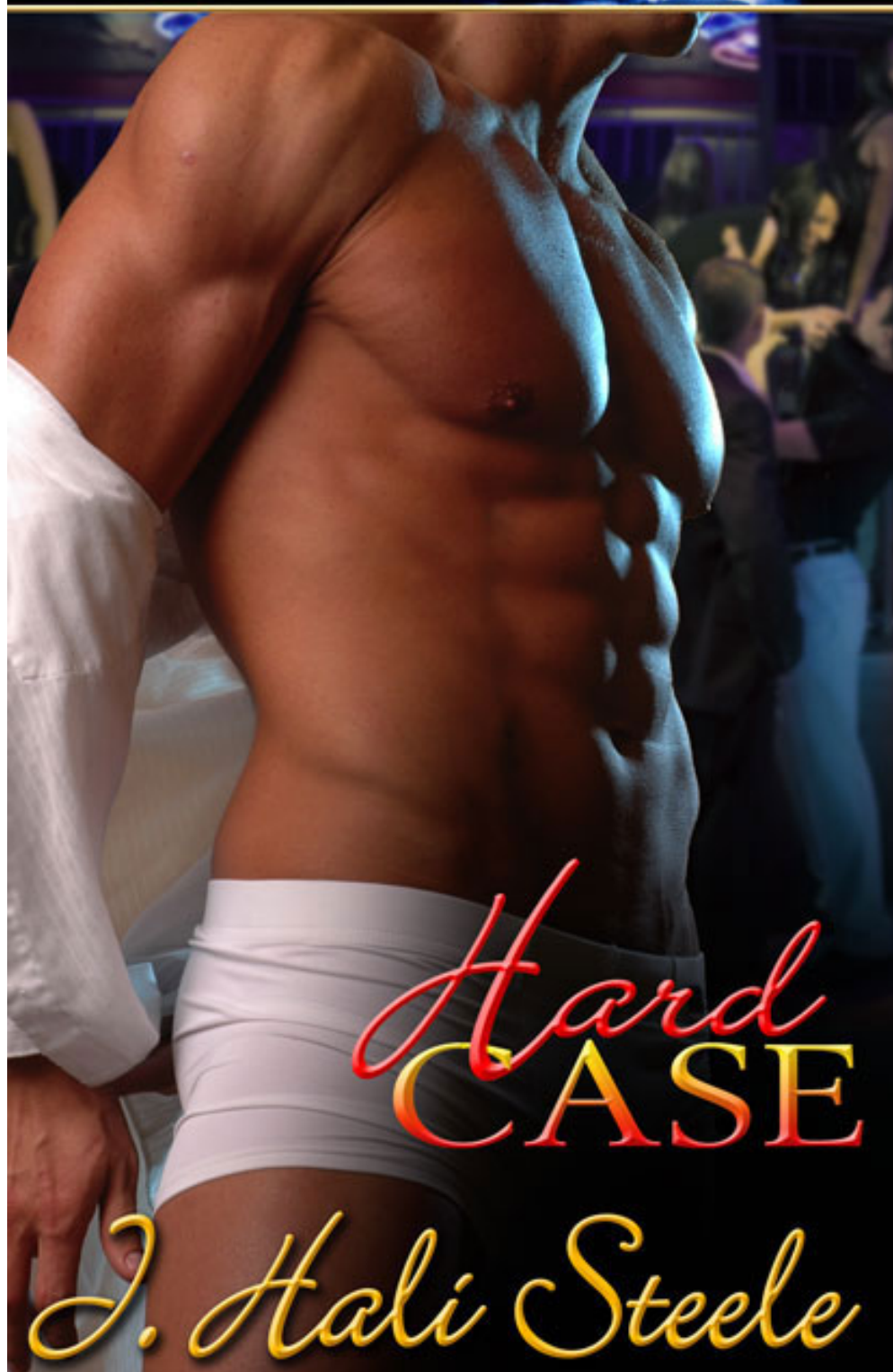


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Hard
CASE

J. Hali Steele

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Hard Case

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HARD CASE

J. Hali Steele

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Chapter One

"Her hair is green, for crying out loud." Case couldn't believe what he was seeing. His new manager had neon green hair.

"I hand-picked her myself." Alek smiled.

"I'm sure you did. Remember, I know you well. Hand-picked means you had your filthy tiger's paws all over her sweet little ass."

"Tres isn't like that, man. And I don't know why I have to explain myself to a damned voyeur. You needed help and I found it for you. She's perfect for the job and will keep a sharp eye on the place." Alek took a sip of his Turkey. "You've spent too much time in Europe. You're not in Kansas anymore, Dorothy, or should I say Malibu, where your million-dollar house hangs over the beach. This is the desert. You're going to have a rough crowd and Tres knows how to handle that type."

Case Tangara watched the young woman who was the topic of conversation stand at the bar of his most recent acquisition and talk to a hostess. Who the fuck had green hair? His clubs were Establishment. They weren't back-alley peep shows for the masses. He catered to upscale clientele. They wanted their secrets kept. Hell, they wouldn't show up at a place if the manager had green hair and dressed in leather.

"She's got green hair." Case eyed his friend warily. "This one of your tricks? Tell me it's one of your tricks."

"Relax, dude. Get past the hair already. Give her a chance. Tres is good at her job."

"A snow leopard shifter? I can smell her over here."

"Maybe Tres won't like the smell of your raggedy old lion's ass either."

"Why do I put up with your shit?"

"Cause you love me, bro. Trust me on this one, you'll thank me in no time."

Case peered at Alek with one brow cocked. They went way back and had fought together often as cats. He thought his friend knew him better than this. He should know he'd want more proof of how good this new manager would be. He still expected his friend to tell him this was some kind of joke.

"Did they get the two-way mirrors installed in the private party room?" Case asked.

"Last week. She handled the workers with ease. And they're a hard bunch of cats to deal with. Your peep show is doing good business already."

He still wasn't sure about this. Case decided to hang around for a while to see how things went.

"Does she know who I am?"

"You just got here. I didn't even know you were in town." Alek leaned back in his chair. "It's unlikely. Even you would have to dig long and hard through lots of paper to come up with your name in connection with any of your clubs. I made sure you're anonymous."

"Good, I don't want her to know."

"What the hell are you up to, Case?"

"I'm *up to* making sure my place is run efficiently *and* making money."

"This won't be like Miami, will it? I can't find good help only for you to scare them off like some lunatic. Protection's my business, I do it well. My people are good."

"Yeah, well I have my doubts right now. Since when do you hire shifters? You know my preference for hiring Kind." Case's Kind brethren were a phenomenon created by vampyres who disassociated themselves from shifters and maintained a comfortable distance from their bloodsucking cousins. His people still thought of themselves as cats, only assuming the human-appearing form of the vampyre when absolutely necessary.

"Shit's changed, man." Alek pierced him with a glare. "You wouldn't have trouble in your places if you stuck to names that worked. Names like those we've always used let the night creatures know who runs the joint. Who the hell calls a place *The Looking Glass*?"

"My clients like those kinds of names. Gives the place an air of respectability. Should I call it the *Lion's Cave*? Maybe the *Tiger's Paw*? Would you be happy then?"

"Your clients watch other people get it on, and some join in. Not quite sure how respectable they are. Our names work well for clubs. You've lived a long time as a vampyre but you *are* one of us. And though you'd like to, you can't shake the smell of lion."

That made Case, a white lion from the Kind species – big cats infected with blood of the undead – think about what he was.

Thousands of years ago vampyres invaded dens in the Balkan Mountains his ancestor's pride wintered in. They used the cave lions' blood as sustenance and contaminated them with their deadly curse. The lions spread the disease to other cats.

The Kind council of Elders forbade "taking of blood" from humans unless you were Sovereign Kind, one of the warriors known as Reign.

Alek now led the Reign. It was his responsibility to enforce the laws which kept their kind safe from discovery by the masses. Hell, a bunch of cats on the loose with the ability to turn into vamps needed to be controlled. If the rules were broken, it would "Reign" all over the ass of the offender.

As warriors, they had served together long before Alek became the leader. It's a good thing he still liked the tiger who sat across from him. Right now he envisioned his canines ripping into his hind end leaving a very visible bite mark.

"In your dreams, dude."

Alek's statement jarred him. His friend read minds now.

Case's people didn't come into the ability of mind reading until they were much older. He took a better look at the man across from him. There was only one other way to achieve this power so early – taking the blood of humans on a regular basis. But then Alek *was* Reign and he had another advantage. He fed from the pure royal bloodline. Alek had direct access to the vein of the Kind prince.

"You're a mind reader now? I'll have to use better shields. Anyway, you've used my private rooms. Don't get all high and mighty with my ass."

"Fuck you. If you spent less time in your own clubs, you wouldn't always be aroused. You might be able to get rid of the wood you carry between your legs, *Hard* Case. Now, how do you want me to introduce you? Or can you handle it yourself?"

"Listen to you, the big man on compound. I would say that's the cock calling the penis a dick. I'll handle it. She'll know we're acquaintances, friends. Nothing else. I don't want her to know about me. Okay? You still got the guest bungalow behind your place?"

"Sure, it's yours for as long as you need it." Alek's voice dropped low, "I like Tres, man. Don't mess with her."

"Don't you have to go to work and train cubs to be good little protectors? I'll see you around."

* * * * *

Tres Moran stole glances toward Alek's table and wondered about the guy who sat with him. Her hostess caught her.

"Interested in big cats now, are you?"

She and Holly had worked clubs like this together as a team for a lot of years now. They'd been together long enough to know each other's likes and dislikes. The only difference—Hol thrived on the performance. Tres was a watcher. This job would be a piece of cake. Tres hoped to settle down this time. This close to Big Bear and

Arrowhead, she could let her leopard enjoy the snow. Hot weather for long periods didn't suit her.

"Big is not bad at all, but he's a *warm* cat. He likes the heat, and he probably has fleas. Plus, I can smell the vamp in his ass from here. And you can't trust those Kind cats. They're deadly mothers."

"You like Alek just fine."

"He's one of the good guys, keeps his paws to himself, and tigers like snowy, cold climates." Tres knew her friend wanted to get it on with the tiger. "Anyway, we're friends, there's no attraction there. You know that, Hol. Wish things could be different because he sure is good to look at."

"Well, the one your eyes are glued to is no slouch. The phrase 'eye candy' certainly pops into my mind. A real *sweet* piece of candy."

Tres agreed with her assessment. The guy was huge, way over six feet. Those green eyes could drag you to hell and back. And you wouldn't mind the trip. His mouth held her mesmerized. Lips looked so soft, yet they were held in a tight line of control. Ash-blond hair was pulled back into a loose ponytail that grazed his shoulders. The hair color indicated a difference from other lions. This cat would be white when he changed. Something she'd never seen before. Tres wouldn't mind a peek under the designer suit he wore. Shit, wouldn't mind a quick ride either. *Okay, down girl, back to work.* Tres faced her hostess.

"Did the shipment of Chilean merlot come in?" she asked.

"Yes, twelve cases of good vintage."

"Nice. Make sure it gets put up in the cellar. I don't want it to sit at this temperature long."

"Taken care of already," Holly said.

Tres dripped. A state of moist heat settled between her thighs while she watched the guy talk with Alek. He turned her on. If he became a regular customer, her desk drawer would need to be filled with a change of clean, dry underwear. Not her typical reaction to lions. Warm climate cats never turned her on. This one would be trouble. Thank God she had a strict policy about customers. *Maybe he's visiting.*

Things had been really slow in her life lately. Over the last five years she'd chosen her partners wisely. The minute Tres felt more than a slight attraction, she ran. By no means would she consider herself promiscuous, but lately the word "celibate" came to mind. If Tres didn't get some soon, her maidenhead would grow back. Her leopard was even starting to complain. It was bad when a lion turned her on this much.

She stopped at the door of one of the private booths and thought, what the hell? A peek that's all. The pile of paperwork on her desk could wait to be handled. Tres promised herself it would be next.

* * * * *

Case couldn't believe his ears. *Fleas*. A shifter sporting neon fucking green hair thought he had fleas! Ready to introduce himself, he thought better of it. He needed to calm down first.

He'd lived in Europe for such a long period it was hard to readjust. Cats here were comfortable in their fur. Something Case wasn't used to anymore. An Elder now, he'd existed in both forms longer than most. Feeding on humans had honed his vampyre abilities to a master. His people called it "taking the blood". Sooner or later the cats would have to stop being so damned finicky. They needed sustenance to live. No matter how they said it—they drank blood.

