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*Tryst*

# Shifters

Cora Zane

Crossing  
**BORDERS**



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Cora Zane

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## Chapter One

It came from deep in the woods, a low, lonely howl that tugged at Laney's soul. She heard it and her ears pricked, her body suddenly going tense. She looked up from the book she was reading in the den of her small cabin and waited, wondering if the sound would come again.

Seconds passed. A minute. The teasing notes rose higher and crested on the balmy night air, causing a slow, tingling heat to creep over her body. Laney shivered and her nipples turned into hard peaks. Hearing that sad, tormented cry made her breathing ragged and her heart quicken. What was it about that voice?

When the haunted notes finally faded, she shook herself from her sensual fog and snarled. This had to stop. For four nights now, she'd been hearing that same relentless baying. The new neighboring pack was going to start a war with her brother if they didn't back off the border and stop calling out within hearing range of the wolves under Seth's protection.

Nerves jangling, she turned her book over and got up from the couch. Anger and frustration mounted within her as she moved quickly through the house to the back porch. She'd promised to watch over things and take care of any emergency pack business while Seth was away for the week, but she had a sinking suspicion that confronting the alpha of a rival pack wasn't what he had in mind when he'd left his instructions. Be that as it may, she had to do something. Seth and the other males weren't going to return for

another two days, and that persistent calling was really starting to get under her skin.

Laney stepped off the porch into the moonlight and crossed the shadow-mottled yard with determined purpose. The wind rose up and swirled around her, strengthening the odors of pine and moist earth--and something else she couldn't quite identify. The combined scents filled her lungs and made her feel strangely restless as she headed toward the tree line that began a short distance from the house.

She walked straight into the woods, choosing to remain in her human form even though her jeans and bootlaces kept snagging on the briars as she moved over the rough ground. It would be faster traveling in the form of the wolf, but she preferred the slight sense of protection wearing clothes offered her.

Dressed or not, she knew going into the woods unescorted was potentially dangerous. Seth would likely strangle her if he ever found out about her going near the border alone, but it would be so much worse for everyone if he came home and discovered members of a rival pack stirring close to the border, marking their territory. She had to reach this rogue male and talk sense into him before anyone else from her pack could answer him and stir up trouble.

She walked maybe ten feet farther into the woods before the male's call rose up again. The notes struck her with the force of a silver bullet, shooting hot sensation from her head straight to her toes. Her breathing hitched. Her senses swam. A tiny tremor wracked her small body. Now that she was closer to the source of the call, the lure was more pure, more potent. Alluring.

Laney stopped in her tracks and clamped her eyes shut tight as heat pooled thick and wet between her thighs, soaking her panties. A tender ache started inside her and she gritted her teeth to hold it at bay. Still, the notes played over her skin like the brush of velvet fingers. The sound *beckoned* her, called to her inner beast until she shook with pent-up desire.

A desperate, cloying need to return the male's call had her pussy clenching in anticipation. Unaware of what she was doing, she ran trembling hands over her small, firm breasts and squeezed,

shuddering as a bolt of erotic energy zipped through her veins. Her bones creaked and shifted. She closed her eyes and fought the urge to embrace the change...

The wind shifted, and the fragrant scent of male lust wafted to her from somewhere deep within the woods. Laney's eyes snapped open in an instant as realization crept in on her. This wasn't just some lonely cry she was hearing. It was a mating call.

A burst of black fury surged through her. *Damn males!* No wonder she felt so strung out and needy. Some horny male had been calling out to her for nights on end!

Her lips compressed in a thin line, Laney tilted her chin and gazed up at the moon. It hung at three-quarters. It would be another day or two before the full moon held sway. Even so, the night was clear. The moon loomed large and bright overhead. No wonder she felt like a bitch in heat.

A heated blush stole into her face at that unspoken admission. Her lip lifted into a silent snarl. One thing for certain, she had to get this howling situation under control before her brother came back and discovered what was going on.

## Chapter Two

Cole scanned the blue-black shadows of the midnight forest, searching for signs of a trap. His night vision was excellent, but he took extra precautions to insure he didn't walk into an ambush. Although he called for his mate, there was always the chance one or more males from Seth's pack would come out to challenge him instead. He could think of quite a few "old friends" from his former pack who'd relish a chance to rip him to shreds.

Alert to every faint rustling of the woods around him, he forced himself to lay low and hold his position. It wasn't an easy task. Waiting had never been one of his strong points, and tonight his patience skated on a knife's edge. The need to take his mate gnawed at his insides like a relentless worm. He didn't know if Seth was aware he had returned to the area, but if Laney didn't answer his call tonight, he'd have to go to her regardless of the consequences.

A bush rustled several yards away and Cole hunkered down instinctively. His claws extended and his bones shifted slightly out of shape, making his already muscular frame larger and bulkier in anticipation of meeting whoever emerged from that forbidden stretch of woods. As the sounds came closer, he eased back silently into the shadows and lifted his nose to the wind.

The sweet scent of desire arched through him like a whip of lightning. His balls tightened and he clenched his fists in anguish. The person approaching him was female. *His* female. Savage triumph coursed through his veins. After days of calling for her, she was coming to him at last!

The scent of her creamy lust combined with the knowledge that his call had roused that desire in her had his cock straining for release. Growling low in his chest, Cole tilted his head back, and for a moment closed his eyes. His hand moved low to squeeze his throbbing erection through his jeans.

His body drawn taut as a bow string, Cole watched the clearing and waited for her pretty little red head to appear through the trees. He was so ready for her. Laney Parker. His little firecracker. Oh, but she must think she was so brave--doing Seth some kind of great service by coming out here to confront the big bad wolf sniffing around their back door. A tide of amusement and joy washed over him so sudden and strong he almost howled.

Cole knew her brother was gone, knew Seth had taken his strongest males with him across the state to discuss forming an alliance with another wolf pack. He also had an idea of when they'd be back, and his time was running out.

He'd thought that with her brother out of the way, Laney would be easy to call out. But night after night he'd called without luck, and he'd actually begun to fear that his informant had been wrong, that perhaps Seth had made good his threat and mated her off to someone else.

Cole bristled with aggression at the thought of his little bitch spreading her legs for another male. Bloodlust surged through him, hot and fast. For simplicity's sake, he'd hoped he wouldn't have to challenge another male for her, but if that was the case--*bring it on*. He hadn't left Ravine for nothing. He ran his own pack now, and he'd come back to claim what was his and make that pack complete.

Laney didn't realize it yet, but she'd decided her fate when she came out at his call. He couldn't risk waiting any longer. Autumn was only a few weeks away, and Cole knew if he didn't take her soon her brother would mate her off at the first opportunity, if for no other reason than to keep her out of his reach. That was something Cole wouldn't allow. Laney was his. She had always been his.

When at last Laney stepped through the trees, he nearly choked on his own breath. She was more beautiful than he remembered. Small and slender, her skin pale as moonlight... She still



wore her copper-colored hair long and straight, like a veil. It swirled around her hips when she walked. Cole growled low in his throat at the thought of her straddling him with her firm, slender thighs, that glorious red hair swinging with her every movement, grazing his hot skin.

His eyes marked her, his skin tingling in anticipation of her touch. He wore jeans but nothing else. Nothing underneath. He'd come out with every intention of mating now, tonight. The fewer clothes to get in his way, the better. Apparently his little bitch had other ideas. Laney was completely dressed: tank top, jeans, and boots. His lips quirked as he began considering all the different ways he could go about fixing that little problem.

