



ANH LEOD

Scarlet Rose

PLAYING
Lycan
GAMES

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by

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Dedication

For Leander

Chapter One

Under the waning moon, the wolf sniffed the evening air. He smelled green shrubs and purple grapes, car exhaust, warm bodies, and wine from his position outside a square cedar-planked building full of humans. All were enticing, familiar aromas, though he wasn't sure what had brought him into civilization tonight.

He tilted his head this way and that, until he caught a scent, much fainter now, on the wind. He recognized the female. *His female?* The thought triggered some indefinable change deep inside and the wolf panicked, scraping the dry dirt with his paws in preparation to run. Should he flee back into the hills, the woods? No, the compulsion, the pull of the woman, was too great. The great creature blinked then began to transform.

First, the fur receded from his body. His bones changed painfully, remolding into shapes meant for a different musculature. The elegance was still there, but the form was new. Claws became nails, paws became hands, ears changed position on his head. Now, he stood upright.

When the wolf was man, strong yet vulnerable, he reached for the pack the wolf had held in his teeth during his long journey and unzipped it to find clothes—a gray suit and white shirt, not so different from the coloring of the wolf. Who had packed it? He pushed sockless feet into soft dark shoes that somehow matched the suit. Then, standing, he pulled one last small item from the pack and tossed the empty bag behind a dumpster.

The wallet opened and he squinted at it in the

moonlight, finding an Oregon driver's license. Was that his name—Jem Valentine? The face was thirty-something. He had a cleft in his chin, five-o'clock shadow, long, chocolate-colored sideburns, and a fringe of unruly curls on his forehead. Fingering his chin, Jem found the cleft. Scattered details of his life before the wolf flashed by. He blinked in his human form now, as his brain slowly began to process human thought. Jem wondered how he could forget his human life so quickly once he became the wolf. His lungs expanded with the scent of the night, but he could no longer say what the wolf found memorable. He folded the wallet and placed it in the inside jacket pocket.

His woman waited for him. He went in search of the building's entrance.

Catee tucked her camera into the voluminous shoulder bag she always carried and accepted a tasting glass from a waiter. Technically, she was here to shoot photos for an updated brochure the Columbia Hood Winery had commissioned, as they did every August, but she wasn't about to say no to a fine glass of merlot. Besides, it might relax her for the sensual game she had planned for later.

"Thanks." She smiled until the man moved on, then gently swirled the glass and breathed in the fragrance of the grapes, watching a crowd of two dozen tourists mill around the room's tasting stations. The chattering melted away as she took her first velvety sip of wine and thought vaguely of photographing the tasting party. The merlot slid smoothly across her tongue. She could drink the entire half glass without noticing, especially if she started talking to someone.

Catee hadn't eaten that day and didn't have much of a head for wine, so she glanced around, searching for munchies. There was a crudités platter

on a table in the center of the room, but it was already down to the last wilted inch of celery. All that remained was a glass bowl of cellophane-wrapped fortune cookies, so she shrugged and grabbed one before the tourists gobbled them up as well. She couldn't leave in search of food right now.

Hungry, she unwrapped it quickly. When she had downed half the cookie, she glanced at the fortune peeping out of the other half. The message was intriguing, to say the least.

A romantic mystery will add interest to your life.

She smiled. A romantic mystery, well if that wasn't the absolute definition of—

A man entered through French doors that opened onto a patio. His face had strong planes, as if the same sculptor who'd carved the south hillside along the Columbia River had chiseled him too. To her photographer's eye, the hills looked unfinished, like the sculptor had found another project and drifted away. But this man's face suited his expression, body, and clothing perfectly. He looked strong, cool and collected...and enticing. Eyes of dark coal danced above a long, firm rose-colored mouth, which quirked when he caught her staring.

"See something you like?" he asked, walking over.

Catee drank in the sight of him for one long moment, then handed him her fortune. "I was just thinking you looked like a romantic mystery."

His smile widened as he glanced at the slip of paper. He had large, square white teeth. She thought of Little Red Riding Hood. Maybe he wanted to gobble her up. A pleasant shiver ran down her spine at the thought.

"A touch of whimsy. I like that in a woman."