Case's brethren needed to come to grips with their bloodthirsty half to survive in the world today. Some had begun to move out of the safety of the enclosed compounds they called home and into society and, as he had, they usually ended up in Europe. There the various creatures of the night at least pretended to tolerate each other and the

Kind had earned a grudging respect. Some of the vamp clans even accepted the cats without prejudice.

Vampyres were voracious mind readers. They had no respect for private thoughts. He'd spent so much time among them, he could crawl into someone's head in a minute. He had been in hers. Aside from the one dark spot he'd been unable to breach, the word "wicked" described pretty well what he found there. He'd give her a ride. Fleas and all. Damn, that still had him pissed. And she was right, the Kind were deadly motherfuckers.

Vamps, demons, all the night creatures hated Case's species with a vengeance. He was much stronger than his Balkan cousins. He had all the primal skills of his cat, and when he assumed his form of vampyre, he had their abilities. He could wield fire, enthrall the masses and dematerialize with a thought. And what they feared most—Case could walk in the daylight. In either form he chose.

His eyes perused his new manager more closely. He wondered what she hid so deep in her mind, not even he could reach it.

Tres' head would probably come no higher than his chest. Aside from the green hair, which was cut in a sleek bob and reached just below her dainty earlobes, she was pretty. Her ass, covered in skintight, dark green leather pants, would fit in both his hands perfectly. It'd be easy to take her for a ride. Yellow-flecked blue eyes slanted up at the corners and made her look pixyish. Thick, sooty lashes swept over flushed high cheekbones each time eyelashes fluttered down.

She had skin the color of honey. An emerald-colored lacy corset top barely covered her breasts. His exceptional vision could see her nipples were hard from across the room. He imagined rubbing a feather under her nose to see if her hard peaks would make an appearance when she sneezed.

He continued to watch. A stream of video played through his mind of all the titillating things Tres could do to him with her full, cinnamon-painted lips.

Down, Hard Case, he admonished his cock, which had taken on a life of its own and moved around in his pants. *Christ, I'm hard as a walking stick.*

He saw his manager slink away from the hostess and disappear through the entrance leading to the private rooms. According to Alek, they were already doing a brisk business.

He decided to introduce himself when she came back.

Chapter Two

When she didn't return, Case went to check on her. He traveled silently down the softly lit, thickly carpeted hallway. The soundproof walls were a dark cherry wood. Classic prints of naked bodies hung beside each private viewing room. The tiny red lights above the doors showed business was good.

Each room contained a comfortable chair and a sumptuous, oversized loveseat in case the patrons desired to invite guests. A refrigerator held beverages, from beer and liquor, to the best wines and champagnes money could buy. The elegantly appointed bathroom stayed stocked with an array of body oils and plush towels.

There was a two-way mirror in each room. The patrons on the other side of the glass entered from a similar hallway on the opposite side of the building. These were customers who loved to perform. They liked to fuck. They couldn't see who watched them.

The watchers, well, they watched. Voyeurs.

Case smelled her. He knew exactly which room she occupied. When he materialized inside, he masked his scent. In human form, shifters had all the senses of their animal side, but Tres didn't feel his presence. He was a master at hiding in plain sight, a secret he learned during his time with his Balkan cousins.

He watched her as she watched the couple who performed. Her wet sex blasted his nostrils from across the room and sent a flash of white-hot desire right between his legs. He wasn't called Hard Case for nothing. His cock stood rigid and pressed painfully into the zipper of his finely creased designer slacks.

He *preferred* this side of the glass, watching, but he had no problem with the other side of the mirror. He'd been there too. He tasted delights in the form of women from

around the world. And he wasn't always particular about the species. His people, because of the vampyre blood, weren't susceptible to disease.

But Case never managed to find the one who could make him happy. Someone to give him everything he wanted, and needed. The one to take him away from the looking glass.

Who was he kidding? Perfect would be the woman who watched with him.

Case watched the same scene Tres did and grew bigger and harder by the second. He already felt drops of pre-cum form on the head of his shaft as he saw the woman suck the man's cock. He couldn't stand it anymore. He silently eased behind Tres and grabbed her hands. He pulled them up and placed them above her, palms flat on the glass. He heard her gasp in surprise as he ground his body against hers and shoved his erection into the small of her back. The only other sound was a soft moan as she pressed her body to his. When he released her hands, they stayed glued to the glass.

He reached in front of her and found her nipples. He pinched the peaks hard through the material of her top, loving how she slid her ass up and down his thighs. He released her breasts from their confines, massaged and squeezed them, and earned more moans of gratification. He left one hand to minister to a swollen nipple as he moved his other caressingly over her stomach.

When he reached the top of her pants, he deftly unfastened the button and slipped his hand inside, feeling the heat of her pussy before he reached it. The softness of the moist hair entranced him. He pushed roughly through the wet folds and stroked back and forth over her clit. He stabbed two long fingers into her canal.

"You like that, don't you?"

He finger-fucked her until she gulped air through her open lips. Her body bucked up and down on his hand and Case continued to swirl his thumb over her nub. The liquid from her pussy ran through his fingers. Her scent drove him nuts.

Her nipples came to life in his other hand. They were like stones between his fingers. He plucked them until she growled. He pulled them more and her head fell back onto his chest. Case had her delirious with want.

His fingers in her pussy never let up. He penetrated her tightness and caressed the inside of her sheath. She mewled and he urged her body lower in his hand. Her sweet aroma flowed around the room.

She watched and wondered why she took these jobs. Tres knew what they did to her. Hours were spent in rooms like this all around the world. Watching. She pleased herself sometimes, but usually she watched. Always feeling lonely, Tres wanted to connect with someone on the same level those on the other side of the glass did. They gave themselves, no holds barred. Whatever brought them happiness, they did it with abandon. Tres had never been on the other side of the mirror.

The couple behind the mirror liked fellatio. The woman, naked and on her knees, worshipped at the hard cock in front of her. She licked, sucked and masturbated the man's length until he crammed it between her lips and buried it deep in her mouth. He pumped in and out furiously. His partner took it all, and there was a lot of it. Her long dark hair bounced on her shoulders as he fucked her mouth.

Tres inhaled sharply in shock. Someone grabbed her hands and pulled them up. He placed them above her, palms flat on the glass. Before she could emit a protest, she felt the large erection in the small of her back. She moaned and pressed her body into his. He released her hands but they remained stuck to the glass. Her very perceptive cat felt no threat as it purred inside her. Her thought of protest slipped through her lips on a whimper.

Each room had an emergency button. Some customers felt better when they knew there was a way out. If it was used, the room would be overrun with security. She should stop this. Tres didn't know the person behind her. She only knew how good it

felt with his hardness pressed into her back. She was so wet and her only thought was of coming.

Her hands stayed locked where they were.

He belonged here with her... *Where the hell did that come from?* This had never happened to her. Tres got caught up in the moment. Her lust overrode any rational thought. Hell, she got caught up in the big cock surging against her body, and the fact Tres didn't know who it was only heightened her excitement. It had been too long since she felt something so wonderful.

It wasn't too late to stop, but she didn't want to.

Tres groaned more when cool air brushed her naked breasts. He rolled her hard peaks between the thumb and finger of one hand while the other whispered over her stomach.

He reached the top of her pants and she had to fight not to help him unbutton them. Before she knew it, his hand slipped inside and found her pussy. His fingers roved through the folds and slid into her. Her legs opened wider so he could go even deeper.

She stood on her toes and arched her butt into him and strained to feel his cock along the crease of her ass. The way he covered her small frame so completely told her he had to be big. That's all Tres could tell about him. No, she knew his penis was huge and hard as a rock as it dug into her. She wanted to feel it in her pussy. He made her convulse with desire and need. Need for more. She rocked on his hand and forced it hard against her labia. Tres ground on it until she couldn't stand it anymore. Her clit was swollen and she was ready to burst.

"God, please, more," she moaned.

"Watch, baby, watch her take him in her mouth. See her lips stretch over his cock. Look how her sweet mouth sucks him. She's good. You like watching her?"

On the other side of the glass, the woman's head bobbed up and down as she took the man's whole penis into her mouth. Nipples stood in hard peaks as her breasts jiggled from the motion of her body.

"Yes, yessss. I need more. Hard."

"I want you to suck my cock. Will you do for me what she's doing to him?"

"Yes, anything," she whispered.

The cock pressed into her back grew bigger. The thought of it in her mouth caused a storm to gather, ready to slam through her body. Tres saw the woman's mouth work the man's erection. She swallowed the thickness over and over. The ecstasy on her face unmistakable. She wanted him to come in her mouth. Tres' body shuddered in yearning as her own tongue darted across her lips imagining the taste of the man behind her.

"Come for me first. I'll give you whatever you want."

Tres' knees buckled as she rode the stranger's hand with fervor. Her pussy squeezed his fingers and drew them further inside. His thumb attacked her clit. He pulled everything from deep in her soul. But Tres wanted more, so much more.

"I want more. Please," she pleaded.

He didn't intend to climax with her. Case prided himself on being the master of control. But this woman made him pulse with desire. Her smell sent him over the edge faster than he'd ever gone before. He would come in his pants in a minute, and he didn't care. He only cared about giving her the release she so badly craved. And he wanted to taste her life spark. What made her different? He didn't understand this at all.

"I'm going to make you come so hard, baby. Look. He's going to come in her mouth. Watch."

The woman had grasped her partner's hips and she'd set a frenetic pace he was hard-pressed to keep up with. The man's long cock disappeared back and forth between her lips. He used the hand he had at the back of her head to press the woman's mouth further around his cock each time he jabbed through her lips. His head was thrown back and his mouth was held in a grimace. He was ready to come.

“Christ.” Case moved his mouth to Tres’ neck and he savored the taste of her musky secretions. He swirled his tongue over her pulse. He would taste only a little of her. He let his fangs drop and he nibbled her neck lightly. He let her feel their sharp points.

“Damn, she’s taking all of his big cock.” On the other side of the glass the man grasped a handful of his partner’s hair. He pulled out of her mouth enough for them to see him release a stream of cum. “Oh shit,” Case groaned.

He bit into her neck and felt her stiffen. He heard the primitive moan escape her lips. Not in pain. Tres was coming. She continued to watch the couple on the other side of the glass. The woman licked her lips with relish as the man stroked his own cock and milked it dry.

Oh, the sweetness of Tres. Case sucked at her blood. With each pull he felt her release more juices into his waiting hand. It flowed through his fingers and wet the crotch of her leather pants.

He finished and licked the pinpricks with his healing saliva. He never did this, “take the blood” of one he barely knew. But he was already thinking about the next time. For now, he would have to let her go. *God, I don’t want to leave her!*

“You’re so good, baby. So good. You’re mine. No one can ever touch you again,” Case told her as he moved his fingers one last time through the swollen lips that covered her wet pussy.

He couldn’t believe what he’d said. He had lost his fucking mind. He only knew if anyone touched her like this, he would kill them. He needed to get out of there fast before he lost control. If his scent mask slipped, she’d know him and he didn’t want her to. Not yet. He needed to understand what the hell was happening to him. And if he didn’t hurry and leave, he was going to come all over himself.

He stepped away from her and whispered, “Mine,” in her ear. Case disappeared in a quiet flash to Alek’s guest bungalow. He had to get himself together.

He stood alone in the middle of the room.

“What the fuck did I do?” The sound of his voice drifted through the empty air.

Case knew he needed to get back to his club. After Alek left, he’d ordered a fresh drink which probably still sat untouched on the table he had occupied. He didn’t want her to wonder why he disappeared, and he still hadn’t introduced himself to her as planned. And now he would have to keep an eye on her to make sure she didn’t make any of the other male customers hard. He already thought of her as his. *Shit*.

He materialized silently into her office but stayed invisible in case she was there. Although he doubted she’d be working. She liked to play around in the private rooms. He’d let it slide this time since he’d been the toy. But how the hell did she plan to do her job? And she used space that could be paid for. As he moved down the hallway, he smelled her. She hadn’t left the watchers’ room yet. He passed the guard in vampyre speed and took up residence at the same table.

Case heard a commotion at the end of the bar. A wolf shifter was acting like an ass. He wanted to see how it would be handled. He waited for the appearance of his errant manager and hoped he wouldn’t have to intervene. There was only one guard on duty. He thought maybe this could present an unexpected opportunity. He moved across the room and took a seat closer to the action.

