

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

ELLORA'S CAVE

Quickies
Naughty Nuptials

*Lucky
Number
Seven*

Anh Leod

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorasave.com

Lucky Number Seven

ISBN 9781419910111

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Cover art by Syneca.

Electronic book Publication June 2007

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LUCKY NUMBER SEVEN

Anh Leod

Dedication

For Leander.

Chapter One

"I'm going to fuck the first man I see." Vivian Lane stomped down the back steps of her parent's church holding the last box of her wedding decorations. Only days before she'd agonized over matching colors to her bridesmaids' dresses. Now, for all she cared, the red and silver ribbons, flowerpot covers and candles could be thrown in the dump.

"Calm down, Vi!" Delia, who was to have been her matron of honor, said, running behind her.

Vi turned at the base of the steps. The drizzling rain made it hard to see. "Calm down, Dee? C'mon, get with the picture! It's over between Randy and me."

"After two years? He just has cold feet!"

Vi blew up a breath, trying to move curls out of her eyes before the rain extinguished her sight with frizz. "No. The wedding was supposed to be tomorrow! I just put my mother through hell taking down the decorations. Randy is scum."

"He's scared. You still love him, right?" Shivering, Dee put up the hood of her jacket.

Vi rested the box on her hip. "He let the stripper at his bachelor party give him a blowjob. Then tells me about it. The morning before the wedding! He's sorry, he says, but he doesn't feel like we have enough sex and he needs more than I provide. That's it! I'm though with him."

"He said he loves you, though."

"I'm supposed to care about that now? If sex nearly every day isn't enough for him, I'm moving on. It's not like I even came half the time. He's convinced sex is so important, well, maybe he's right. I'm going to find out!"

Dee shook her head. "Don't make any hasty decisions. I can see how upset you are by this."

Vi stared at her friend. Six months pregnant, deeply in love with her prince of a husband, there was no way Dee could understand the level of betrayal she felt. Jilted, practically at the altar. "I know we've been friends forever, but I have to feel my own way through this."

"Be careful," Dee begged, her hands protectively covering her belly.

Vi sniffed. "I'm not promising anything." She walked briskly through the parking lot, pausing only to dump her box of ruined wedding dreams into the trunk before driving off.

Dee had been the last person left at the church. Vi's mother had already driven away in tears. Vi hadn't been able to tell her mother the full truth. How had she made such a mistake in her choice of husband? She'd never trust a man again. They were all about their penises and nothing else.

The early June sky was gray with clouds despite the midday hour and she made slow progress through the Centralia, Washington, streets, reliving her copious but somehow unsatisfying love life with Randy. While she drove, she blasted a local country station at earsplitting decibels, wondering why there were so many "she done him wrong" songs compared to "he done her wrong" songs. Clearly, a hole existed in the marketplace. Her experience alone was worthy of a country hit.

Maybe if she'd enjoyed their sex life more it would have been something she pursued often. Busy blaming Randy's unwillingness to provide more than thirty seconds of foreplay for busting up her wedding day, she wandered too close to the orange cones around a chain link fence surrounding an unfinished strip mall. She was distracted by an emblem on a sign that appeared to be a union symbol but had at its center a snarling dog's face. Randy hated dogs. Maybe she should drop by the pound and adopt a big, mean one just in case he decided to ever stop by again.

Her car lurched and she heard an unpleasant *thump, thump, thump*. Shit! She had a

flat! Could her day get any worse? Her car listed to the right and she pulled over to the curb as soon as she was past the cones. Maybe she'd picked up a nail. It would figure. Construction sites were notorious for them.

It had been years since she'd had a flat. Did she even have a good spare? She reached into her purse for her phone, but her hand came up empty except for the last breath mint in a tin and some condoms in foil packages from her last camping trip with Randy. Now she remembered she'd left her cell phone at home so she couldn't receive any more phone calls from friends and relatives commiserating with her over her canceled wedding. Leaning back into her seat, her windshield wipers' steady rhythm increasing the pounding in her head, she closed her eyes and popped the breath mint into her mouth.

A couple of minutes later, she was enjoying her minty breath and revenge-filled thoughts when she heard a knock at her window. Vi turned her head, but couldn't see through the fog on the window. Ignoring all safety precautions, she rolled down the window.

A handsome dark-eyed man with a hard hat, a three-day beard and an orange vest leaned in. Her day was finally improving.

"You okay? You've been parked here for a while and we need to bring in a big machine."

"And?"

"You're blocking the driveway."

"Oh." She swallowed the last of her mint. "Sorry, I've got a flat tire. I'm stuck."

"Is anyone on the way to help you?"

Like she'd want to bother her family with a silly flat tire after what she'd already put them through today. "I left my cell phone at home, so no."

"I have some tools in my truck." He gestured a work-glove-covered hand behind him. "Do you want help?"

“Don’t you need to work?”

He shrugged. “Can’t do much with you blocking us.”

She considered. Could she handle this on her own? Probably not. Her eyes began to tear when she remembered this was supposed to be the last day she was without a life partner. The last day she was supposed to handle everything on her own. She pushed that thought out of her head. Independence was great, for the most part. “Then yes, thanks.”

“I’ll get my tools.”

He turned away. Her mouth fell open when she saw the guy’s ass as he walked back through the gate in the chain link fence. Boy, had she been missing out, dating a string-bean accountant. She wanted some of that construction guy! Then she remembered her promise to fuck the first man she saw.

She smiled. She’d have no problem keeping that commitment.

A few moments later the man returned, calling over his shoulder. “Don’t get your panties in a knot, Barkley. I’ll have her out of here fast, then take lunch while you get the equipment in here.”

“Hurry it up,” Barkley shouted. He was a tall, indistinct figure in the rainy gloom.

“Are you going to stay in the car?” the man said, leaning back through Vi’s open window.

“No, I’ll help.” She could use the distraction. Plus he would get a chance to check her out. Somebody ought to get the chance to appreciate the fitness she’d achieved in order to fit into her mermaid-style wedding gown.

“It’s raining.”

She snorted. “Like that’s going to matter after the day I’ve had.”

After straightening her short skirt, she got out of the car. He motioned her around to her trunk without a glance, not commenting when she pushed aside her wedding decorations to pull out the spare tire and jack.

How was she going to get his attention if her skirt didn't do the trick? All Randy needed to get a hard-on was her bare legs in his line of vision.

The construction guy looked over the jack and spare, then nodded. Vi's nipples tingled at the way his sure hands handled the equipment. She wondered if he could manage her parts so masterfully.

"It should hold you," he said.

But will you hold me? "What should I do?" She swayed toward him.

"Just stand back." His tone was brusque, but she really didn't care. She wanted to fuck him, not befriend him. Moving away, she kept a firm eye on the strong muscles of his back, butt and legs as he bent to her car.

I wish he was bending me over. She licked her lips. *Give him time to finish first.*

He made quick work of the tire change then straightened and turned back to her. "All done. What do you want me to do with the flat tire? I can take it down the street to a tire shop if you want."

How sweet. Maybe he was a nice guy. "I can just throw it in my backseat."

"I'd hate to have you wreck your upholstery. My truck is parked inside the fence and it won't hurt my truck bed."

She smiled as he said the word *bed*. "If you don't mind."

He tilted his head toward the fence. "Let's go then."

She dropped the jack into her trunk and closed it, then moved her car down the street so it would be out of the driveway. By then the man's large green truck had pulled up behind her and she dashed through the rain and opened the passenger door. Grabbing the handle, she pulled herself into the cab, breathing in smells of pine air freshener and wet dog. He must have a pooch of his own.

Curly dark hairs were embedded in the seat cushion. He probably had a black Chow Chow or similar breed as a pet. What kind of dog would she like to have?

Her attention soon drifted off her potential pet and onto her driver. Vi couldn't wait

to see if what was inside his workpants was as big as the rest of him.

"I'm Cere, by the way," he said with a glance in her direction after she fastened her seat belt. His hard hat was off now and she saw his thick hair, though cut short, was a coppery brown, as if the tips were overlaid with gleaming metal.

She smiled in response. "I'm horny."

His eyes grew big and he growled low at the back of his throat before speaking. "You're what?"

She blushed. "I don't mean that's my name. I want to fuck you."