He was sinfully gorgeous, from the mussed hair right down to the dusty shoes. His mere presence made her skin tingle. Her nipples were tightening

under her business-like blouse and she could tell he'd noticed. Maybe she'd suggest they leave together now and not waste any time with their usual games. She tilted her head flirtatiously, thinking about how he might nibble her neck with those teeth. The sensitive skin on her neck sent messages straight to her pussy when it was teased. Welcoming messages. Sex messages.

The tasting room manager sidled up to them and plucked the last bit of wilted celery from the tray, tucking it into the pocket of her apron. "Can I get you a glass of wine, sir? I believe you just arrived?"

"What do you have available this evening?" The man kept his eyes on Catee while he spoke to the manager.

"You might like the Sangiovese," she said, touching a curl of bright hair resting on her shoulder. "It's rich, earthy, and spicy with a taste of fruit."

"Very good," he said in an intimate tone that left Catee wondering what he meant. He was focused on her as if she was the only woman in the room.

As her breath caught in her throat, she deduced he was a man so used to having subordinates that he barely noticed them. Did he have employees? A company? She suspected he did. How had he remained so mysterious?

"Tell me about yourself," she suggested, taking another sip of wine.

The overhead lights added a sheen to his lower lip. "I don't have much to tell. Besides, you're more interesting."

Her stomach tightened, whether from pique or a lack of food she wasn't sure. Mystery was a less appealing part of the game tonight, though she wasn't sure why. "That isn't true."

He gestured to the camera hanging at her side.

“Working?”

“Whenever someone will pay the bill,” she said lightly. Not that getting her bills paid was a problem these days, but it had been another matter eight years ago when she was just starting out. This job at the winery had been an important anchor for her career. “But I have the rest of the weekend to myself.”

“Are you staying around here?”

She nodded, playing along. “At the Damview Hotel.”

“Nice views,” the man commented. His teeth flashed. “At the hotel, I mean.”

The corners of her mouth tilted up at his joke. “Been there before?” she teased.

She watched the man’s slow blink, could almost see his brain processing. The low hum of voices in the room increased as someone told a joke and a group of people laughed.

“I believe so.”

“I’m only here a couple times a year,” she said, as if that was new information. “Once to do the winery brochure update and once for the holiday greeting card.”

He pushed his hands into the pockets of his suit pants and rocked his pelvis forward.

She couldn’t help but notice the bulge in his pants. Her fingers clasped then unclasped in response to the impressive bump noticeable through the fine gray fabric. She wanted to touch, to mold the contours of his flesh in her hand.

“Do you have friends in the area?” he asked. “How did you get the job?”

She’d never been entirely clear on the details herself. “The owner offered me the job.”

“You know the owner?” the tasting room manager asked, frankly curious, as she returned just in time to hear Catee’s comment and brought the

man his wine. "I've never even seen him. He only communicates by email."

Catee glanced at the man, but he said nothing. "He's elusive."

The woman touched her hair again. "I've heard he's rich. Think he's single?"

Catee smiled at the woman's eager question. "I couldn't say. Just emails for me too."

"I'd sure love some Prince Charming to snap me up," the woman commented wistfully. Every part of her was tiny, doll-like, and perfect, as if painstakingly molded into the physical standard of a fairy book princess. Catee hadn't seen her here before. She'd probably taken the job to meet a rich tourist.

"I'm Catee," she said, holding out her hand. "You're new?"

"Briana," the woman said, taking Catee's hand and shaking it. "I've only been here since May."

"Thank you for the wine. We have everything we need now," the man said, dismissing Briana as he raised the glass to his lips and drank deeply.

Catee thought he was being rude and Briana picked up his vibe too. The woman's skin flushed.

"Enjoy your wine," she said in a brittle tone, then moved back behind a tasting table, her perfect perky butt tilting with each step.

"You don't find her attractive?" Catee asked. "She's exquisite."

"Not my type." He put a finger under Catee's chin, tilting her head up for his perusal. "You, on the other hand, are exactly my type."

"Tall?" Catee felt her cheeks heat under his gaze. The rest of the blood in her body pooled south. She spread her legs slightly.

"Athletic."

"Oh. Well, I do keep active." A vision of bodies thrashing on sheets flashed through her mind. But

that didn't happen nearly often enough.