Laney trekked through the underbrush, her movements start-stop and wary. Cole waited anxiously for her to come closer. When she was finally within a few feet of the boundary marker, he stepped forward from the scruff to allow her gaze to fall on him.

Laney flinched at his sudden appearance. She took a full step back before freezing in place. Then her gaze met his. Cole knew the moment she recognized him.

"Cole Holbrook?" Her voice quaked with disbelief. For a long moment, she just stood there staring at him with her hands clasped in front her mouth.

He grinned at her look of shock.

"Oh my God. I can't believe it." She lowered her eyes and focused on her footing as she tromped the rest of the way through the thick brush. At one point she came so close to crossing the boundary marker, Cole's heart skipped a beat.

"What the hell are you doing out here?"

"Laney, honey. I knew if anyone answered my call, it would be you."

"I'm not here to answer your call," she said with a dignified sniff. "I've been hearing you for a few nights now and came to warn you away. You know you can't keep coming out here. This is Seth's territory now."

"I'm not on Seth's territory, honey," he said smoothly, and it was the truth. He hadn't crossed the boundary. He was close enough

to it to piss Seth off royally if he ever found out about it, but technically he was still on neutral ground.

Laney looked doubtful, and Cole ran a hand through his jet hair, smoothing it back from his face. He had to be suave. Play it cool. More than anything, he needed to gain her trust.

She shifted slightly and for a moment the toe of her boot touched the border. Cole tensed all over, a starburst of anticipation sparking in his stomach. *So close!* It took every ounce of control he had to keep from pouncing on her.

Damn, but she smelled so good...tangy and bittersweet. She acted irritated with him, but she was also aroused. He could tell by her musky scent that she was wet for him. His groin spasmed at the knowledge. He thought of tasting her, of taking her to the ground and shoving his tongue between her damp folds. The imagined the look of ecstasy on her face as she came for him made him want to howl.

It was a small torture having her so close. It was almost impossible to keep his eyes from straying to the ground marker.

*Come on, honey, just one step closer...*

He continued to smile at her while she lectured him on pack law, but he couldn't hear a word she said over the roar of blood in his ears. Whether she was aware of it or not, she was only an inch away from changing her life forever. The minute she crossed the borderline separating them, there'd be no going back. Nothing would stop him from taking her to the ground and fucking her until she couldn't see straight.

Tempted by the erotic image he'd conjured up, he licked his lips wolfishly. The vision of Laney writhing beneath him, grinding him, sighing and moaning while he thrust into her, burying himself deep...

"Cole!" He jumped at the sound of his name. "Are you even listening to me?" Laney stood frowning at him, her hand poised on her hip in a gesture of impatience. "I'm not kidding. If you stay here, you're going to cause a blood feud between our packs!"

"Maybe not. I didn't exactly come out here to fight."

"Okay, then. Why are you here?"

Now that was a conversation starter more to his liking. Cole's mouth curved up at the corners. He put on his most charming, coaxing voice and eased forward a step. "Let's take a little walk. I'll tell you about my plans."

Her lips quirked. "I'd prefer to just hear the plans, thanks."

"What's that, honey? Why don't you move a little closer so I can hear you better?"

Laney stared at him, and then suddenly giggled—a small sound that bubbled out from no where. It was as if she couldn't help herself.

The musical tone of her laughter made Cole's heart leap. God, but he had been away too long! She folded her arms across her chest and cast a stray glance toward the gouged rock, a tell-tale sign she knew exactly where the border marker was and didn't dare cross it. He'd have to do something about that.

"If you're worried about going out too far," he teased gently, nodding toward the marker stone, "We could just walk around in circles until we get tired."

She shook her head. "Now you're just being weird."

"Laney--"

"And get myself in trouble? No way! *You* come closer, wolf man."

"Is that an invitation?"

Her smile slowly faded and she grew quiet, as if she were waiting for what he would do next. Cole knew an opportunity when he saw it, and he wasn't about to let this one slip through his fingers. He pushed his way through the brush to close the distance between them.

### Chapter Three

Laney swallowed hard, unnerved and excited by the way Cole stalked toward her. He reminded her of a predator stalking his prey. Those dark, glittering eyes. The way he moved soundlessly through the underbrush, the smooth glide of his legs emphasizing the sensual rippling of his abs...

*Damn him!* Why did he have to be so handsome? And why couldn't she stay pissed at him? When he had gone away, she'd been so hurt and confused by his sudden abandonment.

For all her heartache, there had been no words of comfort. Her brother's only reaction to the matter was to say good-riddance to an enemy. Laney had vowed then and there if she ever came face to face with Cole Holbrook again, she'd give him a piece of her mind for running off without telling her, then walk away and never speak to him again. It would only serve him right. But now that he was here in the flesh, it took everything she had to keep from throwing herself into his arms and raining kisses all over his face.

*So much for willpower...*

Heart thumping overtime, Laney tore her gaze from him and glanced over her shoulder to scan the woods behind them. She felt edgy, torn between joy in seeing him again and the fearful expectation of being discovered. She just knew someone was going to step out of the bushes and catch them together at any moment. Not an ideal situation, to be sure.

She turned back and her heart gave a little leap. Cole had closed the distance between them. He stood right there in front of her, tall and powerful. Deliciously close.

"You really shouldn't be here," she scolded hoarsely. "If Seth finds out you're back, that you talked to me..." She ran her fingers through her coppery hair in a nervous gesture. "I don't think he'll settle with running you off this time."

"Hmm. Tipping off the enemy. Very sweet." Cole hooked his fingers through the front loops of her jeans and jerked her close. "Do you think Seth will grudge me one last kiss before he rips my throat out?"

"Ha ha. Pretty funny, smart ass." She splayed her fingers over the chiseled contours of his obliques. "I came out here to help you, and that's the thanks I get. When you end up with your ribs slashed open, don't say I didn't warn you."

"I'll risk it," he growled as he drew her back into the shadows with him.

In an instant they were on each other, touching, tasting, exploring, their movements fueled by desperation. They were starved for each other, trying to make up for two years of separation. Cole slanted his mouth over hers in a savage kiss, while his hands roved down to bind her hips tight against his erection.

As much as she wanted to, Laney couldn't stay mad at him. How could she resist him when he was once again within her reach? Without hesitation she smoothed her hands over the hard-muscled contours of his chest, remembering him by touch.

She returned his nuzzling caresses and breathed in his warm, cedar scent. She was eager for him to touch her; she loved the feel of his body, his hands. His warmth and strength promised her security as well as passion.

"Mm, so sweet..." he whispered as he found the hem of her tank top and slipped his hand underneath.

Laney pulled back a fraction, allowing him access to touch, to tease. A calloused hand caught her left breast and squeezed, spearing her heart with a feeling like sunshine. Her breath hitched when he finally lifted her shirt and brought his mouth down on a pert, rosy

nipple. He slurped greedily at first one breast, then the other, before lathing his way back up to spear his tongue between her lips.

She opened her mouth at his prompting, welcoming him and the determined swirl of his tongue. His kiss felt so good. Just like she remembered. Laney rubbed her tongue against his in return, savoring the rough, erotic pull of his mouth.

When Cole drew back, his breath was heaving and his eyes glowed with an inner fire. "Now, Laney. We mate now!"

Laney closed her eyes and nodded, a ribbon of heat curling through her as his caresses became rougher and more insistent. When he suddenly dropped to his knees in front of her and streaked a warm wet path down her narrow ribcage with his tongue, she knew what he intended to do and her breath came out in a slow hiss.