"Okay," he said slowly.

She could see he took a deep breath, as if he were testing the air for insanity.

Hopefully he liked her perfume. "I'd like to offer you a personal thank you for doing all this. Is there somewhere we can park after we get my tire fixed?"

He blinked. She liked the idea that she could shock this big strong man. His cheeks were even a little pink in his olive-skinned face.

"Ummm...sure. There's a park a couple of blocks past the tire shop."

"Great." She thought through the contents of her purse. Yes, she had condoms. She settled back into the seat as he pulled into the road.

The tire shop had a short wait, so they were stuck standing in line.

"What union are you in?" she asked, vaguely curious. "I saw the dog emblem on the fence, but wasn't sure what it stood for. I couldn't translate the motto."

He shifted, a bit uneasily she thought. "It's not exactly a union."

"What is it then?"

"More of a brotherhood."

"Of what?"

"óêöëß."

"What?" She had no idea what he'd said.

“Dog. The Brotherhood of the Dog. It’s Greek.”

“Cool. Do you all have dog names, like Barkley?”

He grinned. “It’s just a little joke.”

“A way to get through the workday?”

He slipped his arms around her waist. The work gloves he hadn’t removed were warmed by his body heat and felt comforting on her chilled skin.

“I prefer your idea.”

“Mmm,” she murmured, leaning her head against his chest. “Me too.”

“Are you sure I won’t break you? You’re so tiny and I can get a bit, well,” he half laughed, half chuckled, “rough.”

Vi stood on her tiptoes and nipped at his ear. “I can’t wait.”

Cere turned his head so his nose drifted across her cheek until their lips met. “Me either. Shouldn’t be long now.” He put his hands under her ass cheeks and squeezed.

She opened her mouth to his kiss. Hungrily, she swept her tongue into his mouth when his lips parted.

“My, you have large canines,” she told him, after sampling various parts of his mouth with her tongue.

“A prerequisite for the Brotherhood,” he told her.

“Are other parts of you as large?” she teased.

He raised an eyebrow. “You’ll find out soon enough, puppy.”

“Arf,” Vi said and worried at his neck with her teeth.

His chuckle rumbled his chest. “You get the idea quickly.”

Vi’s name was called and a couple of minutes later they were back in the truck, driving toward the park. She was tense with anticipation and her panties were damp with excitement. No matter how large his cock turned out to be, her pussy was ready for him. Just being near Cere felt like foreplay. He was a real man, doing a man’s job, not some sissy desk jockey with thighs no bigger than hers.

He pulled into the park. Vi could tell he knew where he was going, because he didn't hesitate before pulling onto a dirt road that ran to the right about a fourth of a mile inside the park. Maybe she hadn't been the first to proposition Cere on the job. With no ties to him, she found the thought of his sexual exploits arousing. Not soon enough, they were past open fields and surrounded by trees. He pulled up next to one and parked.

"We should have privacy here," he told her, turning his key in the ignition. "These hiking trails are pretty private."

She gestured to the windows. "We don't need much. We're already steaming up the windows."

He smiled lazily, took off his work gloves, and reached for her. She came up on her knees and straddled him, too hot for his body to pretend to be ladylike. Her lips came down hard on his, grinding against his mouth as her fingers worked to detach his seat belt. His long fingers reached for her cotton blouse then unbuttoned it. She kept kissing him as he slid both shirt and rose corduroy jacket off her shoulders. They fell to the floor with a soft plop.

She fucked his mouth with her tongue as his fingers next moved under her miniskirt. He tugged at her thong, then ripped apart both side straps. The damp satin teased her clit as he pulled it between her legs backward so her entire crotch from clit to pussy to ass was on fire. She gyrated against him, then gave up any pretense of control and fumbled for his belt. Her lips slipped to his neck.

Once he had removed her thong, he pulled off his shirts. He wore two layers, an orange short-sleeved safety shirt with a long-sleeved white T-shirt underneath. When she saw his chest, she smiled with delight and ran the tips of her fingers through the dark springy hair.

"Luxurious," she said, running her tongue over a softly protruding nipple. He exhaled harshly.

His belt was undone now and she undid the button of his pants. The turgid tip of

his cock peeped out from his boxer briefs as she undid the zipper.

“Hi there, you darling,” she teased, caressing the tip. The head was thick and hot, engorged with blood. A drop of precum came out of his slit and she lifted the moisture with a fingertip and put it to her mouth, watching his eyes.

His pupils had dilated, leaving his already dark eyes nearly black. He kept his eyes on her as he pushed up from the seat and moved his pants and briefs down his legs.

She looked down, gauging the length of him, then reached for her purse. Her questing fingers found the condoms. She held them up for Cere’s inspection.

“Think they will fit you?” she asked doubtfully. “My ex didn’t need extra-large.”

“We’ll make it work,” he grunted, taking them from her hand and ripping open the first one.

She pushed him down on the seat as he covered his cock with the condom, desperate to ride this big bad dog. Cream melted down the insides of her thighs. When she reached for the button on her miniskirt, he said, “Leave it on.”

She put her hand on his chest instead and leaned over him. “You aren’t going to get much of a view that way.”

“I’ll watch your tits bounce,” he said. “I like breasts. You have nice round handfuls for such a tiny thing.”

“Thank you. I like yours too.” She licked his nipples in turn, eliciting a chuckle, then climbed over his rock-hard thighs. Kneeling above his cock, she found it with her pussy and pushed down.

“Oh God,” she moaned, feeling his sleek shaft press into her. Her insides began to quiver, as if she were ready to come. “I can hardly move, this feels so good.”

“I can fix that.” He put his hands under her miniskirt and pulled her hips down.

She gasped. His long length engorged her pussy and she wept juices around him, lubricating the shaft. His hips began to piston and she bounced up and down with his rhythm, moaning with each stroke.

“Who needs happily-ever-after when you can have this!” She reached out to get a grip on something, feeling like her spiraling pleasure was costing her balance. A honk startled her.

Cere laughed, the rumbling of his body causing ripples of movement between her thighs. “Don’t hit the horn or we’ll get company. The trails aren’t that private.”

“Right.” She put her hands back on his chest and tried to find her rhythm again.

He thrust harder into her, so deep she was sure he touched her womb. She lost all ability to speak at that point and communicated her extreme pleasure with grunts. Desperate to touch more of him, she bent over, feeling his cock vibrate in new places inside her. She ran her locks across his chest, the brunette of her hair mixing with his copper curls.

The smell of their arousal, of sex, filled the cab of the truck. Vi gasped for breath in the steamy heat enveloping her. Shaking, she held on tightly, grinding against him like he was her only touch point in a world gone mad. As her body exploded into a shuddering orgasm, she keened, “He was right!”

Cere kept pumping as she went limp above him. Each thrust of his cock made her pussy twitch with intense aftershocks almost as powerful as her original soaring peak. When she came back to herself, his harsh breathing told her he was close. He nearly howled, jetting his cum with such force she wondered if the condom had held. Her body exploded into another orgasm.

It hadn’t held. Thank God Randy had asked her to go on the Pill during their first year of marriage. A few moments later, after Cere had ripped off the torn condom and apologizing, pulled her into his arms, he asked, “What did you mean?”

“About what?” Vi snuggled against his solid, warm shoulder, enjoying the rich smell of his work-toughened skin.

“You said ‘He was right’. What did that mean?”

Vi rubbed her nose against him. “My fiancé called off our wedding this morning.”

He shifted his pelvis and his penis slipped out of her. "When were you getting married?"

Had she scared him away? "Tomorrow."

He turned on the seat, so that he faced her. "I'm so sorry."

She could see the honest emotion in his eyes. "It's okay. I think it was for the best."

"So why was he right?"

"He said it was over because of the sex. He decided we were boring together." She put her hand to his temple and ran her fingers through the coarse, curly hair on his scalp. "Now that we did it, I can see Randy's point."

"Did he cheat on you?"

She pressed her lips together, not wanting to kill her post-orgasm mood with talk of her almost-husband. "Yes, but I don't want to talk about it now."

"You want me to find him for you, teach him a lesson?"

She smiled. "Very funny."

He raised himself on his elbow. "I'm not kidding. We take care of men who disrespect their mates where I come from."