* * * * *

“What the hell?” Tres’ knees buckled and she landed in a chair, glad it broke her fall. She had never come so hard in her life. Who was he? Her only lucid thought—find him. Have him again. Yeah, and the underwear in her desk drawer—a good idea. “To hell with Mr. Eye Candy out front.” The guy in here was the one she wanted. Her voice echoed off the walls of the small room.

Her fingertips moved to her neck. She had felt him bite at her pulse right before she exploded. Tres couldn’t believe how much she’d wanted to feel his fangs buried in her vein. And she didn’t even know who he was. She wouldn’t know him again either. Snow leopards were exceptional hunters but she couldn’t hunt what she couldn’t smell.

For the first time in years, Tres felt more than a passing attraction. It scared her. Tired of running, she convinced herself she'd be safe as long as there was no name or face to put on the body she wanted to feel again.

Holly's scent preceded her soft knock at the door.

"I'll be right out, Hol."

"You better hurry, there's trouble up front."

"Shit."

Chapter Three

"Girl, you smell like a cat in heat," Holly said as she followed Tres to the main room.

"I'll tell you about it later. What's happening?"

"Some wolf got his drawers in a bunch because the piece he arrived with went sniffing behind somebody else. She's on the performer's side and he wants to get back there."

"Okay then. Let's see if we can get the cur out of here quietly. Watch my back." Holly was a snow leopard too, and though they were solitary hunters, the two of them worked well together. Getting out of tight situations came easily to their smaller, wily cats.

"No need to even ask." They both approached the end of the bar.

"Sir, can I help you?" Tres was calm as she watched the wolf's eyes. Dogs, and that's what wolves were, tended to give away any advantage in a fight with their eyes.

"I want to go back there and get my girl."

"Well now, if she left you, maybe she doesn't want to be your girl anymore. Finish your drink and call it a night."

"I'm not leaving without her." He stood and Tres could see his claws begin to protrude.

"Yeah, you're leaving. It can be easy or hard. Your choice." *Shit, he's going to pick hard, I can smell it.* She knew there were humans in the club so no way would she let the mangy mutt shift. He topped her by about a foot in height. She needed to be quick and tough.

Her thought about this job being a piece of cake flew out the window. It didn't matter, everywhere she'd been was the same. And it boiled down to one problem. Possessive and jealous creatures. Sex or species had nothing to do with it. Male or female, someone always wanted to control somebody.

Why did they show up wherever she worked?

Tres grabbed the creature by the throat and hid her claws as much as possible. She dug them in just enough to cut off his air supply. She gripped tightly and moved him toward the exit. She spoke with force and remained calm to keep the animal part of him at bay.

"I don't know who your girl is, but when she comes home, keep her under the porch. Don't let her come back here. You probably shouldn't come back either. It wouldn't be good for your health."

She didn't see the chair sticking out as she backed up. Tres tripped over the leg and went down and the wolf shifter landed heavily on top of her with a thud.

Oh hell, this is it, I'm dead.

Before Tres could budge, she felt the weight of the man pulled from her. She stood quickly and watched as Alek's Kind friend held the beast in the air while his feet dangled two feet off the floor. The smell of Kind lion was so thick in the room she could taste it. His red swirling vamp's eyes told the wolf all he should need to know. At least she hoped the dog read his eyes like she did. "Get out or die" was written all over his face. A shock wave of pleasure dived right between Tres' thighs. *What the hell?*

"I don't think the lady made herself clear. You are leaving, friend. And don't come back. You got that?" He dropped the shifter to his feet hard.

The wolf nodded and Tres watched as he scurried to the door. If his tail was out, it would be between his legs. She turned to Alek's friend.

"Thanks, I didn't see the chair. Could've been a nasty situation. My name's Tres, I manage *The Looking Glass*."

She dusted her backside as she stared in the cat's red eyes. Yeah, these dudes were real bastards. And in both forms they were vicious sons of bitches. Except for Alek, she steered clear of them. The one who stood in front of her should be banned from public places. Along with the smell of lion was the look of death. But he didn't have the vile, putrid stench of a transgressor, cats addicted to human blood and emotions. The blood of their victims would be drained while the transgressors were in their vamp forms. They then became trapped in their beast until they gorged on the flesh.

Kind eyes were always variations of emerald green, and his were now back to the normal color of raw emerald, not too dark. They went well with the ashy-colored hair which, punctuated by the much darker brows, looked even lighter close up. The chiseled planes of his face bordered on being gaunt, his straight nose complemented by high, hard cheekbones.

All of this came together to give him the look of one of those mysterious male models who graced the cover of romance books around the world. The ones you never really did see walking down the street. And his full lips—*I got a place for them*. This cat could be real trouble. He was definitely a lion, and if he lived there, he'd be king of the jungle.

She got wet and for the life of her, she couldn't figure out why. She reminded herself of all the reasons she shouldn't be. Even now, she smelled the lion in him. As he stood this close, she saw she'd been right about the ripped body too, all sinewy muscle. Damn, his cock was hard and it bulged at the front of his pants, beckoning to her. She had to fight not to reach out and touch it.

"I'm Case. Glad I could help."

"Looking for a job?" *You can help me anytime with that hard-on*. Shit, what was she thinking? "One of my guards left suddenly, leaving me in a spot." She figured his answer would be no. But maybe she'd get lucky. He might have hit bad times or something. Tres doubted this as she considered the suit. If he was friends with Alek, most likely he was part of the Reign, and they took care of their own.

"Sure. I'm new in town. Alek can vouch I'm okay. We go way back."

"Like I said, I'm in a spot right now. I'll take your word for it."

Tres was soaked. If her pants weren't already wet from the vamp, they would be now. *What the hell's wrong with me?* She was usually so composed. The night was young and she'd spent the better part of it drenched in her own carnal juices.

"When do I start?"

"Now. You can use a room in the back to...uhh...whisk on proper clothes. Black shirt and slacks are all you require. No leather." She knew Kind, like vamps, could pull clothes out of thin air.

"You wear leather."

"I'm the boss. You're not the cocky type are you?"

"No," Case said. "I only wondered. I prefer slacks, no problem here."

"Good. The guard at the door can fill you in on how we operate around here. Mainly, keep your eyes and ears open for trouble. Stop it before it starts if you can, and keep your hands to yourself. No use of the private rooms unless you're on break, and you pay. Got it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And don't be a smart ass. You can call me Tres."

"Okay, Tres."

* * * * *

Oh baby. Yes, I'm cocky and hard. And I'll be inside of you the very next chance I get.

He was right about the opportunity. It had fallen in his lap. Enforcement everywhere had become a lot harder because the creatures humans believed only existed in dreams were on the rise. Shifters in every form, cats, wolves and demons all vied for a place in the world.

The humans who sat in his club didn't know they rubbed shoulders with the boogeyman or that they were under Kind protection. In fact, their hunters probably killed more of his people than anyone else. Whether lion, tiger or panther, many cats preferred their natural state and it made them an easy target. Killing a cat was only a matter of a bullet placed in any vital organ and death followed quickly.

And Alek was right. If he'd named the club *Lion's Cave*, the wolf would have never pulled any shit. He'd have known he would be on his back in no time flat with the red glare of a big vampyre cat beating down on his ass.

He watched his manager head toward the office.

She exuded sex and her desire assailed Case's nostrils. The fangs he kept hidden threatened to show themselves. His mouth remembered how good she tasted. His hands itched to get in her pants again. He couldn't have planned this better himself.

Case already loved his new job.

A change into the proper uniform took him no time at all. He went in search of the guard to receive instructions on how to handle his new position. The security here did need to be beefed up. The incident with the wolf might have been worse.

Unlike his other clubs, this one was located in the remote high desert. Because of the very nature of the place, it would attract Kind from the compound in the area and shifters. Case understood both would be a harder bunch to handle. The animal side of them made their primitive needs stronger.

Vamps were such deviant creatures, they pretty much saw to their own entertainment. They would consider *The Looking Glass* tame. But some would wander in after dark. That wasn't a problem. They'd lived long among humans, blending in was second nature.

Protection of his business was paramount. For this reason his company only hired Kind. They could handle the shifters because they were animals too. The undead posed no threat to creatures just like them.

He believed his initial concern of a shifter managing his club was valid. No one would patronize a place they didn't feel safe in. He didn't think his new manager had a handle on all of this. He made a mental note to discuss it again with Alek.

* * * * *

Case was headed back down the hall when Tres came out of her office door and practically ran him over. Papers flew out of her hand and scattered across the floor.

"Dammit," she exclaimed.

"Let me help you." Case gathered some of the stack. When Tres bent to help, his shoulder bumped her and sent her sprawling across the floor on her ass.

"Christ, be careful," she said, as she scrambled up before he could offer assistance. She shied away from him and her eyes glittered with wariness. And he was sure he saw fear.

Why the hell was she so jumpy? It was as if she didn't want to be touched by him. Did her dislike of lions go that far? Then it hit him right in the gut. Without question, he knew someone had hurt her. She'd buried it so deep in her mind he still couldn't see it, but for a moment he glimpsed darkness. Case's blood turned cold and anger bubbled up in him at the thought that anyone had brought harm to her. His feelings caught him by surprise and made his next words sound sharp.

"You should be more careful."

"Well, I wasn't exactly expecting a damn lion to be in my way."

"What's your problem with lions?" Case really wanted to know. Was it one of his brethren who had caused her to be afraid? *I'll kill him.*

"Look, I hired you to be a guard, not a private fucking eye, okay?" Her eyes went dead and her voice cracked.

Case was right. He vowed to find out for sure and the cat better be long gone from the desert. He'd rip the son of a bitch in two. Tres looked so vulnerable. He couldn't imagine anyone touching her in the wrong way. She had a body made for pleasure, not

pain. *What the hell is wrong with me?* There was no logical reason for the sudden protective feeling he had.

He handed her the pile he'd picked up. When his fingers brushed hers, an electric spark raced up his arm and ended at his cock. *Shit!* Nothing like that had ever happened to him before and he'd lived a damn long time.

Hundreds of years screwing females from every species, none ever held sway over him like this little leopard did. He needed to be very careful or his game with her would quickly get out of hand. Case wasn't looking for anything other than a good lay. But his next sentence did nothing to convince him of that.

"Hey, not all lions are bad, you know." He wanted Tres to like the cat, not his vampyre side.

Most Kind ignored the vamp half, hated it, because it forced the need to take blood on them. Not Case. He'd spent years evading the truth of what he was--it had been a long time since Case even acknowledged the cat inside him. Now he found himself in the odd position of wanting someone to accept his cat. The thin high desert air was affecting his sanity.

Case left her in front of the office door with a look of pure hatred on her face.

He added finding out more about his new manager's past to the list of questions he had for Alek.

* * * * *

"So, you want to tell me what happened in the private room? Was it good?"

"Holly, you won't believe this." Tres told her friend the whole story, every detail. They didn't have any secrets from each other.

"Damn."

"He was all vamp." She felt the pinprick dots on her neck. "He had no scent. And his...well, he was huge. I need to keep him out of here. You know how I am about any involvement with customers."

"What about your new guard? You seemed pretty interested in him earlier tonight. I'd hoped the past would finally be put to rest."

Tres understood her friend's concern but she wasn't ready to trust another cat. Vampyres were different—like her, they believed in hit and run. Sex for the sake of sex. And though it happened, it was very unlikely her leopard would turn out to be the mate of a bloodsucker.

"He's Kind. Hope he works out though. I liked how he handled the wolf." She wondered briefly why she stayed continually wet around him. It didn't matter. Like the customers, staff was off limits. Tres didn't tell Holly about the incident in the hallway and that bothered her. She told Hol everything. The rush of energy that zapped her when their fingers touched still tingled between her legs. Lust, that's all it was, or carpet shock.

"Since when did you become an elitist? We're felines too, you know."

"Those cats are crazy as hell with their mixed-up blood. I don't need that shit in my life again. I want to keep this job. I'm tired of hopping around."

"Then you won't mind if I make a play for him?"

Tres didn't expect Hol to ask that question. She hesitated, which spoke volumes to both of them. Normally she would have said go for it, immediately. What the fuck was her problem tonight? She needed to get herself together real fast.

"Suit yourself."

"Alrighty then. I'll check on the cleanup crew out front and I'm out of here. See if the new guy wants to play alley cat tonight."

"Okay, see you tomorrow night."

She flipped through the correspondence on her desk and pulled out what needed immediate attention. She had to write a note to corporate about her new guard. *He'll be Holly's new guard after tonight.*

Tres loved to watch Hol perform and she thought about her with the lion. A hard knot formed in her stomach.

