flew over the keyboard, calling up the sites he'd been through to get to the last one. Except this time, his by-pass failed. Access denied. They were on to him. The knowledge, whether it came from his past or from some other instinct, was undeniable.

Standing, he pressed the power button once more until the screen went blank and silent. Then he walked hastily out of the library.

At the street door, someone seized his arm. "Ah, there you are. Come with me, please." A large, burly man in an incongruously smart suit. Another appeared on his left side, grabbing that arm.

"Not bloody likely," said Jon between his teeth and pulled back at the same time as he swung his arms. The men catapulted forward and into each other, enabling Jon to dart free. Another man walking toward him through the crowd swerved to intercept him, but Jon was quicker. He heard the footsteps of the two original men pounding after him and whirled to fight, fists connecting with a ferocious efficiency he hadn't known he possessed.

Another lighter touch on his shoulder spun him around to deal some more. Only the fact that it was a woman, young and timid-looking, caused him to drop his arm. Before he could run, she hissed conspiratorially, "This way!"

He paused for a tiny instant to stare into her frightened eyes. Which is when she stuck the needle in his neck.

He reached for it, trying to run, even to walk, but the world was fading before his eyes. His legs were too wobbly, too numb to move, and he fell into blackness.

* * *

Through the crowd in the main street, Rose watched him fall, saw the three men and the woman close in on him, dragging him upright and carrying him to a smart little craft parked opposite the library. Pushing after them, Rose heard the woman shout, "Make way!" to passers-by. "Medical emergency!"

Rose ran after them, peering over and between the crowd to see as they bundled Jon inside and leapt in after him. She didn't pause to think. She found the requisite button on her camera, pressed it and heard the door of the nearest craft unlock. Rose climbed in, and although it was five years since she'd piloted any aircraft, the controls were so simple that she was up in the air only seconds after Jon.

This wasn't part of her plan. She'd meant to find him, tell him her theory that he was a government "hospital victim" for some perceived misdemeanour, and say goodbye. For she recognised now, as she should always have done, that any relationship between them was doomed. She should have known better. But still, she owed him, and she wanted him to thrive somehow, to find a way through his difficulties to whatever happiness awaited him.

But when he wasn't at home, she'd remembered about him coming to the library, and on the way had witnessed his fight and his kidnap. Just what had he been looking at in the library to tip these guys off?

Rose kept her distance, swerving up and down, between the city craft, but always keeping her quarry in mind. Of course, it would be harder if they left the city and the skies were clearer, but there was an optimum height and distance whereby you

could avoid detection by the naked eye and by surveillance equipment. Especially, if you had one of *these*.

Rose took her mobile phone from her pocket, with one hand, slid back the side with her teeth, and as the prong slid out, she attached it to the flight control. Now she wouldn't register on anyone's radar.

Only then did reaction take over. She had time to realise that her heart beat like a rabbit's, that her mouth was dry and her hands had an inclination to shake if she relaxed them. "What the hell am I doing?" she asked aloud, and answered herself almost immediately. "I'm risking everything, *everything*, to follow a man I barely know into the lion's den..."

* * *

Jon woke to voices, quiet but clear and close. Opening one eye, he saw he wore only a loose hospital gown, and lay on something like an operating table, wires from his chest, his head, his forearms. Steel bands circled his wrists and ankles. And, only feet away from him, two people, a man and a woman in white lab coats, were staring at a computer screen while they talked.

Something on the screen made them both turn. Jon hastily closed his eye and lay perfectly still. They were monitoring him, to know when he woke up, so deliberately he forced his breathing, his heart-rate to a slower pace. Where had he learned to do that? God knew what they'd make of his brain.

The doctors, or whatever they were, glanced back at the computer screen and, apparently satisfied, returned to their discussion.

"They found him hacking into government sites from a public computer," the woman said. "Which implies he remembers something from his past. But I can't see what's causing the glitch. He shouldn't remember anything."

"Well, of course he remembers something," the man retorted. "He needs to be able to speak and eat and function in society. It's almost impossible to isolate such knowledge from every other memory. Glitches were bound to occur. He's just the first of them."

"A pity 'brain wipes' aren't really possible," the woman mourned.

"Not sure a dribbling vegetable would be much use to us," said the man dryly. "Now look at this. This is much more interesting. I've been analysing the log from his chip, and it shows that he made contact with a target last night. But there was no attack."

"Why not? Could the target have escaped?"

"Obviously. But how and why?" There was a short silence, then: "You know, I can't rid myself of the notion that our man is thinking for himself. I believe that for some reason, he chose to let the target escape."

Target? Did they mean Rose? Had he somehow been set on to her in his sleepwalk? Why, for God's sake? *Calm ... breathe slowly...*

"Perhaps he wasn't hungry," said the woman and the man let out a short, sharp bark of laughter. "After all, he functioned perfectly adequately the night before."

"Go over all his treatments," said the man abruptly. "Make sure there's absolutely no deviation from the plan. I'm just going to check the logs of the others, to make sure there haven't been similar instances."

"I looked already. There aren't. This one appears to be unique. And he's only been out two nights."

"It shouldn't be happening," the male doctor said in clear annoyance. "His profile was acceptable for the programme, I'm pretty sure his treatment was the same, so why is he behaving differently?"

"Talking about behaving differently," said the woman with a sudden tinge of anxiety in her voice. "It's almost sunset time. Shouldn't we get him downstairs?"

"Definitely. The drug won't keep him under when he changes. Get the orderlies."

Jon braced himself. If he could just get away with "playing dead" for the next few minutes, he might be able to surprise and overpower whoever was going to free him from those restraints...

But when the orderlies came, only moments later, they simply picked up the table top, which doubled as a stretcher, and carried him out of the lab. Though at least

they took the wires off him and he felt safe to open his eyes as they carried him along, bare clinical corridors through a thick, metal door, and down some steps.

At the bottom, the smell of disinfectant was less prevalent. Instead, he could smell animals. If he'd had hackles, they would have risen. Turning his head, Jon saw a row of large cages, made of strong metal mesh on three sides and the room's brick wall on the fourth. There were windows in the walls, barred on the outside, through which the last of the evening sunshine was petering in.