"Want to get out of here?" the man asked, setting the empty glass and her paper fortune on a tray.

"No more verbal foreplay?" Catee asked as he released her chin. "No more charm? No seductive moves?"

His nostrils flared. "I can smell your heat."

She had been trying to ignore the moist warmth building in her pussy, the way she responded to his untamed scent, but noticed a growing thickness in his pants as well. What was it about her that aroused him? What was it about him that aroused her? She felt like she could crawl right out of her skin. Was it simple animal magnetism? He had plenty.

"It is August," she countered, hoping to prolong their dance. "Maybe it's sweat."

He glanced around them, then took a step toward her, inexorably moving her backward until she could feel cool glass behind her back. He blocked her from view and then, before she could protest, his thick fingers pinched her left nipple through her silk blouse.

Her mouth opened in shock. A dagger of delight bit into her belly and her clit tightened into a strung out bundle of nerves. She was outraged, she was excited. His move might be more blatant than seductive, but it was also exactly what her body craved. What it always craved when she came here.

"It was pouting for me," the man said.

"We're in public," she protested. Not that it wasn't a turn on to think people might be watching. But the hum in the room hadn't increased again.

She glanced over his broad shoulder, saw Briana watching them, hunger in her eyes. As the women's glances caught, the manager turned away.

"Maybe if you'd worn underclothes, I wouldn't be

so tempted.” He moved his shoulders sinuously, his jacket hugging his well-developed upper body.

Was it that obvious? She folded her arms over her chest and assumed a snotty tone. “It’s hot. That doesn’t mean I want to be pounced on.”

His expression was the smile of a predator sensing his prey was close. “Stop pretending you aren’t drenched in lust for me.”

“You aren’t *that* breathtakingly gorgeous,” she blurted, then put her hand to her mouth. Only a half glass of wine and she had already lost her inhibitions.

Perhaps sensing she had more inhibitions to lose, the man raised a finger to the tasting room manager and Briana arrived with two tasting-size glasses of marionberry port.

“You’ll love this,” she gushed as if they were complete strangers again. “It’s sweet yet tart, very rich and refreshing.”

The man took the glasses and turned away, shutting her out of the conversation. Catee was too turned on to care now. Her pussy was vibrating and it wouldn’t take much to send her over the edge. If he touched her again she might even moan aloud.

She took a glass from him. Her mouth was dry, probably because all the moisture in her body was ripening her for him. His self-assurance was so damn irresistible, and she hadn’t been with a man since last October. Catee couldn’t wait much longer. Her nerve endings, especially those in her pussy, were tingling wildly. She needed to stop and think rationally, but what the hell. This was what she wanted. Dinner first might have been sensible, an extension of their pretense, but fast, hot sex now was better.

She drained the glass, barely tasting the expensive contents. He raised his bulky eyebrows at her action, then saluted her with his glass and

drank it down.

“Let’s go,” she said, taking the glass from his hand and setting it on a tray.

“No more foreplay?” He was teasing her now, and she knew it.

“As if you need it. I can tell you’re a man of action.” She touched his biceps, felt the muscles flex in response.

“I hope you’ve taken proper precautions.”

“Such as?” Her fingers trailed up his arm and grazed his earlobe. The diamond chip from a ring on her right hand sparkled.

“How do you know I’m safe?” His eyes glowed, caught by the same light as her ring.

Her stiletto heels left the ground as she rose, placing her mouth at his ear. “I know you aren’t.”

She winked at the staring Briana as she tucked her hand around his bicep and pulled him toward the door.

The French doors he’d entered through were the nearest exit, right next to the window where they stood. She opened them and felt a gentle warm breeze from the river rush over her, cooling her skin, if not her pussy. Her hand released his arm as she delighted in the wind.

Beyond was a concrete terrace lit with floodlights. She remembered the parking lot was around the other side so she walked toward the east side of the building. It would offer privacy from prying eyes.

A strong hand on her arm stopped her. “Where are you going? It’s dark over there.”

She slid her arm around his waist, pulling him near. “Maybe I want darkness.”

Another step brought them to the edge of the concrete. “The dumpster is in that direction,” he said.

She wrinkled her nose and turned. “We’ll go the

other way.”