She put her arms around his neck and hugged him close. "I appreciate that and your offer. But he's not worth it."

Cere swore, making her giggle.

"Would you take me back now?" she asked. "I have a ton of presents to return and I'm sure you have to get back to work."

"Yeah." His lithe body came off the seat in a fluid movement and he bent to pick up his clothes.

They dressed in silence. Vi had never hooked up before, wasn't sure what to say.

He drove her back, then exchanged her spare tire with the repaired one, despite her protests that he'd done too much already.

"It's no problem," he told her, but Barkley came to stand on the other side of the

chain link fence and looked curiously at them.

“Sorry,” Vi called, wishing their interlude hadn’t ended so abruptly. “He’ll be there in a minute. It’s my fault we took so long.”

A corner of Cere’s mouth tilted in a grin. “And my pleasure.”

“I can smell her on you, Cerberus,” Barkley told him as he unlocked the gate and let him in.

Cere shrugged. “She wanted to fuck.” Among his people, sex was a casual thing, but he was surprised to find a human who felt the same way as the Brotherhood, especially since she’d wanted to fuck face-to-face.

The stern look in Barkley’s dark eyes stilled Cere. “You know she is your true mate, right?” the older man asked. “I can smell the link on you.”

“What?” Cere felt a little sick. Barkley had the ability to sense true mates, he knew, but he hadn’t considered the possibility for a second when he agreed to fuck the woman. “I don’t even know her name.”

“If I know bitches, she’ll have left her mark somewhere,” the older man told him.

“Don’t call her that,” Cere cautioned. “It may not be an insult in our culture, but it is in hers.”

Barkley shrugged. “She’s your mate. She’ll have to learn the ways of the Brotherhood.”

“Assuming she wants a óëöëß for a mate.”

“There’s no other choice for her now. You have a duty to mate with the one female who can successfully bear your young.”

Cere waved a hand uneasily and went back to fixing the asphalt roller. Barkley had never been wrong about a mate before, but shouldn’t he have sensed the connection himself? Of course, he had mated with her, something he’d never done with a human stranger before. Her beauty had been so enticing. Wasn’t that all the justification he

needed? Her body was tight and muscled like a greyhound, her beautiful, breast-length brunette hair more beautiful than any chocolate Labrador Retriever's coat. Never for a moment had he thought she was fated to be his for their lifetime. In fact, he'd always hoped his mate was a member of his pack, so they'd both enjoy the same long lifespan. There were few women however and he'd never been interested in more than a few weeks' companionship with any of his pack females, had never mated with them in human form. That was considered a sign of serious attachment, since most humans mated face-to-face, unlike dogs.

How would this human woman react when he told her he was descended from a Greek werewolf pack? Many generations later, his people had intermingled with humans so many times that they considered themselves quite domesticated, hence their tribe being called the Brotherhood of the Dog in honor of their friendship with humankind. They could mostly control their transformations and behavior even under the moon.

After his shift was over, he went to his truck and drove to the house where he shared quarters with several littermates. When he reached to grab his lunchbox his hand instead came back with a handful of cloth.

He recognized the woman's panties and brought them to his nose for a sniff. Barkley had been right about her leaving her mark. The arousal still evident in the cloth hardened his cock and his resolve to find her. Examining the cloth, he discovered the word "Bride" was emblazoned across the front in tiny rhinestones and underneath was the word "Vi" – her name? He now had more knowledge than before.

Inside the house, he started calling churches. Twenty minutes later, he had her name, Vi Lane and an earful of sympathy for his mate from the secretary who told him of the wedding's tragic cancellation.

It wasn't tragic, he told himself. His mate had nearly been lost to him before she'd been found. He'd never had such a lucky break.

He looked her up in the phone book and dialed her number. Was she ready for a

permanent mating so soon after the blow she'd had? He'd have to persuade her she was.

Vi's voice was on her voicemail, though she didn't answer.

"Hi, Vi, it's Cere," he said. "Hope you don't mind my call. I figured out your name from the, ummm, property you left in my car. Come by my worksite tomorrow, would you? I'd love to see you again. And," he paused, "thank you for today. I hope you enjoyed yourself as much as I did."

He hung up the phone, feeling like an idiot. Anyway, she was probably avoiding calls after her wedding mishap. Soon however, she'd be faced with the truth. He couldn't let her out of his life.

Late that night, Vi arrived home from a long afternoon returning gifts to a department store in a mall outside Seattle. Depressed and near tears, she poured herself a large glass of wine before braving the telephone. All she wanted to do was get in the tub and relive the one good part of her day, the fling in the truck with that construction worker. But first, to get it over with, she tacked her voicemail.

After three condolences messages, she heard a voice that put chills down her spine. *Cere.*

Vi hung up the phone, bemused by his message. Oddly, she wasn't at all bothered by his call or the fact he'd tracked her down. She was glad he had done so. Certainly visiting him tomorrow would take her mind off the wedding that wasn't taking place. Randy had delayed their honeymoon because it was tax season, so there wasn't even a trip to look forward to, nice though it would have been to get out of town. She'd have changed his ticket to her sister's name and gone anyway if they'd planned one. For that matter, maybe she'd have taken Cere!

She imagined that taut, muscular body stretched out on a towel next to her under the hot Mexican sun, gleaming with lotion and sweat. Her clit twitched in response to the image. Too bad he hadn't left a phone number. She'd have called him back and

invited him over.

Instead of using the bathtub for relaxation, she poured herself a second glass of wine, then dug into the back of her walk-in closet to find the vibrator she'd hidden from Randy. The plastic tool wouldn't do the job Cere had done on her today, but she'd certainly have fun reliving the memory of his huge cock pounded into her from below as she'd rocked on his hips. The thought made her pussy fill with cream. She wouldn't need any lube to glide the vibrator home tonight.

Chapter Two

Vi parked down the street from the strip mall construction site, no longer sure she was doing the right thing. Sure, she had stocked up on extra-large condoms at the drugstore on the way here and she was wearing a black mini-dress without panties for access, but sex with the same man two days in a row felt like she was jumping right back into a relationship. Was that really wise?

On the other hand, she really wanted to fuck him. Cere was, well, *amazing*. He had blown her mind in a way she hadn't thought possible. She was used to little fluttering orgasms, warm feelings, supplemented by the occasional more intense though briefer orgasm provided by her vibrator. Cere was truly lucky number seven, her seventh lover.

She stepped out of her car resolutely. After what she had been through with her ex, she deserved this. Her pussy creamed at the idea of experiencing lucky seven again.

The gate was chained so she peered through the metal links of the fence. Several men in hard hats were visible. All appeared to be taller than average and none wore coats despite the unseasonable June chill. The man closest to her walked by with two large propane bottles on his shoulders. She wouldn't have thought any one man could carry multiple bottles.

The man nodded in response to her wave and gave a shout in the direction of a small group of workers focused around a depression in the dirt. A moment later, Cere detached himself from the group and came toward her.

His taut, muscular body moved easily, the strength evident in his loose, confident stride.

Vi pressed her thighs together to contain the ripples of excitement that had her feeling faint with anticipation.

"Hey," he said in greeting. The men must have been digging. Cere had a streak of dirt on one cheek, which only served to highlight his cheekbones and his tight tan canvas pants were muddy at the knees. He only wore a T-shirt today under an orange safety vest and she well knew his muscles were earned by hard work rather than in a gym.

Damn. She licked her lips, painted cherry red for the occasion, not sure if she could speak coherently with the lust crowding reason from her brain. "Hey back."

"You got my message?" He put a work-glove-covered hand on one hip, used the other to take off his hard hat and wipe his forehead.

How had she gotten so lucky? In all her twenty-four years, she'd never seen such a prime male specimen and yet he was the first man she'd met after Randy's betrayal. "Yes. I thought this might be your lunchtime."

He nodded. "I'm glad you came by. I...I was afraid you wouldn't."

She sensed he was nervous, a far cry from his businesslike competence of the day before. Could she set him at ease? She entwined her fingers in the chain links at the level of his pecs. Her fingernails were freshly painted and she hoped the polish was dry by now. Playing the role of temptress was easier than trying to find a genuine connection with her lucky seven lover.