Then he saw a man inside one of them, dressed only in a hospital gown, with a short, military haircut. Large, powerful chains around each ankle. Worse, the man was crouched on the ground with his wrists tied together, gazing bleakly, desperately at Jon as he passed.

In the next cage was a young, blank-faced woman, similarly bound.

This is inhuman...

He knew where he was going now. They carried his stretcher right inside one of the cages and laid it on the bare floor. One of the orderlies dragged out a chain and fastened it to his ankle before removing the restraint already there. Damn, he'd have no instant of freedom in which to act.

"Careful, George," one of them warned. "He's awake. And it's almost sundown."

Part of him wanted to struggle anyway, to throw himself around in fury and helpless outrage. But something deeper kept him still, saving his energy and his fitness for a time when it could benefit him. Here, there was simply nothing he could do.

They bound his wrists before they unfastened the last of the stretcher's restraints, and then simply emptied him off.

Prepared, Jon leapt up, hurling himself after them, but as if they'd expected his attack, they'd already bolted, and in any case, the chains brought him to a juddering, painful halt well before he got to the cage door, which was slammed shut and locked in his face.

"Down, boy," one of the orderlies mocked, with a wink. "Be good." And they swaggered off, their footsteps echoing around the large, dreary basement as they climbed the stairs and closed the heavy door at the top with an ominous clank.

When its last echo had faded, Jon shouted to the other inmates. "Hey! What's going on here? What are they doing with us?"

He got no response, not even the rattle of a chain. "Don't you care?" he raged, before he realised that they really didn't. Whether drugged, or in the middle of whatever "treatment" the doctors upstairs had talked about, he'd glimpsed no understanding in their abject, miserable faces.

Then it was up to him alone to get them all out. And he was chained and bound so he couldn't even reach the cage door. The cage itself was riveted to the floor and the wall and the steel-reinforced ceiling, and its mesh was made of one of those strong new metal alloys. The window in the wall was well out of reach, and in any case it was barred from the outside.

But there would be chances. There were bound to be chances, he thought, just as the first pain struck him like a knife, doubling him over. From the other cages, he heard a high-pitched cry and a low moan of pain.

Synchronised cramps? This was weird.

His spine was in agony. His head was on fire. It felt as if every limb, every internal organ was being ripped asunder. Gasping with the force of the pain, he stared at his forearm as hair formed there before his eyes. Thick, black hair, like fur.

This is it, this is the change they talked about, he realised just before his body contorted in violent spasms and the screams of the others filled his ears. They might have been his own screams. He no longer knew, or cared. They said he'd been "out" for two nights. He couldn't remember the nights, except for last night's dream, and this change had something to do with it. He had to remember everything. When he changed, he had to remember this, and if and when he came back he had to remember the rest too...

And then he realised it was impossible, that nothing mattered except the pain.

Chapter Five

Rose had left her craft in the wood, some distance from the perimeter. Having circled the installation from the air, she knew this was the closest to the main building as she could come while avoiding gates.

Hoping the craft would not be noticed on any surveillance, she unplugged her shield device from it and took it with her. She'd need it to cut the fence wires, to see in the dark, and to jam the surveillance equipment.

The little laser did its job quickly and with minimum fuss, cutting her a hole just big enough for her to slip through, and easy enough to disguise away from a direct inspection by drawing the ends of the fence back together. Then, flattening herself to the ground, she listened.

There were sounds from the woods, insects and night creatures, but the howling of dogs, that came from within the building. Guard dogs, she imagined. She would just have to hope their antipathy for her would prevent them trying to hunt her down.

Rose got to her feet and ran lightly toward the building. She'd thought she'd changed. That she really had become the iGazette journalist with very little recollection or interest in her old life. Her new life had taken over as she'd made new friends among her colleagues, and Carrie, of course, whom she would miss appallingly. But now the action had begun, all her training came back to her with the clarity of yesterday. Fear was pushed aside, only the objectives of the mission mattered. And right now, her mission was to free Jon. Wherever he was.

At least the howling dogs weren't loose. Although when she approached the basement windows and pressed herself in against the wall until the searchlight had passed, she began to feel they were a little bit close for comfort.

When the light moved on, she turned and knelt, pressing her face to the grating and shining her torch inside. A giant wolf lay facing her, its nose on its bound, dejected paws. A large, solid chain ran around its hind legs, fastening them to a pole in the centre of the floor. Rose stared. Slowly, her hand crept to her throat as if trying to ease some imaginary constriction. This must be her wolf...

Well, she wasn't going in that window. Through the next, she couldn't make out anything except an empty cage and what seemed like an empty basement beyond. Then she came upon another equally large wolf, sitting on its chained hind legs, staring up at her with luminous eyes, and she began to feel really uneasy.

Shit, Jon, where are you? She decided to check all the cages before going back to the open, empty one to try and break in through the window. And just beyond a second empty one, she saw a third wolf.

It too was staring at her. But it stood, its ears upright and alert, and her stomach clenched with sudden, certain recognition. This *was* the wolf who'd hunted her last night, who'd stared at her with just that expression of confusion in its lamp-like eyes.

I'm being fanciful. Don't wolves all look alike?

The animal took a clumsy jump forward, closer to the window, dragging its chains along the ground. It leaned back onto its hind legs and pushed forward till its forelegs touched the back wall of its cage. Instinctively, Rose backed away. But the wolf wasn't snarling. It was just looking, gazing upward into her face, its nose twitching, trying to get her scent.

Slowly, Rose came back, and looked rather fearfully into the creature's eyes.

They looked like Jon's.

Oh no. That can't be right...

And yet for some reason she believed in the wolf as an ally. Which was quite a leap from the wolf who'd been distracted at the last moment from killing her last night.

According to the shield, there were no surveillance cameras close by, nothing to jam. These people were very sure of themselves. Of course they were. People were afraid to question, were afraid of disappearing. Fear was the greatest shield of all.

Using the laser, Rose cut through the outside grid and broke the window lock. The wolf backed away from her, whether afraid or just to let her jump down into its cage, she wasn't sure. Either way, it felt completely crazy, risking herself like this.

She squeezed herself through the open window and paused, wrestling with fresh doubts. But the wolf stood by, calmly watching her with no hint of the snarling aggression it'd shown last night.