She jerked with every nipping kiss he planted along her belly. Every teasing flick of his tongue jarred her inside and out. Her stomach muscles clenched, her inner walls flexed and fluttered. He alternately tugged at the waistband of her jeans, freeing the buttons one by one until his hot breath fanned deliciously against her bare skin. Laney groaned and flushed all over at the phantom contact, her pussy going instantly slick with need.

Cole must have smelled it; he glanced up at her with that penetrating gaze and made a deep rumbling sound of approval. He parted the fly of her jeans into a wide V, and smoothed his thumb over the visible triangle of her satin panties. When he leaned in to kiss her through the fabric, Laney thought she would lose her mind. She sucked in a sharp breath and speared her fingers through the dark curtain of his hair, holding onto him for dear life.

"Oh, God..." she gasped out. It was madness. She could barely think. She wanted to feel him between her thighs, his mouth against her body, licking her, sucking her. Her clit throbbed, ripe for his attention.

He went to slide her jeans down her hips, but some part of her hesitated. She couldn't let this go on... She caught his hands, stilling them against her body.

Cole looked up at her, his hooded, sexy eyes burning her like a brand. "What is it, baby?"

"Please. We have to stop..."

"Why?" His ragged voice was almost her undoing.

She shook her head. "We... this is... We just can't!" She tried to push him away, but he wouldn't let go of her. "I shouldn't have let it go this far. If Seth finds out, he'll *kill you*." Hell, he'd probably kill her, too—or at the very least, make her wish that he had.

"I'll worry about that later," Cole grated. He tried to tug her to him again, but Laney braced her hands against his shoulders in an effort to hold herself back from him.

"Stop it, Cole." Her voice was a breathless croak of desire. "It's not that I don't want to be with you, but if someone sees us together..." She darted her gaze around expectantly before looking back at him. "I'm sorry. I just can't risk it. Not for a quick roll in the woods."

He grew very still, very silent. Although he said nothing, she sensed a brooding anger building just beneath that calm exterior.

He got up from his knees and rose up to his full towering height. Laney had never seen him look so dangerous. He hovered over her while she straightened her shirt and tugged up her jeans. Rearranging her clothes wasn't an easy task. It was bad enough she felt like she was letting Cole down, but the way he watched her made her nervous.

He didn't make a move to stop her; he didn't say a single word against her leaving. In a way, Laney found that painfully disappointing. Maybe she'd been wrong about him after all. Perhaps it was best she found out now just how far he was willing to go to claim her, instead of later when nothing could be done to repair the damage. The last thing she wanted was to be left with nothing but memories and ugly regrets.

Even so, it pained her to have to walk away. She'd had such hopes for them. Fantasies that now seemed somehow embarrassing with him looking at her like she'd just issued a challenge. She didn't want to leave him on bad terms, if such a thing could be helped. After all, he was her first love. Her only love.

"I guess this is goodbye," she whispered awkwardly, not really knowing what else to say. She waited for him to make some kind of

response, but Cole said nothing, only continued to watch her with those eerie, burning eyes.

Laney swallowed hard. His silence disturbed her. Was he pissed off? Hurt? Spurned? Probably a combination of the three. It bothered her, but there was really nothing she could do. She finished buttoning her jeans and turned to face him.

What now? Should she just walk away? It didn't seem right somehow.

Laney hesitated briefly, then leaned up and kissed him once, twice; only to be further disappointed when he made no move to embrace her or kiss her back.

He neither accepted nor rejected her kisses. She knew he was anything but happy, but it was impossible to determine exactly what was going on in his mind. His face gave away nothing, but she could sense an indefinable tension throbbing between them. Laney was sorry for it. With nothing left to say or do, she sighed and removed her hands from him.

"It was good to see you again, Cole, but I have to go now. I have to get back home before anyone realizes I'm gone."

The instant she turned to leave, Cole snapped into motion. Laney never saw it coming. His quick movement startled her. She jumped when his arms snaked out to catch her biceps.

"I don't think so, Laney."

His fierce tone caught her completely off guard. She gaped up at him, and he smiled down at her, a wicked stretching of his lips.

"You're on my side of the border now, honey. Whether you intended to or not, you just answered my mating call."



## Chapter Four

Laney's gaze darted over to the large stone marker with the series of slash marks gouged into its rugged surface. She stared at it, but her brain couldn't conceive it. She was across the border by little more than a foot.

"Oh, come on." She frowned up at Cole. "I'm barely over the mark!"

He grinned like a devil, then gripped the cheeks of her ass and spun around with her, stepping her back even further from the boundary. In the bat of an eye, he had her pressed roughly against the trunk of a tree with her legs spread wide and his hot, hard body thrust up against hers. The bulge of his erection pressed tight against her soft center.

"Does that feel serious enough?"

He rocked his hips sharply, grinding his hard length against her, and Laney almost went up in flames. Her pussy contracted inside, aching to be filled.

"Tell me you don't want it," he demanded softly. "Look me in the eyes and tell me you don't want me."

Laney closed her eyes and refused to look at him. She couldn't. She wanted him too much. Every fiber of her being screamed for him. Surely he had to know it.

He rocked that thick length against her again, and the nagging ache inside her tightened like a fine wire. All sane thoughts, all notions of leaving him fled her mind. All she knew was that she needed this, needed *him*, right here. Right now.

She wrapped her arms around him for balance and opened herself further to him as pressure built within her, a fiery heat that spread through her from head to toe. He was torturing her without conscience, and she'd waited too long. Needed too much. Every rough grind against her slit sent tingling pleasure spearing through her body.

A sudden wild chord rose up within her. She held herself poised on some nameless brink. Laney gasped and clung to his shoulders in desperation, ready to give him what he wanted, if only he'd stop torturing her and take it. "C-Cole, please!"

"We belong together," he breathed against her ear. "Admit it. There is a draw between us. From hundreds of miles away I felt it calling me back here to you. You are my mate, Laney. *Mine*. I want to hear you say it!"

Her breath caught. She felt every word and knew them to be true. She nodded, but a gesture wasn't what Cole wanted. He wanted an admission from her, and she knew he would accept nothing less. "Y-yours..." she panted in acquiesce, forcing the words from her lust clogged throat. "I-I'm yours!"

Cole snarled in satisfaction.

Before Laney could fully comprehend what was happening, he grabbed her tank top roughly and yanked it over her head, ruffling her hair and exposing her skin to the night air.

Goosebumps peppered her feverish skin. Her nipples puckered instantly, drawing his attention. Cole grunted and reached for her breasts. He kneaded them mercilessly, squeezing the firm, small globes while his fingers alternately pinched and flicked her tender peaks. Finally he dipped his head and drew first one, then the other into the hot cavern of his mouth.

Laney sighed as a sensual haze clouded over her, making her dizzy. Her heart thundered against her ribs and she surrendered to the glorious sensation, allowing her eyes to slip closed while she moved against him, desperate to feel that flickering, throbbing pleasure.

Every rough grind against her slit brought her closer to the edge. She was wet for him, so ripe for fucking. It felt so good... the

thrust of his cock. And it surprised her because they weren't even naked yet.

She wanted more. Needed it. Craved it. They stumbled together as she kicked off her boots. Cole righted her, and once she'd steadied herself she reached between them, going for the buttons of her jeans. She worked her fly loose with trembling fingers, a sense of urgency and desire fueling her movements. An almost unbearable need to be skin to skin with him ate at her.