She breathed out of her nose and counted to five to quiet herself, then spoke in a low, seductive voice. "I remember you telling me your truck had a bed."

He half turned his head away from her, but she could see his grin. "Yeah."

"I noticed you had a topper on it. Might give us some privacy."

"Uh-huh." He turned back to her, his eyes creasing with amusement. "Might be a little rough though. Not much padding in that kind of bed."

"I like your brand of rough." Her words were instinctive, true.

He stepped to the fence, close enough for her fingertips to graze his chest. Even through the two layers of clothing she could feel his nipples were hard. Her pussy

twitched and she felt the first trickle of cream at her nether lips.

“You think so?” His eyes, so unusually dark, caught hers with an intensity that had her questioning subtext. But she had nothing to fear from him. That had been made clear yesterday.

Her own nipples had swelled now and she could see his gaze fasten on the low-cut bodice of her dress. Her breath quickened. “I brought a sleeping bag.”

His lips twitched. “I see.” Pinioning her fingers underneath his dirt-roughened gloves, he turned and called out, “Barkley, I’m taking lunch!”

The older man she’d seen yesterday raised a hand in acknowledgement and turned back to his conversation.

Thank God, she blinked. All this visual, verbal foreplay was driving her insane with lust. She didn’t want to chat with Cere, she wanted to fuck him.

Cere tossed his hat into a wheelbarrow and pulled a ring of keys off his belt. He unlocked the gate and eased out of the narrow opening.

“All set?” he asked her.

She gestured to her car. “Just have to get my sleeping bag.”

He openly laughed, making her feel a bit defensive. “Is it in your trunk? I’ll get it for you.”

They pulled it out of her car, then walked over to his truck.

He cocked his head to her as he pulled out his keys. “So, do you get off on trucks or something?”

She shook her head. “I get off on you.”

With movement almost too quick to see, Vi found herself plastered against the door, Cere’s firm lips against hers. She opened her mouth, giving his tongue free entrance. He tasted of cherries and pine needles. Somehow he managed to imprison her leg between his. Her mound rubbed against his leg with only her skirt to protect her sensitive flesh. She moved against him recklessly, pulling one of his hands to her breast

from where it rested above her head.

“Ares, you’re as shameless as a bitch in heat,” he muttered, pulling her aside and getting his door open. “I love it, as long as it’s just for me.”

“It is,” she said hoarsely, her lips swollen from his bruising kiss. Even if she didn’t want this to be true, it was.

He lifted her onto the truck seat, spread her legs wide around his powerful thighs. His hands squeezed her breasts, hard. If she could only get her pussy a little bit closer, get a little friction going, she could come. *She needed to come.*

A little wriggle slid her to the edge of the seat, but he obviously sensed her wish and his hands dropped from her breasts.

“Do you want me to take you in front of the Brotherhood?” he asked.

She raised passion-glazed eyes as his sentence ended with a growl. A few yards away a group of hard-hat-wearing men stood watching them. Her heart thumped as one of them cupped his crotch.

She fought to catch her breath, focus. He had moved away from her pussy and this helped, as badly as she wanted friction there.

“I must be losing my mind,” she told him, pushing her curls out of her face. “You have some serious sexual mojo over me.”

His chest rose and fell. “I know it’s hard to stop, but the park is so close.”

He patted her legs. She swung them into his truck and he closed the door. Through the open window, she heard the other men’s howls of protest. Cere made a rude gesture, then walked around the front of the truck and got in on the driver’s side, stuffing her sleeping bag behind the seat.

“They certainly didn’t seem concerned that we were having a private moment,” she observed.

“Privacy isn’t highly prized in our culture,” he told her, starting up the truck.

As she pondered why a construction union would have a culture, Cere drove

swiftly to the park. Was this Brotherhood of the Dog some kind of a cult? Vi licked lips that had suddenly become dry. Some kind of sex cult? Leaning her head back into the seat, she realized she didn't really care. Whatever he was into had given him *skills* and she had no interest in resisting him. Her lust was animalistic in its power over her judgment.

They drove into the park as they had the day before and were soon in the mini-forest where they had parked. Cere jumped out after turning off the ignition and pulled the sleeping bag from behind the seat. She heard the tailgate drop in the back and took this as her signal to open her purse, pull out the condoms and follow him.

Behind the truck, she found Cere pulling her sleeping bag out of its cover and unzipping it so it provided padding for the truck bed. The topper was dim inside and it took a moment to adjust to the light when he had hoisted her so she could crawl inside.

"I can smell your arousal," he said.

In her position of butt hanging almost off the edge of the truck, his words made her feel vulnerable. But she couldn't help arching her back. He pushed her dress up to her waist, groaning when he saw her naked pussy.

"I didn't wear panties," she confessed. "It made me feel sexy while I was driving to you."

His unseen fingers touched her ankle then ran up her leg. They felt impersonal, thick.

"Are you still wearing your gloves?" she asked. "Why don't you take them off?"

He didn't say anything for a moment. "My hands are a little different."

"I can hardly see in here," she reminded him. "And I don't mind. I know what you can do with them."

"Okay." She heard the soft rustling of leather as he pulled them off.

He moved warm, smooth palms up her legs. She purred with pleasure. "That feels wonderful."

She gasped when his fingers pulled her hips back. Sharp teeth gave her left butt cheek a nip. Scrambling into the truck in shock, she turned over and gracelessly collapsed on the sleeping bag.

Feeling exposed, she started to pull her legs together.

“Stop.”

His command shocked her into stillness. Her legs slowly fell open as his fingers started at her ankles again then quested farther north. All her nerve endings were raw, her heart beat quickly. How dangerous was he going to be for her?

His fingers were at the tops of her thighs. She needed him to move on to her pussy, but instead he turned his hands and ran them down her legs. The backs of his hands were thick with hair, causing a very different, prickly sensation that had her wriggling.

“Do you like that?” he asked, climbing in with her.

“Sure,” she said, breathing hard. “But you know, I don’t need any more foreplay.”

“Maybe I do.” He knelt over her, pushing her mini-dress out of his way. She sat up so he could get it over her head. Then he bent down, moving his hands up and down her torso the same way. He followed this with his tongue, exploring her breasts, then her neck. When he reached her ear she shuddered against him, his gentle ministrations torturing her excited system.

“You have to stop or you’re going to kill me,” she told him.

She felt his lips curve against her ear. “No.”

“I have condoms,” she wheedled. “Extra-large.”

“Good. But still no.”

He moved his nose along her body next, as if smelling every secret crevice of her body. Vi found it hard to breathe. Her entire body was taut with a coming orgasm that couldn’t be triggered until he touched her pussy.

He didn’t give her what she wanted. Adrift in his attentions when he started sniffing the insides of her wide-spread thighs, she reached out her arms for something

to hold. The skin over her breasts tightened in unbearable pleasure as she arched her back. Her breath quickened into pants.

Questing fingers touched something rough. His gloves? No, it was thick and cylindrical. Rope. She found it on both sides of the truck bed, thick coils that were attached somehow. They were perfect to hold, made her feel more grounded in reality.

"Would you like to tie me up sometime?" she asked. "I'm holding your ropes." She knew she'd have to see him again. Her lucky number seven was addicting her. She lifted her head, trying to see what he was doing to her thighs.

"Those ropes would hurt your skin," he said, then pushed his hands against her knees so she spread to him even further.

"Why are they in here?"

"I'll tell you later." He took her pussy with one savage, open-mouthed kiss, his tongue sweeping into her inner lips with the same skilled passion as he had used to ravage her mouth earlier.

Her body bowed as the orgasm hit her, shaking her limbs and rattling her brain to the consistency of hot cereal.

"Oh my word!" she gasped a full minute later, when he finally took his tongue from her clit. "I thought I was going to lose my mind."

She heard rustling next to her and the tearing of a foil packet. Her boneless legs were pushed at the ankles until they bent, then he pulled her closer with his hands on her thighs. He stepped outside the truck.

They were pussy to cock. The smell of his skin, his sweat, was unbearably arousing. She felt herself start to climb the hill of passion again. He paused with the tip of his cock at her entrance and thumbed her clit.

She jerked under his hand.

"I'm going to pound you," he cautioned. "Can you take it?"