Oh well, she'd come this far. With resignation, Rose dropped down beside the wolf. It stood perfectly still, gazing at her, its nose twitching. She didn't feel any safer. Warily, she glanced at its chains and saw blood at its ankle. Ignoring her probably dangerous upsurge of pity, she crouched down and reached slowly to free its front legs.

What the hell am I doing?

The hairs on the back of her neck stood up. She could feel its breath on her nape, but it didn't touch her. So she turned to the chains. If she judged it right, the laser could unlock them without harming the wolf.

It stood perfectly still while she dealt with each of them. Only when it stood free did it move, turning its huge head toward her. Rose couldn't breathe. It took a hesitant step toward her and bent its head.

Oh shit. I'm dead.

The fur was surprisingly soft as it brushed against her chin. Its head was warm and heavy on her shoulder.

For several pounding heartbeats, Rose didn't dare to move. Then, slowly, she reached up her hand to the creature's head. *It is Jon...*

The impossible thought was abruptly interrupted. The dim lights of the basement suddenly went up to full, just as a door clanged noisily open and human voices could be heard above. The wolf's head jerked up. Rose sprang to her feet.

"I just want to see how he behaves in wolf form," a man said argumentatively as feet fell on the stairs leading into their basement. "In particular how he reacts to a smell of the alien's clothes. These belong to the one he killed two nights ago..."

"Oh shit," whispered Rose in anguish. "Oh shit, shit, shit."

But in fact, her galloping understanding changed nothing. If they stayed here any longer they were both dead or worse. They only had this one chance of freedom. And it seemed the wolf was waiting for her.

Taking hold of the narrow sill above her head, she hauled herself up to the window and scrambled outside. The wolf landed almost on top of her, and then they were running like mad through the darkness.

The wolf seemed content to follow her lead, bounding beside her, rather than ahead. Behind her, she heard the exclamation of amazement, shrieks of warning. A few moments later, an alarm blared. Rose kept running. One thump of the fence revealed her hole and then they were through it.

The wolf ducked its head down, nudging her so that she almost fell over. Then it lowered its back, and Rose understood. The night couldn't get any weirder. Perhaps she'd dreamed the whole thing. Perhaps she'd wake up in her own bed as if the past five years had never been.

So she climbed onto the wolf's back, tangling its hair around her fingers to hold on, and it began to run, building up to a fantastic speed. The strength of the creature under her was terrifying. She could do nothing but hang on as it ate up the ground, and whisper into its furry ears instructions which against all the odds it seemed to understand, for in an impossibly short time they'd reached the forest clearing where she'd left her stolen craft.

She had the door open by remote before the wolf came to a halt and she slid from its back. She dove inside and the wolf leapt after her, rocking the tiny craft.

Rose slammed the shield into the flight controls and took off.

Below them, as she flew over the installation, she could see soldiers running in all directions. None of them could see her.

* * *

The hotel was clean, but only just. Its main attractions for Rose were its location in the busy heart of the city, size, and changeable clientele, all of which made her feel suitably anonymous.

She registered under a false name, using one of the alternative ID cards she kept for emergencies as well as undercover journalism. For although she was pretty sure no surveillance cameras at the installation had picked her up, she might just have been witnessed stealing the craft. "A quiet room at the back would suit me best," she said casually.

"Three-eighty," said the night clerk without interest, handing her the pass-card.

"Thank you."

It turned out the sullen clerk had paid attention to her wishes, because the room did look onto the back courtyard between buildings. Praying she wouldn't need to get someone up to pry open the window, she went across and tugged.

It opened wide immediately. Rose went and sat on the not too uncomfortable bed, her heart beating hard and painfully, worse than at any point throughout her rescue of the wolf and their escape. Would the wolf find the room? Would it come? Or would it go hunting?

Come to that, would it come hunting her?

Unlikely, since she would have made an easier meal in the woods or the craft, or as they'd walked through the dark city streets after abandoning the craft...

And most importantly, was she right? Or was she guilty of a stupid, unforgivable mistake that left Jon languishing in the installation while a giant wolf marauded around the city killing people?

Something rattled. Her gaze jerked up to the window, and the wolf stood there, its mouth open and panting.

Rose swallowed. "Come in," she invited, and it did, loping down from the sill onto the floor. It seemed to fill the room, massive, wild, unpredictable. And yet, still in a daze of unreality, she found herself patting the bed beside her. It jumped up without a second invitation, not to savage her, but to flop down on its stomach and lay its huge head on its paws. Its eyes were closing.

Rose knew how it felt. She was exhausted, physically, mentally, and just about any other way it was possible to be. Pulling back one side of the quilt, she slithered underneath with all her clothes on and lay down beside the wolf.

Under the covers, she took off her clothes and threw them on the floor, laughing at herself for such modesty before an animal. The wolf never stirred. She thought, despite her debilitating tiredness, that she'd never be able to sleep with him, with *it*, so close. But reality was different. As she drifted into unconsciousness, it struck her that in fact she had never been so safe in her life.

Chapter Six

She woke with a start, staring at the shapeless daylight shadows dancing on the plain wall only feet from her face. She remembered everything in an instant. Lying very still, she listened for the sounds of other breathing. She thought she heard it, very faintly, but it didn't matter. She could sense another presence.

Very slowly, she turned over and looked at the sleeping figure beside her on the bed. Where the wolf had fallen asleep lay Jon, naked and uncovered on top of the quilt.

So it was true. She hadn't really doubted it, not since she'd looked into the wolf's eyes last night and overheard the words of the doctor, or whatever he was.

What have they done to you?

Naked, he was the most beautiful man she had ever seen. She'd acknowledged it on their first encounter, from the mere glimpse that had made her afraid to look any more. Broad shoulders, tapered waist, narrow hips, long, muscular legs. He was built like an athlete, his skin a deep golden brown that spoke of years spent out of doors or in warm climates. A scattering of soot-black hair dusted his powerful chest and forearms. He lay on his back with one arm flung out off the bed. The other bent upward with his hand under his head. But although he looked totally relaxed and his breathing was peaceful and even, a strong frown marred his brow, even in sleep.

Rose wanted to reach out and smooth it away. The urge to run her hands up and down the length of his body, just to know what he felt like, was so powerful that she had to clench her fists. Instead, as a reward for her restraint, she let her gaze travel the same route.