Cole looked down, saw what she was doing and quickly helped her remove the offending garment. He squatted down and gripped the sides of her jeans with both hands and jerked them down roughly, the action tugging them off her hips so fast it dragged her panties off with them.

The scent of her arousal drifted on the night air, a musky perfume without the trappings of her clothes to shield it. Cole grunted. His balls tightened and his cock—which was already hard—surged to unbearable stiffness. Lust pounded in his brain. Damn. He needed to fuck her. He needed to thrust her legs wide, shove his tongue inside her and lap her sweet juices. But first...

He lowered his hand to his fly and tugged it open ruthlessly, allowing his aching cock to spring free. With one hand, Cole gripped his hard flesh and stroked, working the thick length, willing Laney to watch while he stroked himself and shuddered with pleasure. With his other hand, he reached for her roughly, his palm cupping the back of her neck to draw her forward for his kiss.

Tongues sucked and glided. Tasted. Devoured. While they kissed, Cole pulled Laney up tight against him. He gripped and kneaded the cheeks of her ass while he thrust his bare cock along her naked belly.

Laney moaned into his mouth, a spike of erotic pleasure stabbing through her. His hot, probing flesh seared her stomach like a brand. His hand moved down to touched her between her legs, his fingers exploring her wetness in search of her clit. He found it and stroked. Nothing had ever felt so good. Her breath hitched, almost choking her. She rubbed herself against his hand, and when his finger traced the line of her slit and slipped inside....

It was like stepping into a sudden, blinding light. Raw, sparking sensation shot through her, new and startling. Her body flushed all over while every nerve ending convulsed in rapture. If Cole hadn't held her, she surely would have fallen. The feeling went on and on, then played out like a fading burst of light that sucked every ounce of strength from her body. She grunted lamely, and then went limp against her lover, her juices soaking his hand. When Laney was finally herself again, she pulled back. Shivering and slightly embarrassed, she tried to push Cole away.

"Oh, no. We're not through yet," he grated huskily.

With his eyes, he willed her to look down between them. He wanted to show her what he liked. He gripped his cock and stroked it before her eyes, once, twice, then he took her hand and wrapped it around his erection.

"Like that," he instructed hoarsely, guiding her silken hands along his shaft. When she mastered the rhythm, he brought his hands up to press firmly on her shoulders, urging her down on her knees. "Now. Suck my cock."

His demand thrilled her and sent shrill elation skittering through her veins. Barely over her first climax, she trembled. Pure lust once again had her climbing the ladder of arousal. She followed his lead and went down. The rich forest soil was cool and springy, and slightly damp under her bare knees.

Cole stepped closer to her, the crown of his penis grazing her cheek. She palmed him, and as the first wisps of her breath touched his skin, he had to bite back the transformation. His teeth elongated and his stomach muscles jerked in anticipation. As much as a bid for control as it was to urge her closer, his hands tangled in her hair. The need to feel her mouth taking him in was a clawing, frustrating thing, bent on driving him mad.

She stroked him first, watching pre-come beading on the large, cherry tip. The look on her face, her innocent curiosity, sent sparks shooting from his groin straight to his brain. She was an angel. So damn hot. Then, as if to torment him further, she gazed up at him with those wide emerald eyes and leaned forward to swirl her tongue

experimentally over the weeping tip of his cock before sucking him firmly into her mouth.

Cole jerked and snarled, dizzy from the mind-blowing sensation. *His*. His little bitch. So hot and moist and slick. He gazed down at her with heavy lidded eyes, fascinated by the erotic view of his hard length slipping wetly between her full lips. He growled hoarsely and pumped slowly against her. He had dreamed of this, had waited so long...

“God, Laney,” he ground out. “I’ve missed you so much!”

It was an understatement. She could never know. All his planning, all his time spent in struggle, fighting to bring them together, to gather a pack to protect her...only now did he feel like his effort merited any real worth.

She slurped him relentlessly. Cole’s breathing grew shallow. The sensation was a delicious torture he wanted to last and last. But he couldn’t hold it. The aching, throbbing pressure built and built, too high, too strong. He felt it cresting and reached for it, for her. He traced his thumb along the corner of her glistening mouth and his balls tightened. He was going to come, watching her like this, taking him, sucking him.

“Don’t stop,” he choked out. He tangled his fingers in her long red hair and dragged her closer. Plunged deeper. She felt so good, her curling tongue...her cool hair...her mouth...so deep, so hot...sucking him, *milking* him....

His climax ripped through him like a bolt of lightning. He came hard, his whole body jerking, his seed jetting thickly against her tongue. Laney pulled away with a soft, startled sound, and he looked down lazily to see her wiping at her mouth while his cock drizzled beads of white down her bare breasts.

They were both breathless, their chests heaving in the night air. Cole cupped his hand under her chin and forced her to look up at him. Her emerald eyes shined and her expression was slightly feral. A thrill raced through his soul. He would never forget that look. Not in a million years. She looked a little lost, a little confused. But she wouldn’t for long.

## Chapter Five

Before Laney could protest, Cole kicked his jeans aside and laid her down in the leaves. He spread her slender legs apart and lay alongside her, his black hair brushing near the apex of her thighs. She trembled, and he could smell her nervousness, but at the same time, she was gloriously wet. Moisture dewing her inner thighs and pale pink folds was a testament to her arousal. He breathed in deeply, taking in her scent, his cock twitching as he studied her. His mate was a delectable sight.

He traced his finger along her damp slit and she jerked. She probably would have sat bolt upright if he hadn't caught her biceps and soothed her with a look.

"It's okay, baby. I just want to look at you."

It was a lie and they both knew it. He had every intention of doing a whole lot more than looking.

"So beautiful," he whispered. With his fingers, he traced the lines of her labia, gently separating her. Her sweet musky scent was an enticement. A natural aphrodisiac. His gaze fastened on her flushed face as he leaned forward, dipping his head down to trace his tongue along the edges of her inner petals.

Laney sighed, her eyes growing hooded and glassy as she watched his careful ministrations, as he licked and sucked, savoring her, sipping at her delicate inner lips, tugging gently at her delicate folds. She shivered, a fine sheen of sweat breaking out over her body. Cream gathered at her opening and he caught it with his fingertips, swirled it around and back over her entrance before plunging inside.

Laney gasped in alarm. Her body tensed suddenly, her sheath resisting him, puckering and flexing around his invading fingers. It wasn't the reaction he'd been expecting. Startled by the alien sensation, Laney's mouth tightened into a grim line, her hands pulling tight in his hair.

Cole faltered a split second, his eyes taking on a fierce light. Shock rolled through him. A thrilling, arousing realization. He had never considered it. That in all this time, she might have waited for him.

Laney was still a virgin!

Cole's cock surging fully, aching to life. He pulled his fingers from her hole, swallowing thickly as he now realized he was the only male who'd ever touched her this way.

Not wanting to frighten her further, he gentled his touch, pushed aside his rapidly growing need and focused on building her trust, on making her come for him. His fingers rubbed, his tongue found and flicked her little pink clit. He sucked her into his mouth and she thrashed beneath him, her inner muscles clamping and releasing, making her thighs jerk, her stomach muscles clench.

"Mm, baby. You taste so good."

Laney whimpered, excited by his words. She looked down her body at him, over the smooth plane of her stomach to her shaven mound and watched Cole feast on her pussy. He alternated between pleasing her with his tongue and his fingers. It was incredible, the feel of his calloused digits rimming her, delving in deep, while his tongue thrust and flicked against her swollen clit. No one had ever touched her like this, or made her burn to be dominated in such a way.