She wouldn't like that at all. *Shit.*

Chapter Four

Hours later Tres still sat at her desk. The paperwork done, she'd checked the front to make sure the club was in order for the next day. But she couldn't leave. She hoped he would come back. The mystery vamp. Hell, the mystery of it was probably what attracted her. She told herself it would be different if she knew him.

She made her way around to the other side of the club and looked down the long hallway. She'd never performed but she wondered what it would be like to have someone watch her. Watch his cock slide in and out of her pussy. See him slip into her mouth. *Shit, this has got to stop.*

"Why should you stop? If it's what you want, do it."

Her head turned at the sound of the voice behind her. She had only heard him in the throes of passion so she didn't pick up on it right away. Him. Definitely a vamp and he was a master to have read her so easily. And to control his scent so effectively.

She knew he hid behind a glamour. Why didn't he let her see him? Maybe he was scarred. At this point, she knew it wouldn't deter her or change what she felt this very moment.

"What do you want?"

"You."

"Why?"

"Because I do. I want to feel your lips around my cock. Isn't that what you wanted?"

Tres couldn't move. He was right. She could taste him already. Her tongue darted over her lips. She found herself wet again. The warm moisture sat at the entrance of her

vagina. Waiting for a reason to slide down. *How does he make me want him so much?* Tres *wanted* to wrap her lips around his cock.

He moved behind her and ran his hands down her back. She felt him cup her ass. His fingers feathered their way up and brushed the sides of her breasts. He caressed her shoulders. When his mouth lowered to the pulse of her neck, she was lost. The feeling of his tongue as it swirled over the same spot he'd fed from earlier opened the floodgates.

She heard a loud, deep sigh echo through the hallway and realized it came from her. He'd found her pebbled nipples and his fingers squeezed them hard. He tugged them into painful points that made her knees weak. His erection moved up and down her back and rubbed against her.

Tres' eyes were closed tight and the mental picture of his engorged shaft in her mouth made her gasp. She could feel it pump in and out so deep it took her breath. Her legs collapsed at the thought of her tongue teasing across the broad head of his cock. But she never fell.

The vampire's hands were filled with her full breasts, and he held her pressed against his body. His thumb and finger rubbed and pinched the enflamed peaks until they were as hard as marbles.

He picked her up and headed for one of the performance rooms. They were larger to accommodate the small orgies that often took place on this side of the mirror. Some of them had beds and a few of them contained equipment for BDSM.

"No, please," she panted.

"Yes, say yes. It can be so good. Don't worry – no one will watch you."

She knew he was right. And she did want him. She was here because she hoped he would come back. Did it matter what side of the club he took her to? They were completely alone.

"Yes," she whispered through lips that already felt bruised.

* * * * *

He used his mind to open the door. Case didn't dare put her down. She might run away. He could use an enthrallment, but that wouldn't be fun. He wanted her there, all of her. Mind and body. He wanted her soul given freely and with abandon. The glamour was only so she wouldn't know it was him.

He felt Tres jump in his arms at the sound of the door as it clicked open but she kept her face pressed to his chest. He knew she could smell his arousal. The scent he released belonged to his vampyre. He read her mind, she wanted him to turn on a light, but he didn't. Her sharp vision allowed her to see more than most but he knew in her human form she was at a disadvantage.

Case couldn't wait to feel her skin against his. He used his powers to remove their clothes. It shocked him that he still held her. He didn't want to put her down. She was so small cradled against his chest. And she smelled so damned delicious. He just...held her.

"I want you," he told her.

"I am yours."

The darkness still resided there, but the fear he touched in her mind when she said those three words disappeared quickly. His erection bobbed against her ass while he cradled her in his arms. Her body was so hot it felt as though fire brushed his cock. He savored the vision of his penis in her mouth.

He sat her softly on the bed when he couldn't stand it anymore. He needed to feel her lips around him. He held his cock and stroked it. He wanted her to see it, smell it. For now he had to keep his lion's scent at bay, but he would change her mind about *warm* cats. He worked himself to his full length, until a drop of cum appeared and glistened at the tip of his shaft.

"Take it, baby. Taste it."

He moved into her mind and rooted out every thought and feeling she possessed. He would give her exactly what she wanted.

She flicked her tongue across the head and captured the drop of essence there and he knew it drove her crazy. She liked the taste of him. Her tongue wrapped around his thickness and pulled it further into her mouth. Her small hand held his cock so she had control of how deep he went. She didn't think she could take it all as her lips pulled him in. He hissed as he watched her head begin to move back and forth. More and more of him disappeared down her throat with long, slow jabs.

"You can take it all, I know you can." Case shoved deeper to see how much she could handle. He wanted to feel her lips kiss his balls. She took a lot. "Suck it harder." He began a slow drive in and out. He verged on coming already.

Her mouth consumed him. She tightened her jaw around his cock each time he pulled out. She took more of him each time he pressed in. He could smell the juices dripping from her canal as it clenched on itself with each plunge of him through her lips. He groaned in surprise when she used her tongue to push him out. Tres grasped his balls in her teeth and laved them with her tongue. She pulled one then the other into her warm, moist mouth. It was sweet pain.

Her breath came in short gasps and Case knew she was close to orgasm. He watched her rub her pussy on the sheets to create more friction against her clit. The taste of him, the feel of him fucking her mouth made her come. He never touched her pussy, but liquid overflowed. Mewling sounds escaped her as she continued to suck and lick until he went crazy.

"Anybody who watched you, baby, would come in seconds. It feels good fucking your mouth. Damn, it's hot and tight in there." Case was ready to spurt his cum down her throat, but he wanted more. He pulled his hard length out of her mouth.

He reached down and grabbed her by the hips. He lifted her right onto his weeping erection. He slid into her so easy, he grunted. "Oh yeah, your pussy's wet. Ride it. That's what you wanted, right? Go ahead, ride it, baby." He buried his shaft to the hilt in her channel.

Tres wrapped her legs around his waist and encircled his neck with her arms. Case took her for the ride of her life. With bent knees, he bounced and thrust in and out of her canal like a piston. His hard, fast rhythm propelled her toward another pinnacle of release. Feeling her sheath convulse around him made it almost impossible for him not to come.

He wanted to slow down. But Case couldn't stop. She took him so deep and compressed her muscles around him. He wanted to go on forever like this. He thought he'd be able to taste her sweetness, but his cock had other ideas. It kept her honey-blond pussy all to itself. It refused to let her go. She was ready to come again and he wanted to feel it wash over him.

"Come, come for me, baby. Now."

"Yes." Passion laced her voice and he knew she was ready to give him everything. Each onslaught he delivered, she met with one of her own, plunging down hard on his cock.

"You're so sweet. I'll never get enough of you, never." Case knew those words were true. He wanted this woman like he wanted no other in the world. She'd stolen a piece of him and he didn't want it back. "You're mine," he said as he pounded her pussy. He needed her to hear the words, to know they were true.

"OH GOD, YES!" Tres yelled. Case felt her storm gather, and with force, it battered its way out of her body. Her juices flowed and were met by his.

"Yeah. Let it go. I want it all." He started to spurt a hot stream of cum into her. He didn't want it to stop. And he thought it wouldn't. He came forever, buried in her pussy.

Being in her mind, he felt it all as she did. He wished she could share the experience exactly as he had.

Suddenly a word flashed through Case's mind.

Draga. The flame of his life.

What am I thinking? He didn't want a mate.

This couldn't be happening. He would have to tell her who he was.

Even worse—convince her he didn't have fleas.

Aww hell. My true mate has green fucking hair. Christ!

* * * * *

Mate. That was the reason for the connection he felt earlier. Case had to be sure so he waited for her in the parking lot of his club. When he saw Tres come out, he forgot everything he meant to find out.

He wanted to know her better.

When Tres noticed him lounging against the wall outside, she took her time with the door locks. After she set the alarm she turned to face him. Her lips drawn in a tight line told Case he better say something fast.

"Hey, just wanted to make sure you were okay," he said.

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"You took quite a tumble in the hall."

"As I remember it, I was knocked down." She glared straight at him.

"I'm sorry about that. Anyway, just wanted to make sure everything was all right." Case looked down at his shoes. He'd never had the problem before of not knowing what to say in any situation. Christ, this was bad.

"How do you get home, I don't see a car?"

"Case, what do you want?" She'd gone on the defensive. This wasn't going as he planned. He didn't even know why he was standing in the parking lot having a discussion with her. *Let it go.* But he couldn't.

He slipped into her mind. Tres was tired. She'd had a long day and he, the vampyre half of him, was part of the problem. He'd worn her out. Hell, he'd finger-fucked her earlier today and tonight he demanded even more and got it. Thinking about it

hardened his cock. She didn't have the advantage he did of dematerializing and ending up wherever she wanted to be. Case wished he could take Tres home, put her to bed, and just hold her. But the being he presented to her smelled like a lion. And Tres hated warm cats as she called them.

"Come on, I'll walk with you." He wouldn't let her go alone.

"I don't live far and I usually cut through the woods over there." She pointed to the copse of trees off to the left of the club. Her voice softened a little. "Thanks, but I'll be fine." Tres hurried away from him.

He stood and watched as she disappeared into the tree line. Case didn't see her change but he heard the snow leopard yowl. Her cat was on the hunt. His own beast raged inside him. He prowled and tore at Case's insides for release.

Case had managed to stay unmated for hundreds of years. What was it about this woman? His beast felt drawn too. It pulled at him to follow her into the wooded area. Calming his cat had never been this much of a problem.

There were still no answers to the dilemma he found himself in.

* * * * *

Case didn't tell Alek what happened in the hallway or the parking lot. He did tell him about everything else.

"Goddammit, you took her blood?"

"I don't need your shit, Alek." Case was serious. "What the fuck should I do? If she is my *draga*, I can't work there and watch her every day. What if some bastard starts to pant after her? I'll kill him." He already wanted to tear a cat apart for hurting her and he didn't even know who it was.

"Hell, you got yourself hired by *your* manager at *your* club... You asked for this."

"I meant to have a little fun, nothing else. But..." He knew Alek saw humor in his situation.

"But my ass, buddy. You know what this means. The great, the mighty Hard Case is going down. You may as well hang out the 'Out of Business' sign."

"Screw you. That won't happen, man."

But Alek was right. His single days were numbered, or gone. How was he going to fix this? He liked being single. How could he watch with a mate? His people were too possessive. A little voice in the back of his head told him with the right woman, he could do whatever he wanted. Was Tres that woman? He couldn't think about it now. *Concentrate. Find a way out of this.*

"You're not stupid, Case. *Draga*, dude, you know what it means. I have to keep reminding your ass what you are. Hell, even the vamps and wolves have true mates. You can't fight the Fates. There's not a thing you can do if she's the flame of your life, man."

"Her girlfriend, Holly, came on to me last night. If I take her, this can all change. Maybe I'm wrong. *Draga* dream together and we haven't. It could be I had a...weak moment." Case's teeth worried his bottom lip.

"Sometimes the dreams take a while to come. Anyway, you'll dig yourself into a hole worse than the one you're already in for lying about who you are. Leave it be. And what happened to 'her hair is green, for crying out loud'?" Alek roared with laughter.

"Go to hell."

"Yeah, I do have to go. By the way, don't you have to get to work?"

Case heard Alek's laughter drift through the air. He *was* going to be late for work if he didn't get his ass in gear. "That's it. I'll quit my job and go back to Malibu." Great, now he was talking to himself. But it wasn't a bad idea. Tonight he would tell her something had come up and he couldn't stay on. Then he'd hightail it out of town.

Out of town might not be far enough.

Chapter Five

Tres tried again to concentrate on her work. Mine. He'd said *mine*. Twice. Both times he was with her. *Inside of me*. There was no room for anything else in her mind. She knew she had to stop doing this.

She didn't belong to anybody. No one would ever own her. She'd been down that road before with a possessive asshole. Her skin crawled as she remembered that day. Tres still didn't believe Griffin had planned to do her permanent harm but he'd locked her up.

Things had been fine between them until that night at the club she managed. Grif got into a fight with another leopard and she'd had to have them both removed from the premises. The other cat was one they'd both watched with other women and there had never been a problem. From that night on, Grif would get out of control if she even spoke to another male. It affected her work and Tres had had to break it off.