This time she didn't skim over the arousing sight of his dark, fully erect cock, jutting upwards over his paler stomach. What would it feel like in her hand? It looked too thick to close her fist around, but she'd enjoy trying.

She swallowed, wondering how it would taste, how it would react to the caresses of her tongue and the nips of her teeth. Fuck, she wanted to climb on him now and ease him inside her. He would fill her. And she just knew he'd be a good lover, satisfying her as no one ever had...

But she couldn't go there. They had to talk, work out what to do, and then go their separate ways. Maybe in time, when things were different ... if he didn't hate her. If she didn't come to her senses and realise a relationship with a half-wolf was impossible.

Determinedly, she took hold of the quilt and threw it back, just as Jon turned over, throwing his arm out over the bed. It landed across her body, making her gasp with alarm. Jon, however, grunted with obvious approval, moving his hand on the tingling skin of her waist, and moving higher until he found her breast.

She could and should have thrown him off at that stage, but his touch was incredibly sweet, his questing fingers tender as they caressed around the soft underside of her breast and then over her long, hard nipple.

Rose glanced at him apprehensively, but his eyes were still closed. He'd never know the pleasure he was bringing her just by touching, pinching. She'd have this tiny moment to cherish in the years of loneliness and strife to come. But he had wicked fingers. Their every motion, circling, flicking, stroking, was electric, seeming to tug an invisible cord attached to her pussy which clenched and opened, increasingly desperate to receive him. Her whole body had begun to burn and tingle.

"Mmmm," he murmured, hauling himself across the bed at the same time as his arm tightened, drawing her into him. His thigh, warm and heavy, swept over hers and he dragged her under him with a grunt of satisfaction.

Stunned, Rose didn't move. Neither did Jon. As if he'd found a more comfortable sleeping position, he seemed quite content to lie there on top of her, his face half-buried

in the pillow, his bone-hard cock across her thigh, his chest crushing her breasts. And truthfully, her body was more than content too, silencing her mind, which contemplated waking him up.

Her pussy pulsed under his weight, longing. And then, very gradually, he began to rub his body against hers, manoeuvring until his cock slipped between her thighs and the blunt head nestled among the wet folds of her desperate pussy.

Oh shit, he's asleep! I can't bear this! He doesn't know what he's doing. I can't let him...

His questing cock found her slick entrance and pushed in. Showers of sensation scattered through her. Her pussy caught him and squeezed without her brain's permission. She loved being stretched by his cock. It felt so good, even with just the head of it inside her, that she thought she would come just lying there and throbbing with him.

Jon groaned and lifted his head from the pillow, changing position to get a better purchase, leaning on his elbows. Eyes still closed, he found her mouth without difficulty, covering it in a huge, ravenous kiss that spoke volumes for his body's hunger. At the same time, he pushed fully into her and she almost exploded. His hands were all over her, running up and down her sides, catching and stroking at her breasts, reaching round her hips to her buttocks.

Growling into her mouth, he began to fuck her seriously, full, hard strokes that reached impossibly far inside her, crashing over the spot of fire and ice that sparked cascades of pleasure through every nerve in her body. She grabbed hold of his shoulders, his warm back, feeling the muscles undulating under her hands, gasping with amazement, with need. She caught his rhythm, pushing back, because she could do nothing else – until he opened his eyes.

They looked black with lust, opaque, curiously hard in the middle but fuzzy and clouded round the edges.

Still blind. He didn't know it was her. The knowledge was pain and relief rolled into one. She closed her eyes. Still fucking, he recaptured her mouth, thrusting with his

tongue, and then just as she felt the inevitable tide of orgasm begin to rise and roll, he went completely still.

She opened her eyes in alarm, and found him staring into them. The hardness had gone, but behind the desperate lust was shock, and something that looked terribly like shame.

"Rose," he said in anguish. "Rose Winter. What am I doing?"

Panic that he would withdraw lent her strength. "Fucking me." She tightened her arms around him, slid one hand down to his buttocks to encourage him. "And if you stop now, I'll die."

"You want this?" He seemed so stunned, which made her want to laugh.

"You think you'd have got this far if I didn't?" Abruptly, the laughter died, and the question she both needed and feared to know came out as no more than a trembling whisper. "Do you?"

He stared at her, comprehension dawning in his passionate face. His cock jerked inside her, making her gasp, then lay still. "Do I want to fuck you, Rose, as opposed to any random female I happen to find in my bed? Oh fucking hell, yes."

He arched his back, withdrawing almost totally while he latched his mouth to her breast in a hard, sucking kiss that drove her wild. She dug her nails into the skin of his back, his ass, and he drove into her hard and furiously.

She met his every forceful move, moaning and crying out her pleasure as he pounded her with such power that he had to hold her body steady. His mouth was fierce on her breasts, his teeth grazing and biting. Only when she began to come did he seize her lips instead, thrusting into her frenetically.

Her whole body exploded, shattering in a thousand convulsing pieces, utterly helpless under his continued hammering which drove the intensity to heights she'd never experienced or imagined. His back arched under her scrabbling hands. A deep, powerful groan soared up in his throat and erupted, rising into something approaching a howl. Hot seed spurted up inside her as his thrusts became erratic, yet still reaching fully inside her.

Her world spinning in black, devastating pleasure, she let herself be driven on by his cries, his groans until some element of pain brought her back to earth. His whole body still shuddered in the grip of a massive climax, and yet he jerked with shock as well as ecstasy. His eyes were open and staring.

"Jon?" she whispered in sudden anxiety. "Jon!"

To her amazement, he began to thrust again, faster, while he stared beyond her. Every few thrusts he paused and ground his cock into her, circling inside her. It shouldn't have been possible after so huge an orgasm, but the sparks were catching again. And it seemed true for him too. Gazing up at him, she squeezed his cock, caressed it between her powerful muscles, writhed to egg him on. His eyes glazed, he fucked her to the brink again before his face cleared and he whispered her name and drove her over the edge with slow, tender strokes.

* * *

Rose said, "What just happened there?"

She lay in his arms, her head cradled on his chest, her hand on his lazily throbbing cock.

"I made you come twice," he said smugly.

"I made you come for a very long time," she countered.