"I like it rough," she gasped.

“Good,” he muttered.

His cock invaded her weeping chamber. He slammed against her pelvis. She had no defenses against him since he controlled her entire lower body. Vi was sure no man had ever gone so deep into her. No lover had ever been so large. Her pussy stretched, trying to accommodate his length, her mind shattering with the physical sensations.

He used her hips mercilessly, pulling her tight against him as he thrust. She let her head sink back into the sleeping bag, trying to stay relaxed as every bit of her consciousness focused on the pressure building inside her pussy.

Sweat dewed her skin and Cere’s fingers tightened their hold as he continued to thrust. His vocalizations were mingled howl and moan, each plunge into her clearly as intensely pleasurable for him as it was for her.

“I’m going to come,” she said.

“Go ahead,” he panted. “It won’t be the last time.”

Sparks flashed behind her closed eyes as she gave herself to her orgasm. Her pussy sensitized unbearably, but he didn’t let up his sensual assault. She could have sworn that his cock engorged even more as he pounded her.

When her legs went numb, she unbent them. Her ankles ended up at his ears. She’d never felt so vulnerable, never been so hot, never been so convinced that sex was the best thing *ever*.

Her breaths shortened into gasps and she felt her mind begin to gray as a third orgasm made itself known from the deep pleasure of his cock under her clit. Cere’s thrusts began to shorten, as he increased their speed and intensity.

“Come with me,” she gasped. “We’re going to kill each other.”

His only response was to bend down and clamp his lips over her right breast. She came so hard she did black out for a second, reentering the world to find herself on her stomach.

Cere pulled her hips up and thrust into her again.

“Oh, hell,” she huffed, feeling her body tingle bonelessly.

His long length caressed her pussy as he pulled out to his cock head then thrust again. She put her hands under her forehead and pushed her hips back at him, accepting each long entry. Her pussy fluttered and she couldn't tell if it was exhaustion shaking her or another orgasm.

When one of his hands left her hips, creeping under her pelvis to finger her clit, she knew she was done for.

“If you don't come with me I think I'm going to die,” she told him.

He bent down and nipped her neck. His skin against hers was fiery hot and slick with sweat. “Enjoying yourself?”

“Yes, but I may never walk again.”

His rumble of laughter against her ear made the little hairs there quiver. Instinctively, she thrust back hard, pinning herself on his cock. He took his fingers off her clit and grabbed her hips again.

I'm in for it now, she thought.

His power was unmatched, the grace of his movements unthinkable as he moved against her in a pistoning ballet. She moved her hips in little circles around him, wanting every cell in her pussy to be in contact with his incredible cock.

Time had no meaning as she lost herself in their rhythm. The pleasure was incredible, but she didn't know if her body could manage another orgasm. Slowly though, the pleasure began to build until the fever overtook her and her hip circles became jerky, shaky slides on his cock.

At the last, he held her hips so she couldn't move and pushed against her until she could feel his cock at the door of her womb. Her pussy spasmed as she felt the warmth of cum filling his condom. Her whole body shuddered against the bed of the truck.

Still lost in her orgasm, she barely felt his long length relaxing over her, his head tucking into her shoulder. She wrapped a hand around his hip and caressed him, while

he shuddered through his aftershocks.

“Mate is best,” he mumbled against her neck.

“What did you say?” Her ability to comprehend language hadn’t quite returned.

“Just something Barkley told me. That was the best sex I ever had.”

She smiled as much as she was able, with her cheek against the sleeping bag.

“Ditto.”

“Want to do it again?”

Shocked by the question, she tightened her pussy muscles and realized he was still hard inside her.

“Are you serious?”

She heard his arm slide up to their faces. The digital readout on his watch glowed an eerie green.

“I still have twenty minutes before I have to be back. It will have to be a quickie.”

Twenty minutes would have been an epic sexual experience with her ex. She shifted and he rolled over so they were face-to-face on the sleeping bag. He was still hard enough to fit back in her snugly.

“How about we take a little nap instead. I’m not used to men like you.”

“You will be,” he assured her. “You’re mine now.”

“I am?” she asked, faintly alarmed by his assurance.

“Your body knows it.”

Hmmm. She had to agree with that. Her fingertips glided over the stubble of his beard, then relaxed. “We’ll talk about it later.”

As her eyes closed, she felt him playing with his watch.

“Ten minutes,” he said. “Rest.”

He woke her in five, unable to keep his hands off his mate. His cock was still buried

to the hilt in her warm, tight pussy. Her fresh, light personal musk and the natural woody perfume she wore had his heightened senses overwhelmed. She had taken all he had to offer and more. He thrilled at the lifetime of sensual exploration they had spread before them, as bountiful as a field full of game on the hoof.

Vi seemed adventurous, a trait that would serve him well as he confessed his secret to her. His unusually hairy body hadn't provoked any comments, though she had shied away a bit when he nipped her butt. Hopefully she wouldn't freak out when he shared the details of his pack's formal mating ritual with her.

His mate sighed deeply, wriggling her torso against his.

His cock twitched at her stirring. "Do you want me to move?"

"No," she said lazily. "I like you right where you are."

"We have fifteen minutes left."

"Good. I just needed a little catnap."

His nostrils flared. If his mate was the cat-type they were going to be in trouble. But he didn't smell the furry little beasts on her, so it was probably just a figure of speech.

He bit her neck, gently worrying the skin.

She giggled and flexed her hips. "Don't go all vampire on me, big boy."

He turned his head to her ear. "Couldn't happen."

She shifted until her lips were against his. They kissed deeply, hungrily. Cere could feel her nipples pebble against his chest and her hips rocked little waves around his cock.

He had to make the most of their limited time. Pushing himself up on his elbows, he dipped his head to her breasts. Long licks at her pink nipples softened her thighs, until he was able to tug her legs around his back. He wriggled with happiness before pulling most of the way out of her pussy, readying himself for a long glide.

There was no holding back his howl of gratification as he felt the friction of her tight pussy. The sound rocketed off the fiberglass of his truck topper, until it sounded like his

whole pack joined in his satisfaction.

Chapter Three

Cere parked in front of Vi's sedan and turned off the motor. "When can I see you again?"

His mate's eyes were bright in her rosy face. All her makeup was gone, except for smudged eyeliner and shadow. She looked fresh and wholesome except that one touch of bad girl. He suspected this hint of her character pegged her exactly right. She would be a loyal mate, but a *Circe*, a sensual temptress, in bed.

"When do you want to see me again? Tomorrow's Sunday, but I'm not working this week, since I was supposed to be moving." Her voice slowed as she finished her sentence.

Moving in with her almost-husband, he supposed. He felt a growl start low in his throat. "Was today your wedding day?"

"Yes." She looked down at her hands.

He put his hand on her knee. The touch sent a wave of longing through him. Now that he'd found his mate, he wanted to couple with her endlessly. But he didn't want to scare her. She was used to human men and he wouldn't be able to share his strength with her until the mating ritual was complete. "Do you have plans for tonight? We're working overtime today to keep on schedule, but I'll be off work in a few hours."

Her eyes were damp when she looked at him. "I think I'm going to be sad tonight. Why don't we make a fresh start tomorrow?"

"Sure." He hated to see her in pain, but how could he prevent it? His work schedule forced him to say goodbye for now. "Can I call you later, to make sure you're okay?"

She nodded.

"And take you to dinner tomorrow? My li— I mean, siblings, own a restaurant.

Greek food.”

“That sounds great. I love gyros and baklava.”

“There’s a lot more to Greek food than that. You’re going to love it.”

She smiled and touched his cheek. “You’re sweet, you know that?”

He ducked his head. “Sure,” he muttered, afraid of the teasing the Brotherhood would give him if they heard her. Construction workers, especially of the shapeshifter variety, were not commonly considered to be sweet.

Vi put her hand on his, then glanced down in surprise as she felt the bite of his fingernails. “Wow. You have long nails for a guy.”

Cere looked at his nails. She hadn’t mentioned the sharp points, the vestiges of animal claws he wore in human form. Her flesh was softer than his. He had to remember to pay attention, since he couldn’t retract them. Cats, he thought again in disgust. No wonder werepanthers had an easier time finding human mates.