When she'd gone to get her things from his place, he'd tried to keep her there by locking her in a windowless room in his basement. She thought she'd lose her mind. Her leopard's claws were bloodied nubs from scratching at the door when Holly found her two days later. Hol and she moved away after that. It'd been five years but Tres had built a few walls around her heart since then. Specifically to keep cats out. If she felt the slightest attachment to anyone she slept with, she moved on.

No more. She intended to stay out of the fray of personal relationships. They were bad news. At least for her. She thought about her new guard.

The fact that he cared enough to hang around and wait for her said he wasn't *all* bad. Maybe he hadn't hung around. There was plenty of time for him to screw Hol and get back to the club. Again, her stomach knotted. *What the hell is going on with me?* She'd

been with the vampyre so why did she care what Case did? The last thing Tres needed was to get involved with another crazy-ass cat.

Plus, the vamp, who was still a mystery man, may as well have locked a chastity belt around her ass. All she could think about was his cock. How sweet he tasted. She had thought of nothing else since last night. An attachment that tonight she vowed to break off if he showed up.

"Come in," she called in answer to the light knock at the door. Tres knew who it was immediately. She could smell the lion. Her heartbeat escalated and her leopard stretched and sat up inside her.

"You got a minute?"

"Just let me finish this, I'll be right with you.

"Damn, the ink ran out," she mumbled to herself as she flipped the pen in her hand into the trash can.

She opened her desk drawer to retrieve another one. When she pulled it out, a skimpy, silky red thong came with it. Wrapped around the pen like a rubber band.

Tres, caught by surprise, coughed in embarrassment. *Shit, how the hell did I let that happen?* She guessed she should have taken better care how she placed the underwear in her drawer. *Duh.* Earlier she'd been pleased with herself for remembering to bring them. But now, as Case stared at her panties, she wasn't so happy anymore.

Suddenly, she realized the scent of sex permeated her office. His and hers. She *was* hot for this guy. A freaking lion. And if her senses were right, *he* was hot for her. Last night he seemed to really care about her welfare. Maybe...

She put the slinky underpants back in the drawer without looking up. She took her time and shuffled papers around her desk until she recovered her composure. What was going on? She never lost control like this. Now there were two creatures in her life. A lion and a goddamned mystery vampyre. Maybe if she got it on with the cat, she'd forget about the vamp, who wanted to own her. *Mine, my ass.*

She knew lions could be possessive too, but the one across from her didn't seem the type. *He works for you, so forget that.* There was the problem of him being an employee. If he was promoted to assistant it could work out. They'd be more like partners.

As she ran these ideas around in her head, Tres thought it really might work. And Holly had been right—he was eye candy. Really scrumptious. Since he'd lost the suit she was able to size him up better. The black slacks and tee only served to emphasize his gorgeous physique, and the pants showed off his package to great advantage. His eyes were sexy as hell. His chest was broad and layered with muscle. She imagined his strong arms around her. *I'll need the dry panties anytime now.*

"Okay, done. I'm glad you stopped in because there's something I'd like to discuss with you." She got right to the point. "I, umm...liked the way you handled the wolf yesterday. Things have picked up and I could use an assistant. Would you be interested?"

"Will your boss approve?"

"He hired me to manage his club. He trusts me to make the right decisions."

"I see. I guess it'll be okay then."

"Good, it'll mean wearing suits."

"You know that's not a problem for my people."

"Well, it's settled then. You will, of course, be given a raise."

"Good."

"Okay. I have to finish some work here. You can go change into a suit. You'll handle the main room and be responsible for the bar. This will allow me time to concentrate more on the private rooms and the paperwork."

"Sounds good. I'll get started then. Holly can assist me?"

"Uhh, sure, but run everything by me first."

Tres didn't like Case's idea at all. This guy exuded pure animal magnetism. She'd have to make sure her friend knew it was hands off now. This would be her ticket out of

the clutches of the mystery vamp. She hoped she wasn't jumping from the proverbial frying pan into the fire.

She should have let him walk her home last night. They could have run together. Chasing a rabbit on the way home helped her unwind. What would a white lion look like in his fur? They were rare as hell and Tres had one right under her nose. Damn, why did he have to be a warm cat? A cat, period.

Paperwork done, she took a walk through the club, made sure everything was okay. She watched Case talk to one of the hostesses. He seemed at ease in his new position already. He had great taste in clothes. His suit fit him to a tee. He looked awesome in whatever he wore.

Tres decided to get to know him better. She had the excuse of being the manager to back her up. She approached the bar.

"Case, have you done this kind of work before?" Tres asked.

"I've spent time in clubs like this one."

"Any place I might know?"

"I don't think so. I'd remember seeing you." His lids were heavy and seductive as his green eyes slid over her body. *Shit, he's flirting with me.*

Tres might have bitten off more than she could chew.

* * * * *

Case couldn't believe it—blindsided. That's what happened. She'd blindsided him. With the tiniest pair of red panties he'd ever seen. His cock hardened at the thought of them. He'd love to see her ass in them. How the hell did this happen? He had come in early to quit his new job.

As planned, he'd arrived at his club a few minutes before his shift. He intended to tell her he had to leave immediately. He didn't think there was any other way out of this mess and it would have eliminated the need to tell her his true identity.

Shit, he'd sat across the desk from her and watched her play with ink pens and underwear. Then he waited for her to finish what she was working on. While he waited, his freaking mind decided to go on a fucking walkabout. It pictured how her face would look framed with the same honey-blond-colored hair he'd wanted to bury his tongue in last night. His mouth watered with the smell of sex that had permeated the office.

Hell yeah, he was blindsided. She offered him a goddamned promotion.

Instead of quitting, he'd been made the assistant manager. His vampyre didn't help at all when it rifled through her mind and read every thought there.

She promoted Case so she could fuck him and forget about the vampyre. Just like that, forget about him.

To top it all off, she hadn't even cleared hiring somebody with him. Well, not *him* since she didn't know Case owned the club, but she should have called corporate first. *She's got some balls and she's spending my goddamned money!*

His cock leaked. This was another reason he should leave this job. He remained in a state of arousal around her. Hard as a rock. Damned job could be bad for him. It was painful at the very least.

And right now it hurt like hell as she questioned him about where he worked before. What would happen when she found out he'd not only worked in clubs like this but owned many of them, including *The Looking Glass*? Tres came on to him hard and he had to think of something to say.

"Most of the clubs I've worked in are in Europe," he told her.

"Oh, I did the circuit overseas for a while, mostly Asia."

"Hmm, did you find it much different?" His shaft painfully nudged at his zipper. He couldn't take this much longer.

"You've seen one, you've seen them all." She ran her hand through her green hair and licked her lips. Case felt the wetness gather at the front of his slacks. He had to put an end to their conversation *now*.

"Why don't you let me go with you to your place tonight?" He watched her smile fade.

"Uhh, that's okay. I usually let my cat run before I go home. You know how it is with leopards. We like alone time."

"Sure, I see. Maybe some other time?" Damn, he needed to get away from her. Tres' scent drove him nuts.

"We'll see," she said. Holly picked that time to call her and Case was relieved. Yet he felt the anger build inside him. Not over the job. He was pissed about the fact he'd smelled she was hot for him and she'd come on to him.

But the lion, a warm cat, wasn't good enough to run with her leopard.

His game had gotten way out of hand and he was confused as hell. He didn't know why he needed her to want his cat as much as she wanted the goddamn vampyre. He shouldn't blame her.

Tres didn't know the lion Case let her smell was the vampyre whose fingers were buried deep inside her yesterday, or whose cock filled her mouth last night. But she hadn't seemed concerned about the vamp at all when he'd sat across from her. *Shit I'm jealous she came on to me. Why was he so angry?*

Either way, she belonged to him. *She's mine.*

He forgot about leaving town.

Now his main thought was to find out how far she would go with him—the lion—not the vampyre whose tongue had wanted to search her pussy for honey not many hours ago.

And he hadn't even begun to deal with the *draga* issue.

I am fucking losing it.

* * * * *

Alek's voice pulled him out of the mire of bullshit he'd spent hours stumbling through.

"So why are you out of uniform?"

"I've been promoted to assistant manager." Anger laced his voice. As the evening wore on, Case had grown more and more agitated. He didn't know why Alek stopped by the club, but he was glad to have someone to blow off steam with. "She promoted me so she could fuck my brains out and forget about the *mystery* vampyre." They talked in hushed tones shifters would be unable to hear.

"Jesus Christ, man, you better come clean and fast. Tres will scratch your eyes out when she finds out about your little game."

"To hell with her. Can you believe it? I told her she was mine. And what does she do? She gives me a promotion so she won't feel guilty about being with a *regular* employee. She feels okay if I'm the assistant manager. We'll be like partners." The words dripped with sarcasm. Case really fumed now as he told his friend about what he read in her mind.

"And she thinks my lion has fleas," he finally mumbled.

"Let me get this right," Alek said. "First, you've got no business in her mind. You *have* spent too much time with those nosey-ass vamps. Kind respect the privacy of others." He continued, "You're mad because she wants the real you instead of the other you who has no scent, the vampyre you?"

"She's using me, Alek, to forget my vampyre."

"I'm confused as hell."

"Because you're not listening! I told her she's *mine*, dammit. She doesn't know I'm the vampyre. She thinks I'm the lion. So she's going to screw around on me. Don't you get it?"

"I thought you didn't want a mate. And then there's the green hair."

"Alek, piss off, I've had it with your shit." His feelings were all in a muddle right now. *How the hell did I let this happen?*

"It sounds simple to me, Case. She's probably attracted to the vampyre because it *is* you. Or you because you're the vampyre. Damn, now you got me doing it."

"I intend to find out what she's up to. Anyway, why are you here and not training the Reign?"

"Your secretary called and left a message for you. Something about your manager at *The Looking Glass* hiring an assistant. HR needs your approval."

"Well I'll be damned. She hires me *then* checks to see if it's okay. What if I said no?"

"You're a fucking lunatic. I'm leaving before you drive me crazy."

He still stared morosely at the table when he heard Alek's voice in a whisper above him.

"By the way, do I tell your secretary you're hired?"

"Get the fuck out, *NOW!*" Case hissed.

Chapter Six

"Holly, remember our conversation yesterday about the new guard?" Tres asked.

"Sure."

"I've changed my mind. I made him my assistant." She still didn't want to go into detail with her friend about everything that had happened.

"And?"

"This thing with the vamp, it's made me nuts. He keeps saying *mine* whenever... Hell, like he wants to own me or something. You know how I am about the possessive type. I'd never be able to watch again with someone like him."

"It's how he met you, Tres. Why wouldn't he let you watch? When are you going to stop living in the past?" There was true concern in Hol's voice. Tres couldn't answer the question so she ignored it.

"They always end up thinking I would rather be with the person on the other side of the mirror. I'm tired of men who have no confidence in themselves. Or trust in me, for that matter. When they get all uptight, it's not good anymore."

"So what are you saying about the lion?"

"You're right about him turning me on. Christ, Hol, I had to bring in a change of underwear. It happens when I'm around him. Or the vamp. They both keep me in a constant state of wetness." Tres hoped she'd done the right thing. What if she got hooked on the lion? She couldn't think that far ahead yet. *One thing at a time*. Get rid of the vampyre first.

"No problem, the California high desert is full of Kind cats. I don't even mind if they want a sip of blood now and then. Plus, last night I gave it my best shot with Case. He seemed preoccupied. Almost as if he's serious about somebody already."

Tres' heart did an odd tumble in her chest. He hadn't fucked Hol last night. The fact that they hadn't been together made her happy. So when he waited in the parking lot, he'd really waited for her. While she screwed around with her mystery lover. Her new high spirits sank quickly. How was it she'd allowed herself to get so involved with these two creatures? She continued to talk so Hol wouldn't get suspicious.

"I don't think so. Shit, all you could smell in this office earlier was us. We both gave off the scent of two cats ready to mate." Tres relayed the story about the red thong and at least that gave her a good laugh.

"I hope it works out for you. Look, I have to go, my new boss runs a tight ship. Keeps his eyes on us constantly out there."

"Hey, if there's a problem, let me know right away."

Tres wondered at the odd look her friend gave her before she left. But she couldn't think about it now. Her mind was full of vampyres and lions.

She sat at the desk and thought about Case. She hoped he didn't keep *too* close of an eye on the hostesses. *Christ, now I'm sounding jealous.* She wasn't the possessive type and she intended to remain free of any ties for life.

She'd seen mated males in action when it came to someone messing with their female—they went ballistic. And deadly. Lost-limbs deadly.