"Oh, I know you did," he said fervently. He tugged gently at her hair until she turned and rested her chin on his chest to look at him. "I always wanted you. I looked at you through that mob and I wanted to take you on the road in front of them. Every time I looked at you, I thought of sex. Every time I thought of you, I wanted very badly to fuck you. And yet I never knew if that was just what I did. I didn't know if I reacted like that to every personable woman. If I was a womaniser, a bastard, even a rapist. Some of my fantasies were pretty wild and rough..."

"Like what we just did?"

"And more. Lots more. I thought at first I was afraid because I couldn't trust you. But actually, I couldn't trust myself."

Rose sat up. "Jon..."

"I do like sex. I like sex a lot. And since I became the wolf, I like it a lot more."

"You know you're the wolf?" Rose said, low. She didn't know if she was more relieved or anxious, but he ignored it.

He said, "But I know now I'm not violent. I won't hurt you. Except by accident," he added, a shade of uncertainty crossing his eyes.

"You can be rough," she acknowledged. Then, as a frown began to form, she touched his lips and added hastily, "I like it. I like it juxtaposed with the tenderness. I like your unpredictability and your power. I like that physically I couldn't resist you if I tried, and yet I know that I could stop you with one word. I didn't want to."

She'd never formed it into words before, but she realised as she said them that without any logic or reason, the trust had always been there.

A smile played around his eyes and lips. Reaching up, he touched her breast, toying idly with the nipple. "You're amazing. I thought you'd run a mile when you knew I was the wolf."

She caught his hand, pressing it into her breast. "When did you know?"

"Last night, when I changed. The dreams made sense. I realised they weren't dreams but memories. And as the wolf, I remembered the night before too. I killed someone."

Rose closed her eyes. "I know," she whispered. "And then you let me go."

He nodded. "I thought that was a dream. When I changed last night, I was so afraid I'd forget everything I'd discovered, forget I was a man. It all got lost in the pain. And yet when I saw you at the window, it began to come back."

"All of it? You remembered who you are, what happened to you?"

He shook his head. "Not then. It was as if I had no life before two nights ago." He smiled at her. "Until you made me come."

She closed her mouth, frowning with incomprehension.

"I began to get flashbacks," he explained. "Mixed up with the pleasure, it was kind of hard to hang onto them, but I know my name, and I know what I am, what was done to me with my permission and what without. And what my purpose is. There's

more, lots more. It's coming in dribs and drabs, but I think if we have more sex over the next few days—lots and lots more sex—it might speed things up."

There was a note of tender teasing in his voice that made her throat close up. "Jon, I can't."

The words didn't sit well with clutching his hand to her breast, so, miserably, she let it go. For an instant, he gazed at his hand, quite still on her pale breast. Then he too drew away.

"Because of the killing? If it helps, I was genetically altered, modified to become the wolf for hunting purposes. I was programmed if you like, to kill targets. I know I can break that now, because I didn't kill you."

She closed her eyes, so that she didn't have to see him. "Do you remember who your targets are, Jon?"

"Not exactly. Not yet. The guy who interrupted us said something about aliens. Foreigners, I suppose. In some countries there's heavy resistance to the Earth Government. Or perhaps it's the colonists..."

"It's not the colonists, Jon." Opening her eyes, she dropped her head back against the headboard. "The man you killed was an alien species. Not of this Earth. I have a pathologist friend who tested the blood for me. The DNA is alien."

For an instant he didn't speak. But she felt his eyes almost cutting into her averted face.

"What, like space monsters?"

"That's right. Space monsters who're infiltrating Earth. My guess is, the Earth Government found out about it a few years ago by accident when one died of natural causes. It was all hushed up to avoid panic, no doubt while the government found a suitable weapon against them. The trouble was, they had no idea how many were here, or who to question to find out when the main invasion would arrive. They look just like humans. Only their DNA gives them away and mass testing wasn't feasible if panic was to be avoided."

She drew in a shuddering breath. "But I think they discovered that animals react to the aliens. They can smell them. Except animals are too frightened to attack them. And so they created a hybrid of fighting men, programmed to kill, and wolf, capable of recognizing and killing. That's you."

She lifted her head and gazed into his eyes. "Why do you think when you first looked at me, whatever the attraction, you hated my guts? Why..."

"I didn't," he interrupted. His face was set, his eyes hard.

She smiled sadly. "Yes, you did. I saw it in your eyes. You get it now, don't you? You know why you were hunting me the other night. Let me just remove any doubt."

Raising both hands to her eyes, she ducked her head and popped out each contact lens. Then, slowly, she raised her head and looked him full in the face.

Chapter Seven

It was as if he couldn't look away. Then he blinked, just once, his lashes showing black against his pale cheek for the tiniest instant before his gaze returned to her. And by then it was unreadable.

It could have been worse, she thought drearily. He could be twisting her arm up her back and marching her to the nearest police station. Although if he did that, he'd end up back in the installation she'd just helped him escape from. And next time, she doubted he'd break through their conditioning. He'd be lost forever.

"How long have you been here?" His voice was almost ludicrously casual.

"Five years."

"What's your name?"

She closed her eyes. "You couldn't pronounce it. But it's the name of a winter flower on my home planet. It looks like a rose."

"Why are you here? Spying?"

"Sort of." She took a deep breath. "I'm a special operative, not a military agent, a civilian one. I'm part of a programme to infiltrate Earth. It was an honour to be chosen." Hysterical laughter fought its way up her throat and was swallowed back. "We're known as sleepers."

"Clearly an intergalactic concept," he murmured wryly. "Go on."

She shrugged. "That's it. Our task was to blend in, become part of Earth society until there were enough of us."

"Enough of you for what?"

She licked her lips which had grown suddenly dry under his interrogation. This had been his job before, she thought. To ask questions, find out the truth...

She said steadily, "To shut things down when the invasion force arrives. Jam surveillance signals, break up communications between key forces, army, police, media, so that my people can take over with minimum bloodshed."

"That's how we got away so easily last night ... How many of you are there?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, I think you do," he said softly, and for the first time she felt afraid. She realised she had no idea what he would do next, what he was capable of doing to her now, despite what he'd been doing to her so very recently.

"I don't," she said wearily. "None of us know who the others are, when they arrive, or anything. We each wait for our own signal to begin."

"Have you received that signal?"

"No." She pushed her hair out of her face, and gave a twisted smile. "I've begun to think I never will. That I've been abandoned here."