“Yeah.” He chuckled halfheartedly. “Need to cut them.”

“My sister has a nail salon,” Vi said.

“Like, for manicures?” He looked at her eyes, sure she couldn’t be suggesting a male of *any* species should get a manicure. His mate was nodding.

Vi blushed. She was so pretty. He could look at her for the rest of his long life.

“I just meant you can get your nails cut if you wanted.”

She waved her beautiful nails at him. He hadn’t noticed before, but she had a little palm tree painted on her pinky and all the nails were painted to look like the inside of abalone shells.

“I can’t cut my own,” she confessed. “Too clumsy.”

If he were honest about his werewolf blood, he’d tell her he couldn’t cut his own claws either, that a littermate had to do it with a special tool, but he wasn’t ready to confess to his mate now. Better to wait until they were among his Brotherhood.

“They look great,” he told her. “Honest.”

She laughed. "You're such a man. You didn't even notice my manicure until I pushed my fingers under your nose." She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek, then pushed open the passenger door.

"Call you later," he said.

She smiled at him, then shut the door.

Cere watched as she moved the few feet to her own car. Vi had the hip swing of a woman who had been well satisfied. He was pleased at this evidence of prowess with his mate. Could she keep those warm feelings instead of feeling sorrow that tonight was no longer her wedding night? Soon, he promised her. They would have their own special ceremony very soon.

Her arms strained against the ropes. The fibers rubbed against the tender insides of her wrists, making her shiver.

She felt Cere's tongue glide moistly up the inside of her thigh. The sensation was ticklish and instinctively she pulled her thighs together. Or at least, she tried. She couldn't move them. When she lifted her head to see what was preventing her, she saw a grassy field, candles gleaming hotly all around. Her ankles were tied just like her wrists. How open she was to him, how vulnerable.

His tongue reached high on her inner thigh, only millimeters from the lips of her pussy. She swallowed hard against the pleasure of it. Her clit leapt. She tried to cry out, but a gag muffled her voice.

Quiet, she reminded herself. They didn't want an audience. She had asked Cere to cover her mouth, to silence her cries. The Brotherhood wouldn't mind watching, but she wanted privacy. Instinctively, she licked at her lips. Her tongue didn't meet cloth as she expected, but leather. He had covered her mouth with a leather strap. A muzzle?

A bite on her labia distracted her, caused her to buck against her restraints, focus on her pussy.

“Shhh,” Cere soothed. “Let go, Vi.”

His hot tongue moved back and forth along her slit. Soon her juices began to flow and he lapped at her pussy like she offered him the finest of wines. Soon, her nether lips were open to him and his tongue was moving from her channel to her clit. When she began to shake, his tongue swirled around her clit with increasing pressure. She would have gasped with the pleasure if she hadn't been muzzled.

He never stopped moving. His fingers dusted the insides of her thighs, with no apparent rhythm her body could become used to. She quivered against him and her hips, which were free, began to strain. He nipped her clit.

Wild animal noises of pleasure erupted from her mouth. Even the muzzle couldn't contain them. The scratchy bonds were damp with her sweat, her body bowed under his onslaught.

When he moved one hand to her clit and began to press it firmly, then used his other hand to open her labia wide, she knew what was coming. Or thought she did. His tongue speared her channel. Smaller than a cock, it was also more agile, more textured.

She rode his tongue, following the pattern of his hand on her clit. The beat drummed into her brain, spiraling her up, up, up. Just when she thought she could let go, it stopped.

A heartbeat pause. She opened her eyes, unable to protest, then felt her hips pulled forward on the smooth surface of the floor.

Cock, she thought desperately. Give me your cock.

Her wish was answered. He thrust balls-deep with the first stroke. Her back arched as she took him, her orgasm crashing through her body.

As the convulsions softened and her heartbeat slowed, she opened her eyes. Then wanted to scream. Above her wasn't Cere's handsome face, but the visage of large coppery brown dog with very dark eyes.

Vi's eyes opened wide. She jerked up, then slipped and almost lost her balance. Her fingers clutched at the sides of the tub. The bathwater was tepid to the point of being

cool now and the steady drum of the rain on the roof, along with the pale blue walls of the bathroom, made her feel like she was outdoors in a pool.

Even in her dreams she and Cere made love outside.

Her breath rasped in her throat as she tried to calm down. That was one hell of a dream. She must have fallen asleep for more than a moment. Turning her head, she saw the glass of wine, her third, was almost empty. That was enough alcohol for one night.

Where on earth had she come up with a fantasy like that? Even in the bathwater she could feel juices leaking from her pussy. Clearly she had come, even though alone and without touching herself. The dream had been a powerful one.

Before Cere, her sex life had been way too tame. She'd never even had a fantasy like that before him.

With a sigh, she slowly levered herself out of the bathtub and dried off. She couldn't help checking in the mirror to ensure her wine-born dream hadn't left any physical marks. Her legs were trembling a little, her chest was pink with heat, but there weren't any marks from ropes or muzzle.

Like there would be. She chuckled to herself, feeling uneasy, then wrapped a robe around herself and called Delia.

"What do you think?" she asked her friend, after confessing the wine consumption and detailing her fantasy. They had always shared everything.

"After Randy, you think all men are dogs?" Dee suggested.

"But I liked it," Vi reminded her. "I was shocked when I saw the head of a dog, but it wasn't like I was fucking one. All the parts below the neck were definitely man."

Dee laughed. "I've never known you to have werewolf fantasies before."

"It must be that crazy Brotherhood of the Dog."

"What's that?"

"Cere's union. Anyway, he's taking me to his family restaurant tomorrow."

"Are you sure you're ready for this? Today was supposed to be your wedding day

and now you're meeting another guy's family."

Vi tightened the sash on her robe. "I know it's nuts. I mean, it's just a fling, right? Guys are scum."

"Not all of them. You know that perfectly well. My husband, for instance."

"Is a paragon of all that is good, except when he leaves his stinky socks in the living room," Vi teased.

"Exactly. But I'm serious. I mean, have fun with the guy, but don't get serious. You're on the rebound and you're not used to this much sex."

Vi squeezed her inner muscles. Oddly enough, her pussy wasn't the least bit sore. "You think I can't handle it, but I know better than to trust him."

"If you're having bondage fantasies, I think you already do."

After the call, Vi hung up, perplexed. She barely knew Cere, right? Surely Dee was wrong about her attachment to him. She didn't have the energy for another relationship this soon.

* * * * *

Vi stepped down from the truck, her hand encased in Cere's. She wore a long navy blue tank dress and strappy heels, completely ignoring the fact that this was more boot and jeans weather. Fashion before comfort when you're meeting a guy's family.

Cere himself wore jeans and cowboy boots, but a suede coat in golden brown covered a crisp white button-down shirt, dressing up the outfit.

"You clean up well," she told him.

"I try to avoid anything orange off-hours," he joked.

"It might not be your best color," she admitted, "but you still look hot in it."

He squeezed her hand. "I hope I don't embarrass you. I'm so rough-looking and you're such a beauty."

She felt her cheeks heat. "I love rugged men. Your looks are seriously hot!"

He kissed her cheek, his sculpted lips banishing the heat from her face with cool sensuality. "I bet you haven't dated anyone like me before though, right? What do you do for a living?"

"I'm my father's administrative assistant. He's a small business accountant."

"I didn't think you ever got those pretty fingernails dirty."

She grinned. "My sister would kill me. Usually I only let her do my nails in the winter. I love my garden so my hands are almost always a mess other times of the year."

"Do you have a green thumb?"

They had walked from a rear parking lot around a building. Vi hadn't been on this street before. The old buildings were all single story and the road in between was narrow. They were walking by a video rental place. She assumed the language on the posters was Greek. An awful lot of the posters seemed to feature animal and horror movies. Must be what was popular in Greece.

"I've always liked growing things," Vi said. "I have a huge yard and I go crazy canning in the fall."

He nodded and she sensed the warm glow of his approval, then just as quickly, resisted it. *Don't get attached*, she warned herself. *It's too soon to trust this man. What do you really know about him?*

Now they had reached a storefront that looked all but abandoned. Butcher paper covered the windows, but a circular sign with Greek letters and bottle of wine looked freshly painted.