Case knocked on the door before he poked his head in. "We're done up front, so I'm out of here unless you need me."

"No, you're okay to go," Tres said. "I have to finish up some paperwork." *And I hope the vamp comes for me again tonight.* Literally. Tres melted as she thought about it. She wondered what he hid behind the glamour. It didn't matter, this would be the last time.

She would wait around to see if the man of mystery made an appearance. She thought about the one who'd stood in front of her, and felt the floodgates open between her thighs. How was it possible to be so hot and bothered, by two individuals so damn different? Tres couldn't figure out why she wanted this cat.

But she wanted the white-hot heat of her vampyre too. His fingers deep inside her, primed with her juices. She could smell... *Shit!* Work piled on her desk needed to be done and she was daydreaming.

Finished checking the last stack of bills, Tres decided she'd waited long enough. She got ready to go home.

Before she opened the door to leave, she knew Case was out there. Her cat told her—the leopard screamed to be let loose. What her beast felt for the lion didn't make sense.

* * * * *

He left work happy. She wanted him. The vampyre him. But he also read she felt the same way for the cat. She was torn between both. Only he and Alek knew they were one and the same. He waited outside for her again, determined this time to see her home, learn more about her. *Jackass, a day ago you were leaving.* Now he hoped to walk her home.

The game seemed pointless now. Something had gone terribly wrong. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get her out of his mind.

Case's heart skipped a beat when she appeared.

"I won't take no for an answer tonight."

"I didn't plan on saying no." A smile lit her eyes. "Come on." She led him to the edge of the wooded area. They were safe here. Reign patrolled the area and kept it clear of transgressors and rogue vampyres. Case had trained with the warriors and he was an Elder with great vampyre powers. He could handle anything nature threw his way.

Tres stepped beyond the tree line and continued to walk. "You coming?"

She caught him off guard. Case expected her to change. "Sure." Catching up, he shortened his steps.

He wanted to know about the one who brought her pain. How to get that information without letting on he'd read her mind wouldn't be easy. That part of her past she'd buried deep in her subconscious and Case wasn't able to reach it.

The stars were bright and moonlight filtered through the canopy of leaves. A warm desert breeze ruffled her neon hair. Her steps were sure and quiet. "I love the woods at night," she said, her voice a whisper.

The sound of it brought his shaft throbbing to life. Case wanted to take her right there, in the woods on a bed of leaves. His beast rampaged back and forth and clawed to be set free.

"Did your last place of employment have space for you to allow your cat freedom?" His eyes probed her, waiting for an answer. Her eyes went blank and sadness swept across her face.

"No."

"Tell me about it."

"There's nothing to tell."

"Must have been something you liked about it? Someone?"

"Look, Case, I love my job and I like being free. No one will *ever* lock me up again. I need my freedom. Do you understand?" Her eyes glistened. It tore at his heart and he hated it. This had gone all wrong. But he did get one piece of information. *Locked up?* That alone would do him no good. He needed to know more.

Case hadn't realized they reached a small cabin with a dim light on by the door. One wicker rocker sat lonely on the porch. It was rustic and very well kept. Corporate would have seen to that.

"Thank you, Case, have a good night." She disappeared inside before he had a chance to respond.

His first thought was to follow her but that was a bad idea. What would he say? He couldn't tell her the truth about who he was. His friend was right, when Tres found out she'd do more than scratch his eyes out.

He released his lion. Cream-colored fur covered his extremities and rushed up his torso. His snout emerged and tufted ears pulled his emerald eyes into a slant. Whiskers flickered around his mouth which hung open, tasting the air around him. Case folded his body and let his large paws hit the ground. The lion ran at full speed.

The sound of night creatures in the woods inundated him. He reached a clearing and skidded to a stop. With his head held high he roared to release the pain that settled in his chest.

Every animal within hearing distance grew quiet.

* * * * *

Case hadn't let his vampyre visit her tonight because he wanted to see if she'd go for the other him—the lion. Then he'd know. *Know what?* That she desired his cat. Hell, confusion settled on him again. Walking her home had been a big mistake. Tres craved his beast but she fought it. Shouldn't he be happy?

He'd thought they'd change into their animals and run together, maybe even... *What?* That hadn't happened. His balls ached with fullness.

It didn't help he'd visited one of the private rooms during his shift, and the performers were the best.

He'd watched two Kind fuck each other blind. Then they changed into their tigers and copulated in their natural form. It drove him insane with lust. His own beast had roared and ripped at him for release. The cat wanted its mate.

It made him think of Tres' snow leopard. His lion wouldn't mind his feet in the cold snow if he covered her back. *Oh yeah, you've gone off the deep end now.* He chuckled at the picture he conjured up. A lion in winter.

His cock stood at full mast. Maybe tonight he'd take care of himself. Case enjoyed masturbating. He liked to fondle his warm balls and stroke his stiffness until he came.

He lay on his bed and ran his hand up and down his shaft. He pulled at himself slowly. As he cupped the palm of his hand across the mushroom tip of his stiff cock, a drop of liquid seeped from him. Green hair floated through his mind. He couldn't get the image of her luscious body out of his head. He reached for his balls with his other hand and massaged them hard. He smelled her. He heard her breathe lightly as though she slept.

Shit!

Case lay beside her. A dream. He'd pulled her into his dream. *Draga*. She *was* his true mate, his life's flame.

He could wake up or he could let it go all the way. And take her with him. He decided to take her with him. The scene he wanted to create he'd envisioned since the second time he had her.

To see her perform.

He wanted to bring her out of her shell, to be the first one with her when she knew someone watched. The passion was in her and he wanted to see it. As himself – the lion. He wouldn't allow the vampyre out to play tonight. He wanted her to smell him, taste him. After all, to her this would be a dream.

I'll show her I don't have fleas.

"Come with me," he whispered in her ear.

"What?" Tres murmured sleepily.

"I want to take you somewhere."

"Case?"

"Yes."

* * * * *

Restless as hell, Tres lay in her bed, eyes wide open. Sleep felt a long way off. Her mystery man didn't come for her. It was probably better this way. Sure her vamp had moved on to a newer conquest, she could now devote full time to the cat she planned to conquer, and hold, for a little while. She wasn't so sure about that now.

She shouldn't have let him walk her home. Tres wasn't ready for what had happened tonight. The questions made her think of the last cat she cared for and what he'd done to her. She'd declared to Case she needed to be free. Did he understand? If not, she wouldn't be able to handle it. There was no way she'd let herself be trapped again.

Keeping her mind off the lion was harder than it should be. She wondered if he watched or performed.

The fact he had initially visited the club with his friend didn't tell her much one way or the other. She knew Alek sometimes used the private rooms. He loved to perform. Known in these parts as the BMOC—big man on compound—the Siberian tiger was hung like a horse. He and Tres had run into each other occasionally but like she told Hol, there was no attraction between the two of them. Instead, they'd become good friends.

Alek and the owner of *The Looking Glass* were friends and he'd recommended her for the position because he knew she was looking for a quiet, respectable place to settle into. And Tres was good at her job.

Case, since he'd shown up with Alek, was most likely into the scene.

She finally drifted to sleep wondering what side of the mirror he played on.

* * * * *

Tres was dreaming. About Case. She must really be hot for this cat. Damn, her nostrils were full of his scent. He smelled real.

"Open your eyes," she heard him say.

She opened them to find herself lying naked in a performer's room. And someone was watching her. She knew because the small light over the mirror blinked green, which meant there were patrons in the watchers' room. She wasn't ready for this.

It's only a dream, it's not real.

"Yes, you're ready. It's only a dream, baby. Show me, show them, how good you are."

"I can't do this."

"You can. Do it for me." Case lay beside her on the bed. He leaned over her and took a nipple into his mouth. He nipped at it with his teeth but made sure his fangs stayed put. He suckled on her peak until she moaned, her body arched against his. She whimpered as he lavished the other bud with licks and sucks as his tongue swirled around her areola.

He took away the mirror on their side so they could see the couple in the watchers' room. Three more walls of mirrors surrounded them. Case watched as the man's eyes turned from his and he gave his partner's diamond-hard nipples the same treatment Case had given Tres'. He sucked them with abandon while she forced more at him. The man's tongue lapped at the woman's cleavage.

"Please." Tres moaned under him.

"Please what?"

"I..."

"I know what you want." And Case wanted it too. To taste her pussy. He smelled the aroma that slipped from her canal and soaked her nether lips. He took his time and kissed his way down her body. His tongue stole her musky essence as it moved across her stomach. He played in her bellybutton and drew delightful sounds from her. Her salty taste tempted him like no other. It urged him on to more flavorful exploration.

He reached her soft mound and moved his lips over the light fuzz there. He raised his head to look at her. The golden, honey-blond hair in front of him glistened beautifully with moisture left by his mouth.

Case couldn't get enough. He forced her legs open and dived into the tastiest pussy in the world. His tongue slid through her juicy folds. Tres' scent surrounded him.

His lion roared and clawed at him to be let go. No way was he going to let the beast out. Case drew nourishment from the creamy secretions and continued to lap at her. His mouth searched out hidden places that made her ass writhe across the bed.

He turned his head to the watchers' room and saw the man's head dip between his partner's thighs. He wanted to see the woman's pussy drip, her savory liquid slide into the man's mouth.

Case reached into the man's mind and suggested he lift the woman's legs even higher. He needed to watch the man's tongue dart in and out of the woman's hot canal. The man lifted his partner's legs and spun her ass to face him and Tres. He kept one leg high and the other pressed up against her body. Her pink pussy lips shone with jewellike drops of fluid.

"Oh yeah," he groaned. Case was in heaven seeing the thick labia of the woman. His own tongue prodded and stabbed at Tres' wet pussy. What he received from her was glorious. The juice flowed into his mouth and made him want more. He'd never get enough of this woman. He delved so deep, his teeth scraped against her clit and sent her body into overdrive. She arched up and against his lips. Her body quivered and he felt Tres come. For the first time tonight.

She'd come so many more times, she would beg him to stop. He'd make sure of it.

He intended to overload her senses with feeling. He'd have her perform and enjoy it. And she'd watch. He looked at the couple in the other room. The man's head was still buried between his partner's legs. The man lifted his head to get a breath of air and he turned to watch Case feed at Tres' pussy before his lips disappeared back into his partner's sweetness.

* * * * *

"Mmm," Tres crooned as she shoved her hips into Case's face. She wanted to feel his tongue caress her pussy lips. She glanced at the mirror and wondered who watched. She saw the glass was clear and panicked. *NO!* The couple she had watched with her vampyre lover. She didn't want them to see her with Case. It felt like a violation.

"No," Tres cried.

"It's okay, baby. Let them see you." She let him pull her to the edge of the bed, her pussy angled right at the watchers' room. The excitement of them gazing at the slickness between her thighs filled her with delight. She never knew it would feel like this.

She couldn't pull her eyes from the woman who squirmed under her partner. Her nipples shone, wet with the man's saliva. Tres thought she heard the woman sigh but knew that wasn't possible.

"Yes." Case calmed her with his voice. She relaxed as he dipped his tongue further into her honey pot. "So good," she heard him murmur against her as he slowly teased her clit.

Tres lost all control. She didn't care anymore. She needed him. His mouth, his tongue, his cock—she wanted it all. She reached for his head, her nails scratching hard against his scalp as she buried her fingers in his long ashy waves. She thrust her hips high and pulled him tighter to her pussy.

She turned to see the man look at her before his head dipped between his partner's wide-open legs. His mouth clamped on the woman's nether lips with vigor. He used his mouth, his tongue and his hand. He'd brought his fingers down to hold her open while he licked at the entrance to her vagina. The woman dripped. She bucked her hips up and looked for more.

Tres' blood began to pound through her veins. This was what she wanted. Freedom. Abandon.

And the man who lapped at her moist channel gave her that. He didn't care that she would come hard watching another man give someone pleasure. He didn't care that her pussy leaked in his mouth while she saw another woman have hers licked until Tres was frantic with the need for release herself.

But it's a dream.

"More, give me more." She dug her heels into the bed and ground her pelvis into his face. She forced his mouth to take more of her.

Tres let it all go.

She let go of her inhibitions. Her body moved, her butt lifted up, her legs opened wider to give Case's mouth total access to the sweetness she held hidden there. She looked down at him, her hands in his hair. He used his tongue like a cock. He stabbed it in and out of her. He paused occasionally to suck on her bud, run his tongue over her clit. Her eyes met his. *Heaven.*

"Tell me you like it, tell me." His voice was muffled, pressed against her wetness.