"You've had no contact with your own people for five years?"

She shook her head, glancing up at him. He was frowning.

"That's inhuman," he observed.

"What do you expect?"

"Do you mind?" he countered, taking her by surprise again.

"No, I don't mind. It's like my life is here now. Sometimes I believe I *am* Rose Winter, journalist, and that the people I call friends will never hate my guts, or worse."

"Dream on."

Pain twisted through her. He stirred, restlessly.

"Why did you break me out last night?" he said abruptly.

She shrugged. "Because I saw them take you. I'd just learned that the wolf attack was on an alien and thought I might have to disappear, leave the city. I was coming to find you first, because it had just struck me you might have been one of the 'hospital disappeared'."

"Good guess," he said evenly. "But it doesn't explain what you did."

"No," she agreed. "It doesn't." She slid off the bed and reached for her clothes. "I'm going to shower, and then buy some provisions."

* * *

The shower was a great place to cry. It was private, disguised the noise, and washed off the evidence. She stood under the jet with her mouth open so that the sobs came out like breath. Salt tears and shower water poured down her cheeks and body, into her mouth and ears, and her eyes leaked and leaked. Because she'd ruined forever what could have been the most precious relationship of her life.

She couldn't have done anything else. She needed to be honest, despite her years of lies that had begun as honourable service to her government. Now nothing was clear cut except the pain of his rejection, of his coldness, of his retreat from lover to interrogator within a moment.

Earth people were weird. They railed against the government although they did very little to change it. They showed little respect or love for their planet, seemed more interested in colonizing space. And yet let someone threaten it, dare to invade it, and they turned into possessive, self-righteous, defensive bastards.

Well, she'd hit him with a lot all at once, and he hadn't exactly had an easy time of it the last few days either. She'd known he would hate what she represented, and by extension come to hate her. But she'd hoped they could talk, could at least part with an impression of goodwill, however that shattered later in the face of threat and invasion. That was impossible now. She'd seen it in his eyes. In the lack of any emotion in his eyes.

Tears flowed faster, making her gasp and shudder. What did she want of him? She'd known him for three days, and they owed each other nothing. And yet her heart hurt and she couldn't stop crying.

The sound of the shower curtain moving caused her head to snap round. Through the water, she saw the blurry figure of Jon, staring at her.

"Christ, your eyes are beautiful," he muttered and stepped in behind her, cupping her face in both hands before his mouth covered hers. "You taste of salt. Are you crying?" he whispered against her lips.

"No," she lied. His cock was bone-hard and fully erect, his balls pressing into the crack between her cheeks.

"Do you want me, Rose Winter? Now that your eyes are no longer false, do you want to fuck the wolf?"

His words stabbed at her core, making her gasp as gladness and hope reached up to swamp her. There was fear too, for the future, but at least it was no longer hopeless.

"I've always wanted to fuck you. I have this feeling, this terror, that I always will ... Oh shit, Jon, one for the road?"

His hands slid round her from behind, covering her breasts. His wet cock slid between her thighs and straight inside her. She cried out. "One for the road," he said, pushing her up against the shower wall. Reaching up, she grabbed the top of the cubicle for support. His hands fell away from her breasts, one reaching between her legs to hold her pussy. Her breasts pressed into the shower wall and when he ground his cock inside her, her nipples welcomed the smooth, cool caress of the tile while the water pattered into her skin, sensitizing her whole body.

He took her clitoris between his thumb and forefinger and rolled it. She moaned and he rammed into her again, hard and continuously. With every stroke, her clitoris seemed to fuck his fingers, and the idea was almost as erotic as the action. The pleasure was so intense it was almost painful, an icy yet addictive flame that consumed her. Writhing on his cock, on his fingers, she pushed back into him, her breasts slapping against the wall. He reached up to protect them, holding them both together in one hand.

She felt his mouth on her neck, nibbling, kissing, dragging the skin into his mouth as he thrust into her and continued to roll her clitoris in his fingers, over and over.

Almost mindless with bliss, she heard him mutter, "One for the road. One for the air, one for getting there ... Endless numbers ... What are we going to do, Rose?"

Laughter trembled on the cusp of orgasm. "Keep fucking?"

"Oh yes," he said fervently and with one powerful ram spilled his seed inside her. It sent her over the edge, convulsing between him and the shower wall. His hands covered hers on top of the cubicle, holding her upright with his body. Shuddering, he ground and circled his cock inside her to extract the maximum joy for them both.

He eased his weight off her, slowing his panting breath. Cupping her face, he kissed her mouth again.

"You don't mind me using you as a memory locator?" he muttered.

"I'm happy to be of service," she managed.

"Good. Because for medical reasons, I have to spend the day screwing."

"More?" she asked breathlessly and stared in fascination as amber lights began to dance in his dark, lustful eyes.

"Much, much more," he said hoarsely. With which he picked her up in his strong arms and carried her back into the bedroom without troubling to turn off the shower.

There, he laid her on the bed and sprawled between her legs, still gazing in fascination at her eyes.

She said, "We can change our manners, our speech, our language, clothes and custom, but our eyes give us away."

"Yes," he agreed. "They do. But they're not false. Also ... they're incredibly beautiful. Like gold. And they shine like jewels. Are all your people so beautiful?"

"I don't know," she said, a trifle lamely since she was distracted by his scrutiny of her pussy.

"Have you known many Earth men? In a carnal sort of a way?"

"One or ... two," she gasped as his head dipped and his tongue flickered over her clitoris.

"How did they compare with lovers of your own world?"

His fingers spread her petals wide. His very gaze made her entrance pulse and weep. When he began to lick her clitoris, she cried out and tangled her hands in his hair for something to hold on to. "About the same," she squeaked.

"Tell me about this," he said, his breath stirring against her folds, the vibrations of his voice stabbing pleasure through her clitoris. "Tell me how it makes you feel."

"Am-mazing," she got out, bucking as he sucked her clitoris into his mouth. "Oh fuck, I'm going to come in a minute and I thought it was you who..."

He released her clitoris and slid his finger into her entrance. Her pussy clamped on it without permission. "Feel free to come and get it," he invited, taking his cock in his fist and giving it one gliding stroke before he released it.