The combination of sight and sensation, the knowledge of what she was doing, and where he kissed her was too much. Too heady. It came upon her suddenly. Shockingly. A blinding sweet sensation.

Blood pounded in her ears as the feeling rocked through her. How could it be like this? How could she not have known?

She groaned helplessly and locked her fingers in his hair, holding him close so she could grind her body against his tempting, tormenting mouth. His tongue swirled, delved deeper, and a pulsing, growing sensation that was one moment not enough, then suddenly

too much sent her rocketing over the edge, stunned by her own climax.

“Nnnnn....” She shuddered, whimpering, arching upward as the orgasm shattered her around his thrusting, lapping tongue.

Cole chuckled in feral satisfaction as she sagged against him and at the same time, tried to push him away. Dazed, sated, she lay limply beneath him, her breathing ragged and her mouth slightly parted while her body continued to tremble with the aftershocks of her climax.

Cole moved up to lay beside her, unable to bite back a sense of pride. A smattering of stars winked at them through the forest canopy and he watched Laney gaze up at the sight with astonishment. He could see it in her face--her world had changed.

When suddenly she turned to look at him, his stomach did a crazy flip. She studied him with such an expression of wonder, his pulse quickened. He couldn't take his eyes from her face. He'd had his own revelation tonight. He still couldn't quite believe his discovery. A *virgin!* His woman had waited for him two years. It was almost unheard of for their kind to wait. But there was no denying it. He'd felt it for himself. Laney had come to him pure.

He propped himself up on his elbow and smiled down at her in smug satisfaction. He traced a finger along the valley of her breasts, down to her navel, delighting in the way she shivered at his touch.

“Mm, honey. You sure you didn't come out here to see me?”

Laney fought a smile. She angled her chin in defiance. “And how was I supposed to know all that howling was coming from you?”

“Forgot my voice, did you?”

“I've been trying my best,” she teased.

He growled his disapproval and Laney laughed softly. His heart was so full of love for her, he thought it might burst. She touched his face, and he kissed her lips, her cheek, her chin. When he pulled back again and looked into her eyes, he was startled to find a gentle sadness there.

“What's this?” he asked, brushing back her hair from her cheek.

“I was just thinking and...before, when you left, I thought--” Doubt clouded her features. “You didn't even say goodbye.”



So it had come to this. The past. Cole had hoped to avoid it, at least for now, but there was no denying the hurt on her face. And besides, she deserved to know.

Sighing, he sat up and raked a hand awkwardly through his hair. He looked over at her. "I never left you, Laney. I always intended to come back."

"Really? When?"

"Once things cooled down."

He might as well have said "someday" or "never". They both knew it. He'd left to avoid a confrontation with her brother. This, he did for her—or so she had always wanted to believe. Laney didn't know if that was true or not. She'd always hoped it was. But whether he had chosen to stay gone five days or twenty years, it didn't matter. They both knew things weren't going to cool down. They'd never cool down. Cole was an alpha. Seth would never see him as anything other than a threat to his status.

*Which also meant that although Cole had come back, he didn't intend to stay.*

Laney's face suddenly flooded with heat. God, how could she have been so incredibly stupid?

She got up and started a furious search for her discarded clothes.

Cole looked at her with alarm in his eyes. "What are you doing?"

"I've got to get home," she answered stiffly, tears stinging her throat. "Seth always sends someone by my cabin around midnight to make sure I'm okay." *More like, to make sure I'm actually there and not off doing something completely dumb—like this!*

Cole jumped to his feet and yanked on his jeans. "We belong together, Laney. I've loved you for too long to throw it all away."

"I know," she conceded, pausing dejectedly. She pressed her hand to her forehead in a reflective way. "I love you, too." She shook her head, and then turned from him to continue the search for her clothes. She found her jeans first and picked them up. "I've always loved you, Cole, but we have to be realistic. I have to go back. I can't

just disappear in the middle of the night. Seth would freak out, to say the least. Then I'd have a search party out after me."

"My pack can handle it."

"That's exactly what I want to avoid!" She hurriedly pulled on her tank top, only to realize at the last minute that the spaghetti straps were broken. She let them hang. There were more important things to worry about. Tears burned behind her eyes and she had no idea where her panties were. Her boots either. Oh, to hell with it! There was no way she was going to stick around and let him see her cry. She'd just go home and wait until dawn—slip back out to the woods to look for whatever was missing once the sun was up and he was gone.

Her mind made up, she turned to leave, but Cole stepped in front of her.

"I won't give you up, Laney. You're the only reason I came back to Ravine. I'd hoped to avoid bloodshed, but I'm not leaving without you. Especially now." He reached his hand toward her, beckoning. "Don't do anything we'll both regret because of your brother. Think of yourself for once. Just come away with me. Now. Tonight."

## Chapter Six

*Come away with me...*

Laney stared at him a full moment without breathing. Her stomach knotted as fear and nervous excitement tangled inside her. How long had she waited to hear those words? How many nights had she lain awake, fantasizing about this moment?

She looked at Cole's outstretched hand and her breathing returned, quick and shallow. Her heart raced. He had come back for her. In a way, it was an admission. His way of saying he loved her after all. It was everything she had been waiting to hear these past two years.

Joy rose up inside her so sharply tears gathered in her eyes. She stepped toward Cole only to have her happiness shattered as a dark shape leapt from the darkness and broad-sided him, knocking him to the ground with such force it sent up a spray of leaves. Laney flinched in horror. Before she could fully comprehend exactly what was happening, a rolling, snarling, slashing pack of partly transformed flesh and fur scrabbled on the ground in front of her.

"Cole!"

Claws sliced. Teeth rent. Frantic, Laney scrambled through the underbrush. She found a broken branch and picked it up, levered it, bracing herself for an opportunity to enter the fray. When the moment came, she took it without hesitation. She reared back and swung the limb hard, surprise radiating through her when she connected on her first swing.

She struck the opposing male's shoulder, cracking the thick branch in half. The force of the blow knocked him into the brush, but it didn't keep him down. In an instant he was back on his feet, baring his menacing white teeth at her a split second before lunging at Cole.

To her horror, Laney recognized him. The blonde-brown hair, the flame green eyes... A flash of panic streaked through her. Her worst fear had come true. She dropped the broken limb. "Seth! Seth, stop it! What are you doing?"

If he heard her, he gave no indication.

Once again Cole and Seth grappled on the ground, tearing at each other like brute savages. Laney moved in as close as she could and shouted at them, begged them to stop, but they continued fighting, oblivious to her pleas.

Claws raised high and slashed down, a flash of gleaming black in the moonlight, the motion too quick for Laney to determine who'd sliced whom. She gasped as bits of blood sprayed up, flecking her face. At the same time someone yelped in pain, and she could have sworn the voice belonged to Cole.

"Stop it! Please!" she shrieked at them, her voice going hoarse from the strain. Neither male responded. They scrapped like wild dogs, flipping and rolling, snapping twigs and rattling bushes. Laney tugged at her hair and sobbed helplessly. She didn't know how to stop them, how to break up the fight.

This was beyond revenge; it was bloodlust, plain and simple. Old grudges brought to the fore. She'd been right all along. There was a score to be settled here, and they'd continue to rip each other to shreds until one of them lay dead.