Cere flipped up a metal panel at the side of the door, exposing a keypad. He typed in a code and she heard a metallic click.

"Private dinner tonight," he said.

"Are we going to a party?"

"Yes."

She took a step back, feeling vulnerable. "It's awfully soon for this. I mean, we've just had sex a few times. We hardly know each other."

He turned to her, an imposing near-shadow in the twilight. She stepped back again, suddenly feeling like prey. Her hand went out in the universal "stop" position.

"Don't pressure me."

He straightened, frowning. "Do you want me to take you home?"

A streetlight captured his face. She saw his genuine concern. Cere must be one of the good guys. He had a steady job, friends, a family he was close to. Nothing indicated she had anything to fear.

"That's okay. I just had an attack of nerves. Meeting families is hard."

He came to her then took her hand and squeezed it. "I know you're making a huge adjustment. I respect your concern. But we're good...people."

"Can't we just keep it light and easy for now?"

She saw his expression change from hope to worry. "Vi, it's not that simple. I—"

The door of the restaurant opened. Vi saw Barkley in the light spilling from the restaurant. Rich tomato smells drifted out to the street and she heard laughter behind Cere's friend.

"Are you going to stand out there all night?" Barkley called. "Come in, Vi Lane, and take your first sip of ouzo."

Vi looked at Cere. He took her hand.

"It's a Greek liquor," he said. "It's strong stuff."

She took a deep breath and straightened her shoulders. It was just a party. People liked her. She'd be fine. Attending a party didn't mean a commitment.

In old-fashioned style, the restaurant had a coat check room. Vi gave an older lady with facial hair issues whose nametag said Sophie her coat and purse. Sophie gave her a wine charm in the shape of plump purple grapes as her token.

When Vi turned back to Cere, she saw him swallowing hard. Nervous again, she

diagnosed. A wave of empathy washed over her. Introducing her to his family was as big a step for him as it was for her. She stepped to him and slipped an arm around his waist. Why had he wanted her to meet his family so soon if he was as nervous as she?

The white tablecloth-covered tables formed a rectangle around the room, as if set up for a banquet or a meeting. Cere gestured her to a seat a few steps away and she put her wine charm around the glass there. A clink on her left brought her gaze to another wineglass. A tall woman with eyes like Cere's placed a red grape wine charm on the glass next to hers.

The woman's lips curved into a smile. "You must be Cere's Vi. I'm Bijou."

At Vi's frozen smile the woman patted her shoulder. "It's all very sudden, isn't it? I'm so happy for you."

Vi stifled her laugh. What had Cere been telling his relatives? That she was the One or something like that? "I'm afraid it is sudden, but we're having fun. It's awfully soon to mix family in, I do admit."

"Don't be nervous. We're very civilized."

Why had Bijou said that? Concerns about the Brotherhood rose to the forefront again. "What can you tell me about the Brotherhood?"

Bijou looked uneasy. "How about an easier question? I'd rather Cere explained it to you."

Hmmm. Stymied again. Vi resolved to get to the bottom of the mystery before the night was over. "Okay. What about Cere's name? What's its origin?"

"It's short for Cerberus. You know, the three-headed dog that guards the entrance to Hades?"

"In Greek mythology, you mean?"

"That's right. Isn't Cere wonderful? You're so lucky and I can say that because I'm his sister."

He was wonderful. Too wonderful to be only a casual fling, Vi was afraid.

"I'm glad to meet you," Vi said. "I knew he had siblings. Do you live with him?"

Bijou nodded. "I'm the Brotherhood historian. Asta is my oldest brother and Duke is the youngest."

Out of the corner of her eye, Vi saw Barkley take Cere aside as waiters began to bring in trays of wine bottles.

"It looks like we're in for quite a celebration," she observed.

"Of course! When one of us finds a mate it's a time of great joy. Even outside the pack."

"Who's getting married?" Vi asked with a pang. "A friend of yours?"

The skin between Bijou's thick eyebrows creased. "Don't you know?"

Cere was next to Bijou before Vi could blink. The man moved fast, she noted. He took his sister's arm.

"Enjoying your chat with Vi?" he inquired.

Bijou's eyes were confused as she turned to her brother. "Doesn't she know?"

Vi felt a little rumble of nerves in the pit of her stomach. What was going on here?

"Cere?" she asked uncertainly.

He put his arm around her and walked her back to the coat check.

"Sophie, would you let us in the back for a moment? We could use some privacy."

The older woman nodded and pulled up the folding counter to let them through.

In the back weren't just coats, but full sets of clothing.

"Does someone run an internet clothing store out of this coat check?" Vi joked, trying to regain her composure.

"No, it's a safety center."

"Safety for what?"

Cere took her hand. "I haven't known how to tell you, Vi. From the second I saw you, I knew you were something special. I was so flattered you wanted to have sex with

me. It was far and beyond the best I'd ever had, but more than just physical. I really like you. I wanted to rip the guy who hurt you apart and take all your pain away."

Vi felt her eyes tearing. Cere was sweet as well as gallant. Could it be that right past the man she thought she'd wanted was the one who was right for her? How could she trust her instincts after her disastrous almost-mistake with Randy though? She knew she could trust Cere to take care of her sexual needs, but what about the rest? Could he be open with her? Share with her? And what about the Brotherhood?

"I need to be honest with you about something."

His words echoed what she needed. She put her arms around him. "I need you to be honest, Cere. About everything."

He nodded, stroking back her hair. "Barkley has a special gift. We all have gifts, but his allows him to see true mates."

"You've used that word before," she said, her unease returning.

He rubbed his hands against her shoulders. "I knew we had the best sex of my life and that you were a sweetheart as well as an incredible lover and that I wanted to see you again and again. But Barkley could see you were my true mate."

"That's flattering, but it sounds a little like mumbo jumbo," Vi observed.

"It's real," he said, his serious expression making Vi wonder. She'd never had any experience with the supernatural, but that didn't mean nothing outside her life existed. Could Cere be more than just her lucky number seven?

"How do you know?"

"Those that Barkley claims as true mates are genuinely happy together. And the couple of times I've seen mates reject each other at least one of them has died within a year."

Vi's heart rate quickened. "How?" Was this a threat?

He shook his head. "Heartbreak? Carelessness? I don't know. But it is part of our heritage. When the ceremony is performed, mates become a part of each other. We are

made greater together than apart. I guess we are less separately.”

“Tell me about the ceremony,” Vi said suspiciously. Maybe this Brotherhood was a cult after all. She was beginning to lose faith.

“Before I do that, I’d better tell you about the Brotherhood,” Cere said.

“I’d like that.” Vi’s crisp tone had Cere looking at her curiously.

Sophie had closed the curtain behind her, so they were separated from the counter and the restaurant. Vi wondered if there was a door to the street in here somewhere, in case she needed to run.

“The Brotherhood is transforming now,” Cere said. “I needed you to see what we are. I wanted you to know before you knew about the mating. I wanted you to accept me for who I was before I ever asked you to be my mate.”

“My fiancé just canceled our wedding!” Vi said. “I’m not ready for a commitment. Particularly one that sounds so supernatural.”

“Then you’d better see this,” Cere said, his voice becoming grim. “I thought you were open-minded, but it’s a lot for a human to take, I know.”

He pulled back the edge of the curtain, allowing Vi to peer around it. The room was dimmer than before. Someone must have turned off the overhead lights. Candles were lit around the room, reminding her of her dream, of how she had trusted Cere, even bound and muzzled. But that was a dream and this was reality.

As her eyes became accustomed to the dim light, she saw people in the room. Or were they people? Heaps of clothes littered the floor when she looked down and the legs she sought seemed bigger than human legs, hairier. As her gaze moved up, she saw furry bodies, clad only in tatters that formed loose loincloths around the figures. None of the creatures was looking in her direction. Where had all the people gone? Barkley? Bijou?

When one figure turned toward them, Vi hastily dropped the curtain back into place.

“What’s going on?” she whispered. Slowly, she turned back to Cere.

His serious dark eyes hadn’t changed. Neither had the rest of him. But she took a fresh look at his hands, those well remembered appendages with long sharp nails and extremely hairy backs. She suddenly realized they weren’t exactly the human norm.

“What are you?” she asked.