Rose did, crawling round until her lips faced his cock. It was difficult, in an exquisite sort of a way, because his lips were latched to her lower ones and his finger was plunging in and out of her pussy. His other hand had begun to caress her bottom, his fingers probing and pressing around her anus.

Rose took his cock into her mouth and gave up trying to think any further. It was her duty and pleasure to make him come.

Which he did. And so did she.

* * *

Jon said, "Ask me my name."

"What's your name?" she said sleepily, adjusting his head on her breasts for greater comfort.

"Jon."

She rolled him onto his back to stare at him, half-laughing, half-suspicious. "Really?"

"Really. Jon Maynard, Major, Earth Force."

She smiled, as if glad she could still call him by the name she'd been thinking of him for the last three days. But she didn't ask any more questions, and he was glad. The memories that flashed into his mind during orgasm were like trailers, scenes cut from a movie, or from someone else's life. He knew they were his, and yet he didn't feel

comfortable with them yet. His sense of self was still the naked man found in Art's doorway, the man who could hunt for his own clues and turn into a wolf at night, and become mentally strong enough to decide he needed his own reasons to kill. That wasn't much of a military man, one who should always follow orders...

Most weird of all was the ease with which he accepted the wolf. As if somewhere he'd always known it was there. And he couldn't deny that his comfort with what would give most people the screaming fan-tods, had a lot to do with Rose Winter. His heart constricted. Staring into her astounding golden eyes, he said, "I don't want to let you go."

Her amber lashes flickered down, briefly veiling whatever pain was there. She said, "What will you do now?"

"I'm not sure. I can't let the invasion happen. And yet killing people like you doesn't seem right either. What about you?"

She lowered her face until her forehead touched his. Her hair fell about him like a curtain. "I don't want to take your planet. I like your people. Most of them. I don't even know what they plan to do with you all when they arrive to live here. Herd you into reservations, probably..."

She sounded so miserable that he kissed her hair. "I won't let that happen."

"I'm not so sure you can stop it. Not you nor your repressive, controlling government. My people are technically and militarily far more advanced than yours."

"Then we're concentrating on the wrong things, breeding monsters like me to hunt minor civilian saboteurs like you. We should be developing surveillance and weapons capable of fighting back. Rose, can you help us understand that stuff? Your people's technology, their location..."

There was a pause. "Some of it, perhaps. But I won't."

"You're afraid of them?"

"I can't betray them," she whispered. "They're my people. Mine. I swore oaths I believed in. In maturity, I can't approve of what they're doing, but I can't contribute to their downfall either."

It was like a mirror of his own dilemma. He couldn't approve of his government's actions either. And yet old loyalties die hard and it seemed he would still defend them. Or at least the Earth.

She said, "Don't ask me to."

He pushed his head back against the headboard. "Don't ask me to let a valuable information source go either."

"We have to part."

"I know." And they both knew he would find others like her, from whom he would get the same information. If she didn't find a way to warn them first. "I'll try to stop the killing of your people."

"I'll try to communicate with my government, though what anyone like me can do, I don't know."

He nodded slowly and reached up with both hands to her pale, elegant throat. Once, he'd felt the compulsion to strangle her. "Can we have tonight?"

She nodded and swallowed under his fingers. "I'll leave in the morning."

He let her go, and she slid out of the bed with slightly forced brightness. "We need food."

He smiled, watching her collect her clothes and march toward the bathroom once again. "I'd like to do dull things like shopping with you."

She paused. "I don't think you can, though. You have to keep a low profile. No one knows who your accomplice is, but they'll be looking out for you."

She was right, of course. He'd have to leave the city at night, as the wolf. Tomorrow night.

While she showered and dressed, and replaced the false, brown contact lenses, he thought about his next move. She kissed him before she left, and it entered his head how insane it was to be trusting his sworn enemy more than his own people for whom he was prepared to die.

While she was gone, he remade the rumpled bed and then stood under the shower to think some more. It was as he emerged that he realised the light was

beginning to fade outside. As well he hadn't gone with Rose. Turning into a giant wolf in front of the happy shoppers was guaranteed to bring exactly the sort of attention they didn't need.

Smiling sourly, he sat down on the bed and waited for the change. His nose twitched. Alarmed, he stood up, staring out of the window, searching for Rose. He could smell wolf.

Chapter Eight

Rose, weighed down with some new clothes and shoes for Jon as well as a large amount of cooked take-away food, got a taxi back to the hotel. She hadn't realised it was so late, and darkness had fallen earlier than she'd expected. Bad weather, she acknowledged, glancing up at the starless sky.

The taxi dropped her in the hotel's underground carpark. She paid the driver and began to walk toward the elevator, her footsteps echoing in the dank, empty space. Jon would be the wolf by now, which meant he couldn't talk to her.

It didn't matter. She would have his company. And they would have their last dawn together before parting forever. Fortunately, she had the strength to do that now. She could leave him, smiling, because even knowing the truth about her, he still wanted her, still made love to her as if she was the most exciting and precious being in the universe.

Something snarled. Rose stopped dead, glaring wildly around her. The place was well lit, but any number of wolves could be hiding behind the cars and craft parked in haphazard rows. She had no idea where the sound came from. It echoed all around her. Like ten wolves. Like a hundred.

Or none. It was her imagination. She began to walk faster, hugging her bags and groceries to herself. But the hairs on the back of her neck were standing up like stalks. Every nerve was shrieking.

Shadows surged up the wall in front of her. She spun around desperately and saw two giant wolves pulling toward her, snarling and slaving. Behind them, holding the lead to which they were harnessed, was a large man in a black raincoat.

The sight was bizarre enough to halt anyone in their tracks. Not that there was much comfort in the presence of the human, who clearly had very little if any control over the far stronger animals.

"Interesting," said the man, more than a trifle breathlessly as the wolves came to their own halt a suspicious few yards from her. "ID, if you please. Throw it over to me and don't even think of going anywhere or my wolves will savage you before you've taken three steps."

Holding her groceries with difficulty in one arm, with the handles of the other bags dangling over her wrists, Rose dug in her pocket and produced the ID card which she obediently flung in his direction. It landed at his feet.

Warily, Rose glanced at the two wolves who were still snarling and snapping, although, curiously, they stayed close to the man's legs. In fact, now that she looked at them properly, they didn't look all that well. Though certainly large, if not quite as big as Jon, their coats were scraggy, even bald in places, and under her curious stare, one of them actually dropped its gaze. As if it was frightened.