Clamping her eyes shut tight, she focused and embraced the shift, willing thick patches of red-tipped fur to sprout all over her body. Bones stretched, popping free from restricting joints. Muscles rippled and rolled. In a rapid remolding of features, Laney completely transformed, her body taking on the form of a small red wolf.

In the body of her beast, she struggled out of the human clothes that hung limply around her, and then tore off through the woods, running away from the sound of the fighting males. Panic thundered in her heart, compelling her forward. She leapt high through bracken

and briars. She had no real destination in mind, only knew that she had to get out of Seth's territory as fast as she could without turning in the direction she believed Cole's pack to be denning.

Sleek and furred, she raced through the trees until she came upon a familiar trail, one she knew headed high up into the hills.

Just when she thought she'd run far enough, that she had escaped the horror of watching the only two people she cared about tearing each other apart, a huge black wolf leapt from somewhere off to her right, startling her so bad she slid down in the leaves.

She quickly recovered her balance, but not her lead. It took her a moment to recognize who had ambushed her. Surprisingly enough, it was Cole. He had transformed and now he paced her, bristling with dominant male aggression. The way he charged her demanded she stop immediately.

When Laney didn't slow down in submission to him, he swooped in close and nipped at her side. Laney jumped to avoid his teeth, but didn't manage it entirely. Although he hadn't hurt her, she snapped at him in return, baring her teeth in a show of displeasure before abruptly changing direction, cutting an alternate path through the trees.

Her ploy didn't work. Cole was just too fast. He stuck to her side, matching her pace for pace. Her only hope was to lose him in the scruff, but every abrupt turn she made only served to wear her down and cut her speed. Much to her ire, Cole seemed to know where she intended to go even before she did, right down to the narrow path marked by two birch trees.

Seeing it ahead, Laney darted toward it. Only one of them could fit through it at a time; Laney saw it as her only chance to retake the lead. Tongue lolling and muscles burning with exertion, she lowered her head and gave it her all. To no avail. The twin trees were just ahead when Cole broke away from her in a sudden burst of speed.

The large black wolf leapt ahead of her and skidded, effectively blocking the path. He stopped so suddenly, Laney almost ran into him. Furious, she snapped at him with her sharp, white teeth, a warning that she would not be corralled. Cole stood with his neck tall, his coat bristled in challenge.

He would roll her in a minute, Laney knew. If she refused to submit, he'd *force* her to go belly up. It really would be over then, and she wasn't yet ready to concede defeat. Heart thundering, she turned away from him, intending to run the other direction and find another trail away from this madness. The second she rounded away from him, a large gray wolf burst onto the trail.

Laney balked, her legs bracing out wide, her heart stuttering in fear. She knew her brother in any form. Seth was bulked up and snarled at her in warning. Blood tinged saliva drizzled down his chin. His flattened ears twitched with a sign of furious impatience. Laney immediately knew she was in serious trouble.

Flanked by two males bent on killing each other was hardly an ideal place to be. Laney made a snap-second decision to face them in a form that gave her speech. It was extremely dangerous to bare her flesh—she was much more vulnerable and fragile as a human—but if she was to have any hope of reasoning with them, she had no choice.

She pushed aside her doubts and quickly shifted.

Panting from exertion, she faced her brother, completely unconcerned with her nakedness. “Please,” she rasped, her voice a half-human whimper. “No more.”

Seth quickly shifted into a form of half-transformation that allowed him to retain his bulk and his claws. His mouth was still stretched to encompass his fangs, and it moved awkwardly at his attempt to form words.

“Gwoooo... hooommme...”

“Fine! But only if you come home with me *right now!*”

With hate-filled eyes, Seth glared across the clearing at Cole, who stood in a similar state of half-transformation. Bloodied and panting, both males eyed one another, growling under their breath, baring their teeth. They reeked of blood and sweat and saliva—the overpowering odors of testosterone and feral beast. Aggression pulsed in the air around them. Their eyes aglow, they began to pace one another in a slow circle, sizing each other up.

Laney refused to move from between them, silently praying it would deter them from a second attack. She could only hope. Both males had seen better days. Seth's face bled profusely from a long,

wicked slash that angled across his nose, while Cole favored a series of deep, blood slick furrows scoring his torso. Yet even with their injuries, neither male seemed ready to back down.

“Did you really think I’d leave the area with a rival pack denning so close to my territory?” Seth spat the words at his enemy. His voice was throaty and deep, like shaken gravel, his vocal chords transformed just enough to take on human speech. He made a sick, grunting sound that might have been an attempt at laughter. “I’m going to gut you, bitch-boy...and leave you a hollow corpse in my woods.” Then to Laney, he said, “Get your ass back to your cabin and wait for me there.” His sharp tone carried the promise of punishment.

Cole snarled in wild rebellion at Seth’s words. His furious reaction made Laney’s hair stand on end. She shivered and lowered her eyes in submission. She stood frozen, contemplating what she should do, too afraid to move either way. She would have to face Seth later if she didn’t go home, but Cole seemed to be hanging on to his humanity by a thread. He might even attack her if she ran from him again.

Her heart jumped into her throat when Cole stormed into the clearing and caught her by the arm, wrenching a gasp from her as he thrust her behind him. Laney slipped down in a ditch filled with leaves along the edge of the clearing and landed hard on her knees. She bit back a cry of pain.

Cole looked like a demon, his red-rimmed eyes shining with a murderous light. He bulked up in challenge, his face contorting into a mask of blistering hatred directed at her brother. Seth, looking no less fierce, took one step forward, bristling, preparing to launch himself at his opponent. Laney made a small sound of protest, but it was too late.

Seth bared his teeth, initiating the battle. “No one takes a bitch from my pack!”

In an instant, they were on each other, savaging one another more fiercely than before. Overwrought and helpless to prevent bloodshed and death, Laney began to cry.

They pummeled one another--the woods echoing with the sounds of fists striking flesh. They gouged with claws and rent with

teeth. Blood flew up, black flecks in the moonlight. Laney's heart scraped bottom when suddenly Seth reared up, and Cole went down under the force of his attack. The next thing she knew, Seth was piled on top of him. They were still one moment, then bursting with violent action the next. Moments of explosive scrambling soon turned to sporadic floundering. The fight was slowing down. And Seth was on top.

Laney sobbed in helpless fright, her hands pressed tightly against her mouth. She bit at her knuckles until she tasted blood. A frantic feeling of bewilderment flooded through her, a kind of surreal numbness. Cole snarled and twitched, but he didn't get up. Then his rabid snarling was replaced by labored panting.

Helpless frustration clawed at Laney's insides. Cole's struggles were less and less fierce. She paced and sobbed, her heart thudding heavily. She shook her head, not wanting to believe it. Her brother was going to kill the only male she'd ever wanted as her mate.

"Seth! Please, don't do it!" She ran at him, pounced on his back. "Seth!"

Her added weight threw him off balance. They toppled over together. Laney slid forward over the arch of his back. Seth grunted, then abruptly roared, his back arching up so suddenly he threw Laney to the ground. She scuttled back and watched her brother's odd, terrifying quickening. Something was wrong!

Seth twitched and bowed, then inexplicably stood up. Silhouetted beneath him, Cole's arms stretched upright. Their shadows blended into one another, creating a single, solid body. At that moment the scent of hot, rich blood hit her like a palpable force. Seth twisted in pain.