"Oh God, I love it. Show them how good it is. Taste it, Case." She rocked her body back and forth into his mouth.

"Look, baby, see what he's doing to her. Watch his tongue lick her. He wishes he could taste your pussy." Tres moaned louder when she turned her head to look. She liked what she saw. Even though she had just come, she raised her body up and arched into his mouth, ready to give him more. She felt as if she would disintegrate.

Case wanted more.

She was so light he didn't even have to call on his extraordinary strength to lift her. He grasped her hips and flipped them so that he was underneath, her pussy straddling his mouth. Now she faced the couple who watched them. Her knees were planted beside his head, and he never missed a stroke. She tasted so damn good.

“Oh God, Case, I’m coming,” Tres yelled. He knew she saw the man’s tongue darting in and out of the woman’s pussy. It drove her right over the edge. She couldn’t get enough. Her body had built so quickly toward another climax. When Tres came, it was fantastic. A hot spring of juice poured sweetness into his waiting mouth.

Tres rode his tongue like a cock when she came the second time. Case loved it. Seeing the couple in the other room turned him on so much, he was ready to explode. But when he came, he’d be buried in her slick channel. He held back.

He raised her and moved into a sitting position, his back against the bed’s headboard. Tres faced him and straddled his lap. He didn’t try to enter her yet. Now he looked at the couple in front of them. And she could watch their reflection through the mirror behind the head of the bed. Case wanted to see the woman take the man’s huge penis. Reaching between their bodies, he grasped his own rigid staff tightly around the base. He wanted to be ready to enter Tres at the same time. He speared two fingers deep inside her and watched.

“He’s going to fuck her now, baby. Can you see it?” He looked at the expression on Tres’ face and saw the need gleam in her eyes as she watched the man prepare to enter his partner’s soaked canal. “See his cock leaking? He wants her so bad. Watch. He’ll bury it in her.” Case felt Tres’ sheath tighten around his fingers.

She didn’t take her eyes from the couple. The man rubbed his hardness, ready to enter the woman’s dripping core. Case wanted to be in Tres.

“Please, give it to me, please,” she begged on a moan.

Case rubbed his broad head through the folds at the entrance to her pussy and perfectly timed, he rammed his cock into her with one hard push. “Oh yeah.” He groaned as he entered Tres at the same time the man entered his woman. “So wet and tight. Mi— It’s so good.” He couldn’t say “mine”. She would know him for sure if he said that word. But she was his. Every luscious inch of her. *Mine!*

And they could all look forever, but no one would touch what belonged to Hard Case.

He drove in and out of her pussy, and she rode him like a stallion. Up and down. She clenched her muscles and pulled him in further. She convulsed around his cock when he pulled out and pushed back in. He was so far in her, he was lost.

"He's going to come, baby. He's so close. She took all of him. She's squeezing his cock. She's milking him now. Squeeze mine. Oh, yeah. I can feel it. Yes."

Tres came again and when she crested, it flowed from her like molten lava, a hot volcanic eruption.

"Tres!" Case bellowed as he felt his balls tighten, every muscle in his body tensed in anticipation. Cum spurted from his cock and filled her up. It poured into her hot pussy. He bucked inside her until he was empty and weak.

"Oh baby. You are so good," he whispered to her. Silently, he slipped in her mind.

It's only a dream, she thought, and he wouldn't let her know any different. Tres wanted the dream to last forever so she could stay wrapped in his arms and that's where Case planned to keep her.

She liked to perform – at least in her dreams with him.

Case looked at his lifemate. He'd spend eternity trying to satisfy her as he'd done tonight. She didn't know it was real. How in the hell would he explain everything, make her understand? Because now he knew it was true.

"Best dream," she murmured in his arms.

He laid her back in her own bed and stroked the green, sweat-dampened hair from her face. God, she was so wonderful and sweet.

She is mine.

"Sleep well, *draga moja*, my own flame," Case spoke softly in her ear.

He woke in his bed, his shaft placid and sticky against his leg. He smiled and drifted back to sleep.

And slept the sleep of the dead.

Chapter Seven

It was early afternoon and Case needed sustenance. He was hungry.

He often visited the ski resorts in Big Bear to feed. There was usually one asshole daring enough to leave the marked runs. They provided nourishment to those like him. Humans were never in danger of death from his people, unless a transgressor came across their path. The Reign kept them pretty well in line around these parts.

Skiers came out of the vampyre enthrallment placed on them and thought they'd taken a tumble in the snow. They always felt lucky they hadn't broken anything, so the bruise, and the slight pain in the neck, never registered as dangerous.

It wasn't long before he found the perfect target to satiate his hunger.

Case took his fill of the unsuspecting stranger and closed the pinprick wound with his healing saliva. Another thing about skiers—their blood was sweeter than the sweetest wine. They were healthier than most humans and they supplied much needed strength to the vamp part of the cat's nature.

While he waited to make sure the guy got up okay, his sharp hearing picked up the mewling sound of a cat in the trees behind him. He smelled leopard. Snow leopard. *My snow leopard*. Why was she up here?

He continued to cloak his body and went to investigate.

It was the first time seeing her as a cat. What he saw blew him away.

As he watched the feline frolic, Case was filled with joy. He couldn't take his eyes from her. She wasn't as small as he imagined she would be. His lion, which ripped at him for release, was still twice her size.

He knew of other Kind who mated outside of their species. But he never thought he would be one of them. Often he wondered how they could be with anything other than their own. As he watched this agile, wiry cat, he understood.

She looked as hot to him in her cat's body as she was in her human form.

She was simply beautiful.

He continued to watch her bound effortlessly across the rocky terrain. Then he smelled it.

Goddammit! Case watched her sniff at the air and knew she'd scented the same thing he did – transgressor, a tiger. The foul stench of death was unmistakable. Before he had time to be rational, his beast was loosed, intending to protect its mate.

Sleek, cream-colored fur rippled up his muscular forearms, down his legs, and across his broad chest. Unlike shifters, there was no pain. His bones didn't pop or crack. This was his natural form. His face elongated, his canines dropped and, in mid-stride, his body folded over to accommodate his lion. Large paws smashed to the ground and sent a spray of snow into the frigid air.

His only thought – protect his *draga*.

* * * * *

Tres had awakened with wetness between her legs. Unable to get the wonderful dream out of her mind, she played it over and over in her head. *I'll have to add a cinematic score if I don't stop this!*

To get rid of the pent-up frustrations of her body, she decided to visit the snowy mountain peaks of Big Bear. Her snow leopard cried for release. It wanted to run through the soft, powdery coldness.

The colorful, thick fur slowly crept up her arms and legs, covering her torso. The bones expanded and popped into place. There was only a little discomfort. Her deadly claws curved out and her nostrils flared at the end of her snout. She was a predator. Her long tail swished agitatedly back and forth.

Snow leopards were smaller cats that usually weighed around one-hundred-thirty pounds. But like all shifters, she became larger in her natural form. No one understood this phenomenon. Tres was no longer the petite, pretty woman. She was close to two hundred pounds of solid muscle. In her natural habitat she could kill prey three times her size.

She was in her element. The dense, rosette-spotted fur blanketed her body with warmth as she rolled in the snow. She had found an isolated area with rocky ledges and she cavorted up and down the steep inclines. Her cat enjoyed the rugged activity.

The snow leopard reached the highest ledge and stopped abruptly. Tres' extraordinary olfactory senses picked up a scent. Vampyre. There was something familiar about it. But her eyes couldn't find him as she lifted her snout high in the air, nostrils flared, breathing deeply. Before she had time to think, another smell mingled with it. Transgressor. *Shit.*

She didn't want to deal with one of those nasty bastards. They ran in packs lately, and some with rogue vamps. She knew this blood-addicted cat was alone. The vamp didn't have the putrid scent of rogue. But she hadn't been prepared to meet either one of them this morning.

Tres, caught off guard, saw the tiger jump toward her when she suddenly smelled...*Case!* She looked left in time to see the lion fly through the air and slam into the tiger. Both cat's bodies crashed together in a horrendous sound of bone meeting bone, and rolled over and over down the steep embankment of snow.

She watched stunned as Case's lion came to his feet first and swiped a huge claw across the tiger's face. The tiger, his face bloodied, roared in pain as he reared up to strike back. The lion went up on his hind legs, bellowed a challenge and met the striped cat head on.

Case used his claws to seize the tiger by his throat. Both cats fell to the ground and grappled with each other like wrestlers. They tumbled through the snow. The lion

maneuvered the tiger onto its back and ignored the claws dug in his side. He bit into the tiger's throat.

The tiger's mournful shriek of pain said the short-lived battle was over.

But Tres saw Case didn't release the cat. He shook his strong jaws viciously back and forth. He raised his head and roared. A sound that erupted into the air like thunder. He leaned back down to his opponent who struggled to breathe through his mangled air passage. He dug a claw mercilessly into the tiger's stomach and held him pinned to the ground. The lion's jaws opened wide and bit into the striped beast's belly. He pulled back with unbelievable force and disemboweled the cat. Blood sprayed from the gaping wounds and flooded the pristine snow brilliant red.

Tres continued to watch as the lion stood to his full height, and with his large head held skyward, he roared the shattering sound of victory. The king of beasts. To anyone else he would look monstrous, his cream-colored fur covered in blood, his canines dripping with it.

To Tres' cat, and to her, he was magnificent. He'd protected her life. His green eyes focused on her, blasted her with a heated gaze.

The beast had killed for her and he'd won the snow leopard's heart.

The cat turned away, white fur began to recede and he unfolded his body upright. A bare back loomed before her.

Her snout went back into the air, sniffing.

She couldn't believe it. The vamp smell belonged to him. Now it began to make sense. The glamour, her attraction to both creatures. She knew the Kind were strong, but she had never met one with his advanced vampyre ability. The bastard had played her all along. Tres' eyes were murderous when they met his. Her cat growled and hissed angrily, its tail swishing threateningly in the air. She jumped down off the ledge past him and streaked away, leaving only her large footprints in the snow.

* * * * *

Hell and damnation, I forgot to cloak my vampyre's scent.

Assuming his vampyre's body, Case had stood naked with his back to her, the blood gone from his body. The sharp wind blew and lifted his loose hair. It wrapped around his face. With his ability to manipulate nature, he created a blanket of snow. Directing it over the dead tiger and all the blood, he covered the area, eliminating all traces of the battle that took place. There was only one problem.

He hadn't masked his vampyre's scent and when he turned to face her, he'd seen recognition dawn in her eyes before she ran away.

* * * * *

"What's up?" Alek asked.

Case had called him to the bungalow and told him about his disastrous afternoon. He also filled his friend in on the rest of what had gone on between him and Tres. All of it.

He wished for a moment he was human and could drown his sorry ass in liquor. The Wild Turkey he drank only made him more morose.

"I got fired. She barred me from my own club. Can you believe it? She won't even let me explain."

"Christ, man, I told you this shit would backfire on you."

"I don't want to use my vampyre powers. I...oh hell, I don't know what I want." Case drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair. "Yes I do. She's my *draga*. She must know by now. But I won't go to her if she doesn't want me."

"Give it some time. If you're right she'll have to come around."

"I need to get away from this. I think I'll go home to Malibu." Case stood and began to pace.

"You won't be able to stay away from her long if she's your mate."

"I'm aware of that, dammit, but there's nothing else I can do."

"I don't know why but I guess I'll have to help your furry ass out of this."

"What can you do?" Case turned to face his friend and saw a smile of anticipation on his lips.

After Alek explained his plan to bring the two of them together, Case had only one comment.

"If you touch her, if I smell one bit of desire from your tiger's ass, I'll kill you. I mean it. I'll rip your fucking heart out. You got it."

"Tres and I go way back. It's never been like that with us, man. Now, you want my help or not?"

"Please. And thank you, Alek, in case I forget to tell you later."

"Okay, let's do this."

Case hoped their plan worked. He knew he couldn't live without her. But he had one more question.

"When should I tell her I own this club and a bunch of others?"

"Shit, if I were you, I'd leave any mention of them alone right now."

"Yeah, you're right. Let's go."

* * * * *

"I don't want his ass back in this door. If he gets past any one of you, you're fired."

Tres' staff eyed her like she was a raving maniac. They were all on edge. And afraid. Not a single one of them, hell, not three or four of them together, could stop a master vamp if one wanted to come in. Tres knew that and it was unfair of her to even ask them to try.