“We are shapeshifters,” he said softly. “You’d call us werewolves, though the truth is we’ve been civilized since the days of the ancient Greeks. We live among humankind. We always have.”

Vi pressed her hand to her stomach. “Don’t werewolves kill during the full moon?” Thankfully it wasn’t the full moon for another week.

He shook his head. “My people have interbred with yours for centuries. We are stronger, faster, live longer, but we aren’t so different. We are as moral, as principled, as humanity.”

“I’m not sure that’s saying much.”

He regarded her quietly.

“I dreamed of you with a canine face,” she told him. “We were making love. I was bound and muzzled, but I trusted you and you repaid me with such pleasure.” Her pussy tingled with the memory.

“A mate dream. In truth I am bound to you as much as you are bound to me. I have told you what I am. I cannot hurt you, Vi. I love you. I’ll protect you to the end.”

She patted his chest and felt his strong heartbeat under his shirt. “You trust me,” she said.

“With my life. You are my mate,” he said simply.

She came up to tiptoe and kissed him. He reached his hands under her butt and pulled her up against him. She could feel his cock harden against her stomach as they deepened their kiss.

With a muttered oath he kicked aside boxes, backed her against a wall. Balancing

her against it, he pushed up her skirt.

“I want you so badly,” he growled into her ear.

Vi forgot the people—beings—in the outer room and reached for his zipper, desperate to loosen more of his clothing. She wanted his cock in her pussy now. How could she ever refuse him? She knew he was right. They were mates.

Cere had gone commando, just as she had and his thick cock pulsed in her hand as she gently freed it from his jeans. He grasped her butt again as she fought to angle her channel over him.

His cock seemed larger than before, his arms even stronger. As she felt her pussy widen, clenched her inner walls around him as she descended, she raised her eyes to his and saw the face of the wolf from her dreams.

She wasn't afraid. Cere's eyes looked at her beneath the thick eyebrows and she still kissed his lips even if the rest of his face was so different.

His rhythm caught her and she forgot his transformation, only feeling the strength of his cock in her weeping pussy. Each thrust found her G-spot then moved against her clit. The juices running down her legs would have made it hard to keep riding him if it wasn't for his iron fists holding her up.

She came in a burst of light, muffling her cries against his chest. His shirt was gone, ripped away by the transformation that had broadened his chest. A softly furred pelt covered formerly smooth skin, soothing her hot cheek.

Cere seemed to be built of steel. His cock pistoned in and out of her for so long the crowd outside might have finished dinner and left by then, or so it seemed to Vi's passion-soaked brain.

“I'm going to come again,” she moaned. “Oh God, Cere.”

He gripped her more firmly, pushing her pelvic bone against his. She spread her legs just a little farther apart, gyrating with desperation.

Her mind fell apart as her body crested. Distantly she heard his low shout, felt cum

shoot against her womb as he found his own release. His arms never faltered, nor did his cock relax inside her.

She rested, knowing she was secure between his body and the wall. "You are one amazing beast," she muttered.

His chuckle made his chest vibrate against her cheek.

"You are one amazing mate," he said.

Her daze suddenly lifted, she looked up at him. What surprise could he have left, after trusting the truth of his people to her? She knew him now, could embrace her sweet protector. Was that the significance of her dream last night—that she could trust him?

"It's all happened so fast," she whispered.

"That's the joy of a true mate." As she watched, his face transformed back into human form. She reached up a hand to touch his cheek.

"We don't need to worry," he assured her. "Barkley is always right."

She wanted him too much for caution. "Now what?"

"If you are willing, the Brotherhood has come together to witness the ritual of mating."

She raised an eyebrow. "Do we have to make love in front of them?"

He smiled. "Only if you want to. But it's really a tattooing. We mark each other with our claws."

She let herself slip to the floor, smoothing down her skirt. Thankfully it was some manmade fiber that didn't wrinkle. Cere handed her a handkerchief and she cleaned up.

"I don't have claws," she reminded him.

His brow wrinkled in thought. "Right. It's rare for a member of the Brotherhood to take a fully human mate now. We'll have to ask Barkley."

Holding Cere's hand, Vi cast her gaze to the floor shyly as they reentered the room.

Perhaps to reassure her, Cere kept his human form though the many people in the room were in wolf form.

They weren't the frightening creatures from legend, but recognizably human relatives, standing upright with intelligent expressions on their canine faces. Vi recognized Cere's sister and even Barkley despite their transformations.

One of the shapeshifters Vi had seen at the strip mall construction site pulled a table aside to allow Vi and Cere to enter the center of the rectangle. Bijou handed them each a glass filled with a clear liquid.

"Ouzo," she whispered to Vi.

Once they held their glasses, Barkley held his up for a toast.

"I vow these two be mated by the Fates," he pronounced. "Long may they live and love."

"Long may they live and love!" shouted the group, holding their glasses high.

Everyone drank. A silence afterward had Cere clearing his throat.

"We need guidance in the ritual."

A tall shapeshifter stepped forward from the gloom beyond the candles. Vi immediately sensed power radiating from him.

"Is he the alpha?" she whispered to Cere.

He nodded. "See, you do know something about us. That's King. He'll know how to make the ritual work."

"Cere," the tall shapeshifter spoke. "You may perform your part of the ritual. Then your mate will put her fingers on her tattoo and make the marks on your skin."

Cere bowed his head. "Thank you, Alpha." He turned to Vi. "Are you ready?"

Vi looked into his eyes. Was she ready to take a life mate? Yes, she had been more than ready to commit herself before, she had merely made a poor choice. Now she was faced with a strong, honorable, trustworthy man. They would have a lifetime of passion together. She could love him and be happy with him.

“Do you really love me?” she asked.

In answer, he took her face in both hands and kissed her deeply. When his lips left hers he was laughing. “Yes, mate, I do love you, though I’m more likely to show it in deed than in words.”

Vi nipped his lip. “I want you to show it often.”

“I promise.”

She felt air at the back of her leg, realized that he had slyly begun to lift her skirt.

“Cere,” she said, grasping at it.

A few shapeshifters chuckled.

“I have to lift it for the ritual.”

“Why?” she asked nervously, well aware now the Brotherhood had different standards of privacy.

He lowered his voice. “The tattoo goes on your ass.”

“Of course it does.” With a sigh, she allowed him to raise her skirt on one side, exposing her right butt cheek.

She heard one of the men let out a low groan, quickly hushed by a woman’s voice. Probably one of the construction workers, she thought. The pervs.

“This will sting a little, like having your ear pierced,” Cere warned.

The shapeshifters began a low chant in a language she didn’t understand. Glancing to her side she saw Cere was in wolf form again, his long, sharp claws apparent, his clothing torn half off his body as his musculature increased. She squeezed her eyes shut as his hand moved close to her fragile skin.

Multiple pinpricks of heat suffused her skin. Just as quickly, it was over.

She glanced down, saw five tiny points of blood on her skin, in the shape of a half circle.

“Now put your right fingers to each spot,” the alpha instructed.

Vi obeyed. The Brotherhood continued the chant as she touched each of her blood-

tipped fingers to the same spot high on his right butt cheek.

Like magic, the blood dissolved into his skin, until all that was left were five raised spots.

She tried to look at her own cheek. Instead of bloody spots she could just barely see the same five markings. Remembering her skirt was up to her waist, she quickly smoothed it back down.

The chant ended with a chuckle from several of the participants.

“You are hereby mated,” the alpha said with satisfaction. He vaulted gracefully over the table in front of him, then strode toward them.

Vi followed Cere’s lead and bowed her head as the alpha placed his hands on each of their heads.

“Blended blood, blended hearts, blended families, blended souls,” he intoned, then Cere raised his head. Vi followed his lead and the alpha smiled.

“I see many happy cubs in your eyes,” he told her. “Blessings upon you.”

Vi blushed, tightly grasping Cere’s hand. She had not planned a wedding day like this one, but she knew she was safe and loved now and looked forward to a future with her wolf, her lucky number seven.

About the Author

Anh Leod is a goddess-in-disguise who hopes readers will enjoy her romantic, erotic stories as much as she enjoys creating them. Her favorite things are love and chocolate. She writes about love because, after all, it's awfully hard to write about chocolate all the time.

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