Right before her eyes, Cole hefted Seth up like he weighed nothing and barrel tossed him, using his feet to propel the pack leader's body back and over his head. Seth hit the ground with a heavy thud a short distance away and curled up on his side. He wrapped his arms protectively around his middle, where blood flowed freely—where Cole's claws had sunk deep. Laney would have run to him, but she stopped when Cole shifted position on the ground, catching her attention.



He shifted onto his stomach and stayed there, heaving in great gulps of air as he struggled to catch his breath.

Laney let out a small cry. A feeling of relief and urgency fizzed in her stomach. They were both alive!

She didn't know who to go to, what she should do. She paced in an anxious, darting motion--first toward Seth, then toward Cole before finally stopping to wait and see who would get up first.

That someone was Cole. He came up on his knees and looked over at her, his expression hard as granite, his eyes boring into her. "You have to choose, Laney," his voice was laced with pain, with bound fury. "It's either me, or Seth."

She glanced over at Seth. He had backed himself up to a tree and was sitting against it, watching her. Menace burned in his eyes. His gaze was filled with accusation. "If you leave with him," he rumbled under his breath, "Don't bother to come back."

His words slashed her heart. Sadness clouded over her and tears burned behind her eyes. As much as she wanted to help him, to plead for his forgiveness and make things right, she knew life would never be the same after tonight.

With her eyes fixed on her brother, she tucked a lock of hair behind her ear and went where her heart was, where it had been for the past two years. To Cole.

"Laney! You can't leave me out here!"

Seth's voice pounded her with dark, cold fury. His dark eyes fixed on her in bitter disapproval as she moved across the clearing to Cole. He continued to shout at her, alternating between ranting threats, pleas, and reminders of family ties.

Laney did her best to block him out, and was careful not to acknowledge him in anyway. He was too injured to continue fighting, but speaking to him might instigate a pack challenge. That was the last thing anyone needed.

She reached Cole and helped him up. When he was finally on his feet, she propped her shoulder under his arm to lend him support.

"Bitch, I know you can hear me! Looook at meee!"

She jumped at Seth's sharp command. His garbled raving continued, his voice thickening as he transformed. His mouth

stretched taut, further slurring his words as his muzzle elongated. Dark blood from the slash wound on his face matted his fur, making him look all the more malevolent. Already he was trying to rise to his feet.

Laney's heart leapt in fear. Her stomach twisted. She tried not to look at him; she didn't want to look. Seeing Seth like this scared the daylights out of her. He'd taken care of her since she was a pup, since their mother had died. In all that time she'd never seen him like this before, so determined to make the kill.

Cole led her away from the clearing, but he kept his arm clamped tight against his ribs the whole way. Laney did her best to help support his weight when he stumbled, silently praying he wouldn't fall. It would be impossible for her to lug him as deadweight, and they needed to get as far away from the border as they could, as fast as they could.

As they moved out of view of the clearing, Seth's ranting became a thunderous roar of rage. It boomed through the quiet of the woods, sending night creatures scattering through the brush. His enraged cry carried on and on before at last tapering into a long, eerie howl.

Laney ducked, startled by the sound of her brother's haunted call. Her hair stood on end. She wrapped her arms more firmly around Cole's waist, savoring his warmth and nearness, and drawing comfort from it.

"We have to hurry," she whispered, unable to keep the fear out of her voice. "The others will come for us soon."

The instant she said it, a distant chorus of howls rent the night air. Lingering notes of acknowledgement. Promises of revenge.

## Chapter Seven

They stopped at a stream well beyond Seth's territory to wash away the blood and rest before moving on. The night blackened water was a shade too cold for swimming, but Cole barely felt it. His heart was exultant. He had won his mate. An ultimate feeling of victory coursed through him. His life finally felt complete.

He looked over where Laney stood rinsing herself in a section of knee deep water near the rocky bank. She was so beautiful. Her long red hair draped over her shoulder, a dark silhouette haloed in fire. The moonlight caressed her pale, willowy body, giving her skin a pearlescent sheen.

She stooped to splash the water on her upper arms, and Cole stiffened at the unexpected view. Her movements lifted her bare backside and exposed the rounded flesh of her nether lips--two sweet lines plumped by the crush of her thighs.

His cock surged to attention, his eyes narrowing to amber points of light. His face flushed with heat as Laney continued to wash herself, unaware of what she revealed to him and the havoc she played on his body.

Cole sluiced across the water, prowling toward her like a wolf on the hunt. He had a half-formed idea of sneaking up on her from behind, but at some point Laney must've heard him coming. She straightened, turning to him as he approached.

"How are your wounds?"

"What wounds?"

Laney glanced over his torso, pausing where his wounds were now nothing more than raw pink lines, before drifting lower. Her eyes widened as she caught sight of his thick, jutting erection. Her lips parted slightly. Little spots of color appeared in her cheeks. Her gaze leapt back up to meet his face. "Well! Looks like you're healing nicely."

Cole smiled wickedly and held out his hand to her.

She came to him willingly, with only the slightest hesitation in her movements. Her nervousness only served to endear her to him further. He gathered her into his embrace and took her mouth in a long, slow kiss before trailing lower to nip at the ridge of her collar bone. "Mine..." he murmured against her neck.

Without saying another word, he picked her up and carried her from the water. He found a soft bed of leaves a short distance from the stream and laid her out in front of him so he could worship her with his body.

She was trembling, and he could feel the anxious pounding of her heart, but there was also an eagerness shining in her eyes that Cole found incredibly sexy. He leaned over her and she smoothed her hands across his chest in a gesture of wonderment and innocent curiosity.

He kissed and caressed her body, taking his time to savor every inch of her creamy skin. He sucked gently at the hollow of her throat, then moved down to swirl his tongue around the ripe peak of one breast. She welcomed his touch, rewarding him by reaching up to thread her fingers through his silky hair.

Cole's nerves buzzed as he nuzzled his way down her narrow rib cage and flat stomach to her bare slit. There he propped himself on his elbow and slid a finger along her cleft before leaning forward and repeating the motion with his tongue. Laney shivered, sighed.

"Open your legs for me, baby."

She complied, and he tongued her moist opening while rubbing her clit in a slow circle with his thumb. She mewled softly and clutched at his hair in an effort to tug him ever closer. He growled his approval against her bare flesh. God, but she was a delicious feast! Her eyes grew hooded and sexy while she watched him work her over

with his tongue and mouth, her lips parting slightly in an expression of clouded rapture.

He broke away finally to scrape his teeth along her inner thigh, ignoring her small sound of protest. He wanted to watch his fingers stroking in and out of her dewy wetness. It was a tantalizing agony, to feel her tight depths clamp around him. It was even more erotic to see it. First one finger, then two. Filling her, stretching her. Gathering sweet moisture before plunging deep. When he reached up and gripped her breast with one hand and massaged her pussy with the other, she jerked sharply and began grinding herself against his fingertips. It was almost more than he could stand.

When she was ready for him, Cole slowly withdrew his fingers and settled himself over her, nestling his lower body against the cradle of her hips. She welcomed the weight of him by running her hands over his back. But there was also fear shining in her eyes.

“Cole, I should tell you...I haven’t...I mean, I never...”

He gave her a long, deep kiss that seemed to calm her, and then he began to probe his hard length along her slit, slipping in her juices until he found her entrance. Slowly he pressed forward, pleasure searing through him as he squeezed himself partly into her resisting sheath before her muscles shoved him back out again.

Cole groaned, his breath rushing out hard and fast. He clenched his jaw in anguish to keep from coming all over her.