Was that her hope?

"Rose Winter, journalist with the iGazette," their handler read out from her card. "Nice job for an alien invader. Is that how you tracked down Jon Maynard?"

Her heart lurched. She stared at him, wondering how they were on to Jon and her so quickly. She'd assumed the wolves had just found her, much as Jon did that first night.

"Come on, Ms. Winter, I can't hold the wolves back forever. Did he find you or did you find him? How did you discover what he was, how did you deactivate him?"

Her mouth dropped open. She saw the first glimmer of uncertainty cross his face as he recognised her sheer astonishment. And then the elevator pinged.

It was instinct to glance round, so she did, without permission, and in fact her captor didn't object. Out of the elevator erupted another wolf, huge and powerful as it leapt the few paces across the floor to stand by Rose.

"Jon," she whispered, unable to touch him without dropping the load in her arms. Had he changed in the elevator? Or walked through the hotel like that? It was no time to ask, and in any case, he couldn't answer.

His attention was occupied, chiefly in staring at the two leashed wolves, who abruptly lay down, whining like dogs. Rose laughed.

"They're not ready yet," the man raged. "Damn it, if you don't surrender yourself to me, Major Maynard, you will be executed! Do I make myself clear?"

Jon turned on his heel.

The wolf handler said desperately, "There's no escape! Reinforcements are arriving from all over the city – wolves, soldiers and agents, all with orders to capture the traitor Jon Maynard, who's protecting an alien! There's nowhere for either of you to hide!"

"Jon," Rose said warningly. There were shadows entering the carpark, large ones, bounding faster over the barriers and charging toward them.

"Attack!" screamed the handler.

Rose didn't wait. She bolted into the elevator, crying, "Ground!"

Jon squashed in beside her, pushing his head urgently between her thighs. It felt weird, because of who he was, before she realised he was urging her on to his back. So it was to be another fast getaway.

The door opened and Jon leapt across the foyer floor with Rose on his back, still clutching all her bags. As they charged through astonished and screaming guests, past the stunned receptionists, Rose wanted to laugh out loud. In moments they were through the door and into the fresh air. She could hear wolves howling, hunting her, the shouts of men hunting Jon, hunting both of them.

Snarling and snapping, Jon broke through two men who closed in on them and then they were off, bounding into the darkness and freedom.

* * *

There wasn't much shelter in the ruined hut, but it was enough. They'd broken out of the city and run and walked for miles before coming to rest here just as the first

dawn light seeped into the sky. While Rose prosaically unpacked the groceries she'd held on to – mostly – during all that time, and the clothes she'd bought for Jon, he went through the change.

Watching him, her throat constricted. "Is it painful?" she asked when he opened his exhausted eyes and smiled at her.

"Changing into the wolf, yes. This way, not so much. I've always slept through it before." He sat up, flexing his muscles, and in spite of everything, she felt her blood rise. "But here's the exciting thing, Rose. I think I can control it. Last night, I staved off the change until I got to the elevator. I could smell the wolves down there and knew they were coming for you ... When I'm rested, I'm going to try and bring it on early."

"But why?"

"We'll cover more ground that way."

We. We'll cover more ground.

"Jon, they're on to us," she said urgently. "They know you've kept quiet about me. They know we're together."

"Then I guess that's one decision we don't have to make."

Her heart beat strongly, loudly. "What do you mean?" She pushed the clothes toward him, but he ignored them, reaching over them to get to her. He wrapped both arms around her, dragging her onto his naked lap.

"I mean we're in it together, and together we'll figure out a way to beat this, to stop the invasion without betraying either of our worlds."

"How the hell are we going to do that?" she demanded, gazing into his dark, clouded eyes. The glints in them heated her body, made anything seem possible. Her hands gripped his powerful shoulders so tightly that her knuckles showed white. But he didn't flinch.

"We need to find the other wolves. I spoke to the two in the carpark. They're still in treatment so I could dominate them easily. They were in the installation the other night. I've promised I'll go back for them, soon. And I will. And I think we can reach some of the others too. Using them, we'd have a hold over my government. They'd have

to listen to us. Also, we need to contact your world and convince them not to come. We need resistance from both peoples if we're to achieve anything."

Rose closed her mouth. Somewhere there was excitement and admiration, even exhilaration, but on the surface, all she had was astonishment. "Just a short agenda, then," she said weakly.

He grinned. "Not that short. For example, I thought we'd begin with a long morning screw."

Her pulses raced. Held in the arms of this particular naked man, she had no argument to offer. Her "Why?" was more of a provocation than an objection.

"So I can remember the names of my colleagues, of course."

Her hand lifted, with impetuous force, but he caught it and bore her backward onto the mud and twig-strewn floor, until he lay on top of her, breast to breast, his cock grinding between her thighs.

"But mostly," he whispered, "because I worship your amazingly beautiful, alien body. And because I love you."

She stopped fighting. "You love me?" she stammered.

"I love you, and I won't ever let you go. You're not safe until we tame the wolves. And by the time we do that, I'm hoping you'll love me too."

She seized his face between her hands, staring at him in mingled disbelief and frustration. "I can't work out which of us is stupider, or why. I've only known you three days. I don't know how this can have happened so fast. But I knew this morning that I loved you. I would only leave you for your own good."

"It will never be for my good." His hands were busy on her trousers, tearing them down over her hips and thighs so that he could ease his cock into her already wet, welcoming pussy. He entered with a sigh of pure contentment. "I could die happy in here."

"Please don't," she gasped, and hung on to him for the ride.

Marie Treanor

Marie Treanor was born and brought up in Scotland, but for some years moved around the UK working and studying. Now she is back home and happily married with three young children. Having grown bored with city life, she lives these days in a picturesque village by the sea where she is lucky enough to enjoy herself avoiding housework and writing stories of romance and fantasy.

You can find out more about Marie and her books on her website: www.marietreanor.com, or by subscribing to her newsletter at groups.yahoo.com/group/marietreanornewsletter. She also shares the Sexy Delights loop with fellow Scottish author Kyla Logan. Find out more at groups.yahoo.com/group/sexydelights. Marie loves to hear from readers, who can contact her at marie@marietreanor.com.