Case was Reign too. What if he brought the Sovereign Nation down on her? Shit, she would have to call the owner. Let him know there might be trouble.

And Holly had been no help at all.

"How could you not know? You're never affected by lions. I suspected..."

"When, Hol? When did you suspect something and why the hell didn't you tell me?"

"Look, you're a big girl and a smart one. The day you said your office smelled like a mating room, the same day you told me to back off. Don't you remember? I thought something was strange then. I didn't know his lion's ass was the vamp, but I knew a connection existed between the two of you. We don't go around all willy-nilly secreting the mating scent, Tres."

"What the hell am I going to do? He took my blood, dammit. I don't want a mate. Christ, the vampyre in him is so fucking possessive I can't breathe when I think about it. And he's a lion, for hell's sake. He likes the heat. Let's not even deal with the fact he's Kind." Tres paced to her desk and stopped. "Shit, he'll probably strangle me in my sleep if I look at another man sideways. How can I work like that, Holly? And it's a damn good thing I didn't get fleas."

Tres knew she was ranting, but she couldn't stop.

"I like to watch people fuck. It turns me on. How can I get satisfaction with my *mate* breathing down my back constantly? You know how it is with those guys. You've heard the stories." She'd also heard the Kind would die for their *draga*. That's what she was now. A Kind lion's true mate.

She paced the floor and struggled to hold her cat at bay. It clawed without mercy at her insides, wanting to be free. The snow leopard needed her mate.

"And when he tells me I can't watch anymore, when he gets all jealous and possessive on me, what will I do? I mean it, I'll be afraid to close my eyes at night next to the crazy son of a bitch.

"Well, at least you've come to the realization he will be lying there beside you." Her friend's eyes pierced her. "You had to let the thing with Griffin go someday."

"Get the fuck out of my office, Hol. You're no help at all."

Tres continued to pace back and forth. Her friend was right. She knew she couldn't be without him. Since the first time the vamp touched her, or was it the lion? Oh,

whichever the hell one it was, she was lost. It was no wonder she never had a dry moment when the cat was around.

Draga. She was a shifter but she knew what the word meant. And now she understood her dream.

It was real.

She was dying inside already. It hurt like hell to think she wouldn't see Case again. Her leopard covered the distance inside her with the same ferocity as Tres paced her office floor. If she released her cat right now she'd find him. Wherever he was.

"Oh shit, this is so fucked up."

And she knew unless she wanted to spend the rest of her days talking to herself and pacing the floor, she had to go to him. When she thought about Case, both of them, she dripped. She had no control over her body. *I can't live without watching. At least sometimes.*

She tried to be rational. *The vampyre likes to watch. The lion likes to perform.* In fact, the lion showed her she liked to perform as well. *Which one would I choose to be with?* Tres wanted them both.

There was one thing she was positive of.

One or the other, preferably both, of those bastards will apologize to me.

She'd make sure of it.

* * * * *

Case had known his friend was hot for Holly.

Alek brought her back to the performer's room. They talked and Case saw her smile broadly, he knew she agreed to help with their plan. Evidently she liked to perform, and in that arena, Alek was a master. This should be good.

"I was right," Alek said as he materialized in front of him. "She likes to watch Holly. Don't worry, she'll get Tres back here. You need to be cool though. About me, I mean. Tres has watched me before. There is nothing there, dude, and you'll see that. I

think the leopard only has eyes for you, or the vamp.” Case’s friend was being a wise-ass when he added the last part.

“I’ve watched people I know before. I’m cool with it if you are.” Case’s voice was hesitant.

“Yeah, but you’ve never watched with your mate. Tres is really into this scene and I know you are. Now’s the time for you to find out if this is something you both will be able to do together, as *draga*. From what I’ve seen, especially with the Reign, we tend to be a little more possessive than most.”

“She performed with me in our dream together. I was okay with it.”

“The dream with *draga* feels and smells real but it’s still a dream, bro.”

“I can’t imagine the rest of my days unable to watch or to perform sometimes, Alek. What will we do if we can’t do this for real?”

“I can’t help you there, Hard Case, that’s your demon to fight. One thing at a time, let’s get her back here. Wait next door. I’m sure you’ll know when she comes in.”

Case knew his friend had a demon of his own. He was addicted to the blood of the Kind prince. An addiction he fed with vicious regularity. He often wondered if Alek’s excessive sexual appetite for females was because of the pull he felt for another male.

He knew the minute Tres entered the private room next door. He could smell her. The desire slammed into him like a baseball bat. His beast roared inside like the wild animal it was. *God, what if I can’t do this?* How would either of them live?

What he should think about was how to make her understand why he hadn’t been honest with her.

* * * * *

When he materialized in the room, Tres was watching the scene unfold in front of her. He invaded her mind and found her thoughts on how fantastic it would make her feel to see Alek and Holly perform together. Tres also knew Holly told her about the

performance with Alek so she *would* watch them. She intended to pleasure herself and forget her own problems for a little while.

Their friends were two very sexual beasts. Case saw Alek on the other side of the mirror fondle Holly's naked breasts. His head bent over her peaks as he licked circles around first one then the other. He pushed his hand into her hair and pulled her head back roughly and kissed her neck. He licked and sucked at her pulse as he prepared to sink his fangs into her vein. Alek liked "taking the blood" when he fucked his partners.

Case knew Tres' hand stroked her clit inside of her unzipped pants. Her scent blazed around the room like an uncontrollable fire. It filled his nostrils with such sweet delight.

He released his lion's smell.

"Tres," he whispered, "I'm so sorry, baby. I never meant to deceive you. When I read your mind and you said I had fleas, I freaked the fuck out. I didn't know I would fall in love with you."

Attuned to both his scents now, she knew he was there. He let his guard down for her. She wanted him, whichever one he was. And she expected an apology—from one or the other. He smiled at her thought. Case knew she deserved that and more.

He'd apologized, every bit of it sincere. He felt her mind wrap around his words and it was enough for her. But she worried. Tres was afraid. The darkness still lived there.

"Tell me what's wrong, baby, please."

"Shh. Watch this with me. Can you...can you always do that?" She waited for his answer.

Alek was on his knees, his face buried in Holly's pussy. Case could see his tongue move in and out of her as he smacked her ass. Each time his hand landed, she jammed her pussy closer, tighter into his waiting mouth. She tweaked her own kiss-swollen nipples, her head thrown back in the throes of passion, her long golden hair whipped about her face. Tres' fingers were buried deep in her own wetness.

"I can watch with you, I can perform with you and I don't care who sees us." And Case meant it. This was what he had waited for. He knew deep in his soul Tres was the right one. The one who could do this with him forever. "They can't touch you, baby. No one can ever kiss your sweet lips, touch your sweet pussy or taste its delicious honey but me. They can watch my beautiful leopard forever. And you can watch all you want. You can't ever touch anyone else, Tres." His blood boiled at the thought of it.

"I need you, Case. I need to feel your arms around me, your fingers inside me. You do it so much better than I do." Tres continued to watch as Alek stood and Holly went down on her knees in front of him. The size of Alek's cock was unbelievable. Case smiled as she watched her friend take all of it in her mouth. Tres' fingers worked her own clit harder. "Look how she takes all of his big cock in her mouth." Alek had Holly's blonde hair fisted in his hand and he held her head still as he plunged his shaft in and out of her tight mouth.

Case used magic to undress them both, and stood behind Tres. His cock was pressed tight against her back and grew painfully bigger.

"She knows what he likes. God, she sucks him so good." His fingers replaced hers, and they went deep inside her while he watched his friend get the blowjob of a lifetime from the pretty blonde at his feet. "Damn, Tres, I'm going to explode all over your back."

"No you won't, you can't come until he does. He's fucking her mouth like it was a pussy. Shit, he's huge and so hard."

"You like his big cock, baby?"

"Oh yeah, but it's yours I want inside me, every inch of it."

He watched Alek lift Holly from the floor and wrap her legs around his waist as his length slid into her. He impaled her with his cock. Case's sensitive hearing heard her moan and it heightened his already blatant arousal.

He picked Tres up and held her with her thighs spread so wide, Case knew it hurt. She pressed her hands against the glass to brace herself. He entered her from behind

and coaxed a hiss from her sweet lips. He sank his thick shaft in her tight pussy. He knew she liked it when she started to ride him, bucking up and down.

"Baby, easy, or I'll fill you up with my hot cum *right* now." He watched Alek move to the bed and place Holly there on her knees. He knew what his friend would do, and it drove him out of his mind with lust. Case watched him move his fingers through his partner's soaked nether lips. He drew wetness from her and used it to moisten between her cheeks. She reared back onto the wet finger he inserted in her anus. "Oh shit, Tres, don't move. Please, don't move."

Case would lose it if she even quivered.

Tres said, "She can take all of it. She'll milk him dry."

"Don't, I can't... Dammit," Case exclaimed as he lifted her off his cock and threw her onto the big loveseat. He spread Tres' legs and bent his knees, prepared to enter her slick pussy.

"Yes, that's what I need. Fuck me hard, Case."

His cock throbbed as he drove it into her. He tried to reach her soul. He stroked in and out so hard, he heard her whimper. He held her legs high and wide as he thrust his hips, pumping his hardness in her. He leaned forward to cover her mouth with his and savor her sweetness. Their tongues danced together and fought for control. He could feel her pussy convulse, ready to come all over his cock. He couldn't wait.

"Come with me, Tres. I'm going to come...*now*," he bellowed, before his body exploded, ripped apart like an earthquake. He poured hot semen into her and pounded it further in with each push. *Mine!* "Baby, you belong to me. All of this belongs to me," he croaked loudly.

"Yes, it's yours."

Case collapsed to his knees in front of her and Tres held his head pressed to her breast.

"I belong to you, heart and soul, baby." It was true. He wouldn't have it any other way. "There's something else I need to tell you." He didn't want any more secrets from her.

"Mmm...what," she whispered.

"*The Looking Glass* is mine. I have seven other clubs like it around the country and three in Europe."

She stiffened as her breath caught in her throat. Case held his own.

"What are you telling me?"

"I'm telling you, *draga moja*, you are a very wealthy businesswoman. What's mine is yours. You're my life's mate. We will spend eternity together."

Still in her mind, Case felt Tres take his words in. Suddenly, she grew sad. Tres wanted to be with him forever. At least for as long as she lived.

"What do those words mean, *draga moja*?"

"They mean my own, my flame."

"My species don't live as long as yours." Her voice trembled.

"You're my mate and my people will expect me to change you. But only if it's what you desire. Tres, you will become lion and you may lose your leopard." He sent a silent prayer she'd want the change.

"I want to be with you forever." His heart soared with happiness. "But I don't know if I can let my leopard go. At least not yet."

"We can wait until you're sure." He'd give her time, but he wanted to taste her blood again. Case teased her swollen nipples with his teeth then pulled her head down. His tongue swirled over the pulse in her neck. His fangs slipped down and captured her vein. He sucked her blood until full. Using saliva, he closed and healed the pinpricks.

This time she opened her mind to him completely. Case hissed in a breath as he saw the pain she'd locked away for so many years. The growl swelled out of his throat, his

fangs bared, red with her blood. Tres covered his mouth with her small hands, her fingertips on his lips. He kissed each one and sucked them. "No one will ever hurt you again. I promise you that." Case wanted to kill the bastard and would if he ever met him.

"Taste my life, *draga*. My blood is strong and will give you a connection to me." He opened his wrist and placed it at her mouth. Tres latched on like a newborn and sucked hard. The blood sang through his veins with each pull. When she finished, he closed the wound. "You will only know my blood. And now, my thoughts as I've known yours."

"Maybe we should visit your...our other properties and make sure they're being run properly," Tres said as she licked her lips.

"I agree, one hundred percent." His cock hardened at the thought of all they would see together.

"I think Holly will love my job." Tres smiled.

"Good, because Hard Case has a full-time position for you." Case lay on the floor and pulled Tres down with him. He intended to enjoy his mate once more while they watched their friends have each other.

Case felt her probe at his mind, and then he heard her.

And don't give me fleas, lion.

Never. But about the green hair...

About the Author

J. Hali Steele currently lives in Southeastern Pennsylvania but her dream is to return to the high desert of California. She shares space with four furfriends (cats) and enjoys spending time with family and friends. Her passion has always been reading romance novels, especially those with vampires and happy endings.

A multi-published author, J. Hali is a member of the RWA and its Passionate Ink chapter. When she's not writing, she can be found snuggling in front of the TV with a good book, a cat in her lap and a cup of coffee.

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