*She was so tight!*

He gripped himself and levered the head of his penis against her wet opening, holding himself in place. This time he entered her with more force, arching his back so he slid fully inside her with one smooth stroke.

Beneath him, Laney stiffened at the sudden invasion. She let out a little bark of pain that slashed across his heart. As he pushed past her innocent barrier, he felt the pulse of her inner muscles bunching and straining, either to accommodate his throbbing length or to force him out.

Cole hung his head, allowing his eyes to slip closed.  
“Oh...Fuck...” It was sweet torture. Laney Parker. So tight...taking him

in. His woman, fucking him. It felt like he was dying. "Oh, Laney," he breathed ragged. "You feel so good!"

Laney bit her lower lip while she held herself completely still. Her short sharp breaths spoke of fading pain. She still had her eyes shut tight while her pussy worked itself around him. Cole flexed gently, waiting for her to adjust to his size. He kissed her breasts, her neck, her lower lip. He wanted to make it good for her, but it wasn't easy to hold back when his every instinct told him to rise up, to dominate.

When finally she opened her eyes and looked up at him with an awed, feverish expression; a feeling of sharp, possessive pride surged through him.

Trying to be gentle, he gripped her hips and withdrew slowly, groaning as the tight pressure of her pussy sucked at his cock, massaged it, then drew it deep inside her again. Her entire body tensed around him, and this time Cole reached between them and thumbed her clit.

The little bud was hard as a pebble. He rubbed her for several minutes and when she began to relax, he set a gentle rhythm. He pumped his cock in and out, very slowly, very steadily. She choked out a breath and went wet around him, her pussy stroking him like a thousand velvet tongues. Cole moaned and thrust harder, burying himself to the hilt.

He licked her earlobe. Nipped her with sharp teeth. His pulse thrummed as he stared down at her face, watching the expressions of wonderment, worry and bliss play across her face. She whimpered softly, the vibration making his cock throb inside her. "So beautiful, honey. So hot!"

Sensing how close she was to the edge, he thrust hard into her and ground his pelvis against her clit. Laney panted in response and bucked against him, shoving him in deep. Cole's heart lurched into his throat. He growled, momentarily wilting in satisfaction. "Don't fight me, Laney. Relax and take me inside you."

She did as he asked, going soft and pliant beneath his arching body. His hands smoothed over her shoulders and roamed down her back to her slender thighs. He rubbed them, and then slipped down

to clutch at her ass. He wanted to memorize the feeling of her. *His mate*. He held her slender hips, and gave up the lead. He held himself still while she rocked back and forth on his slick length. He needed this, needed to feel her pussy, surrounding him, clutching him.

“Oh...”

He felt it surge up. Knew she was close.

“Oh, *Cole!*”

“That’s it, baby. Come for me.”

She stiffened. Shuddered hard. Her eyes slipped closed, and Cole knew the moment the climax broke over her. Wave after wave after wave.

She uttered a strangled cry as pleasure racked her body. The feel of her pussy fluttering and clamping down on his straining cock was too much. Cole growled as his temperature surged, a flare of heat that swept over him from head to toe. His cock jerked in reaction, scattering all thought. He thrust deep, plunging wildly inside Laney over and over until bliss caught him, shook him, almost tore him apart.

He roared out his release as he spilled his seed deep inside her. When at last he collapsed on top of her, he was shaking and sated. Completely drained.

Minutes later, as they lay resting together on the bed of leaves, Laney reached for him. She rubbed his thigh, kissed his shoulder.

“This isn’t over, you know. Seth will come for us. For me.”

“Let him,” Cole said. He gave her a quick kiss on the forehead before rising to his feet. “We won’t be here come morning.”

Laney sat up. “We won’t?”

“My pack is waiting for us not far from here. I told the others I was going for my mate tonight. As soon as I return, we’re all heading north to Silver.”

“Is that a town?”

“It’s a small community in Dover County.” Cole reached down to pull her to her feet. “It’s where my sister from another litter lives. She lost her mate in a fire last year and the pack has been in chaos

without an alpha. She's asked me to come in and settle things down. I agreed."

"Wow. Cole, that's major." It was also quite dangerous.

"I know," he agreed. "The males aren't going to like an outsider coming in and taking over. There are bound to be challenges, especially since they're like us--a small pack, without many females. I'm hoping I can convince them we'll be stronger banded together, but you never can tell how they'll react."

She said nothing and he caught her hands, smiling wanly as he guided her back down to the stream. "You're quiet all the sudden. Regretting your decision to come with me already, are you?"

Laney sniffed. "Do you really think I'd stay behind and go on driving myself crazy missing you?" She pulled him to a stop just shy of the rocky bank and reached up to lovingly touch his face. "Not a chance, wolf man."



## Author Bio

Cora Zane loves to write steamy and erotic romances about handsome heroes who go out of their way to win the affection of their lady loves. These men are strong, sexy, and unafraid of commitment. They know what they want, and are determined to get it. Cora believes their willingness to risk a broken heart makes them all the more irresistible--and special.

Cora began writing erotic romances in 2005. When she's not writing, she's usually reading. Her favorite books are futuristic and paranormal romances. Her goal for the future is to continue to write the kind of books she herself would like to read.

Also Available from Cobblestone Press

Enduring Promise by Tempest Knight © 2006

## Chapter One

“Don’t do this to me,” Evan Harris muttered under his breath.

His sports car lurched one last time, shoving him against the steering wheel, knocking the wind out of him, before it came to an abrupt stop and died.

“C’mon, start.” He turned the key and pressed the gas pedal several times, but the motor remained dead.

“Shit!” He slammed his fist against the steering wheel. He fished his cell phone from the backpack on the passenger seat and hesitated for a moment. Who could he call? Nobody knew where he was headed. He’d jumped into his car and driven away without even leaving a message for his assistant. He let out a long sigh. Maybe Triple A. He started to punch the numbers when he noticed the *No Service Available* in the display.

“Great. Just fucking great.” He threw his cell phone back in the bag. Leaning back, he ran his hands through his hair in frustration. He looked out the windshield to see nothing but a great expanse of shortgrass prairie and scrub vegetation. The sun’s weak rays barely pierced through the thick, low hanging gray clouds. At least the hard

rain that had followed him since he left the highway had lightened to only a soft drizzle.

What the hell had he been thinking when he took this shortcut? Rubbing his temples, he frowned. But that was exactly the problem, wasn't it? He'd not been thinking. Tension and unease had slowly built inside him for days. But this morning he'd awakened with a sense of restlessness he couldn't explain. The urge to get away from New York—and his work—had grown as the hours went by. This morning, before he'd had time to consider what he was doing, he'd phoned his partner to take over the photo shoot he'd scheduled. Then he'd packed a light bag, jumped in his car, and slammed his foot down on the accelerator like a possessed madman. The car ate up the miles. The need to drive away had been all consuming. Yet, the edginess hadn't eased once he'd hit the highway. On the contrary, it'd grown with each mile. Mixed with a sense of urgency. Until he'd meandered onto the country road.

"Yeah, well, now I'm stuck in the middle of nowhere," he muttered. Opening the glove compartment, he pulled out a road map he kept there for emergencies like this. As he studied the map carefully, his frown deepened. Once he'd gotten out of New York, he'd been compelled to head south, that much he remembered. Yet he couldn't remember exactly when or where he'd gotten off the highway.

Tossing the map aside, he threw his head against the headrest, eyes closed, and swore under his breath. Unbelievable. He was lost. Really lost.

*You are not lost.*