His chuckle mingled with the breeze from the river and swelled around her, mysterious but very romantic all the same. The jacket under her arm covered firm, warm flesh.

“I love August,” she said, stopping to inhale. “The air is so soft and silky. It’s almost like being indoors, but there’s a sense of possibility.”

“What could you possibly do outdoors in August?” he asked, a hint of seduction in his growl.

Her camera bag and purse dropped to the ground as she leaned against the wall of the winery, away from the windows. She arched her back and relaxed into the dark. The river was a black surface beyond. “Bet you can guess.”

His hand moved down to cup her ass. She heard his jacket sleeve scrape the wall behind her. “I don’t need to guess. I already know the answer.”

His fingers tightened and momentary fear rushed through her as his nails bit into her tender flesh. The grip was intimate, but she wished his hand would slide in the other direction and find a place to make contact. Her first orgasm would come hard and fast, but it would be far from the last one she’d experience tonight. She knew he’d make sure of that. His scent had changed now, underscored with a hint of aroused male musk. Her tongue tingled in her mouth, longing to taste him.

She hooked her foot around the back of his leg and pulled him close, using her arms to bring her body against his. The heat of his erection radiated against her belly. Their wine-soaked breath mingled. His fingers rubbed against the cleft of her ass. Her cheeks clenched instinctively.

Forget dinner. He was running those hard, clever fingers along her hips in little circles that excited her nerve endings. Almost without thought, her feet spread, the stance allowing her to fit one of

his thick thighs between her legs. He chuckled again and moved his hands back to her ass, encouraging her to rub against him. The intimate connection made her nerves sing, but she wanted to feel his raw skin against hers.

"I feel naughty," she whispered, nipping at his neck. Her tongue darted out to taste his warm, salty skin. He smelled familiar and wild all at the same time.

"You are naughty." His hands zipped up to cup her breasts, ensuring she couldn't want anything but him inside her *now*. Feeling it imperative, Catee pulled open his suit jacket, reaching for the inner pocket. She touched a thin square with a hard circle inside. Just what she'd expected.

"You came prepared," she murmured, rubbing herself against him.

"Did I?" he said. "It's hard to remember."

Her voice came out as a gasp. "Maybe you don't have much of a head for wine either."

"What's clouding my thinking is you," he said. "From the second I scented you, I forgot everything else."

She lifted the packet to her teeth and held it there so she could work on his trousers. He wasn't wearing a belt. Her fingers slid against his warm, furry skin as she opened the fastenings. He wasn't wearing underclothes either and his cock sprang free, proud and straight against her belly when she slid down the zipper. She moaned under her breath and couldn't resist the urge to take him in one fist and pump up and down the long length. His breathing changed. They were two of a kind, ready for pleasure under the warm August sky.

After a deep breath of the wild air, she tore open the packet until she held the delicate rolled edge of the condom. She fit the ring to the edge of his flared cock head and began to unroll it.

Her knees felt weak and she was desperate to taste his cock, but even more strongly, she needed to take his thick length inside her pussy. They had time to play later. Right now, she had needs.

He bit back a grunt as her fingers smoothed it to his root. "You really mean business, don't you?"

"Ten months is a long time to wait. What do you expect?" she said.

He didn't speak, just pushed her away from his leg so he could tug up her skirt until the front panel was at her waist. His body held her against the warm wall and his fingers gripped her thighs, pulling until her drenched pussy found the tip of his sheathed cock.

She sobbed at the feel of his thickness as he pushed into her.

"Okay?" he whispered.

"It feels so good," she whimpered. "Keep going until there's nothing left. I want it all."

"Like this?" He thrust hard, seating himself to the hilt, his bent knees keeping her thighs spread wide.

She went up on her tiptoes to accommodate his height, felt his body shudder. "Yeah, just like that. You have the perfect cock."

He moved again, the pressure building and her inner walls separating as he swelled. Her toes momentarily lifted from the ground. She adjusted her hips, tilting into him, allowing him to penetrate her more deeply. Already the smell of sex filled her nostrils. Her body heat, the light floral perfume she'd sprayed along her body, the feral, woodsy scent of his flesh added texture to the building tension. She wanted the moment to last forever. The great outdoors had always captured her like this, turned her on, but she'd never been able to indulge before him, another soul willing to play in the open air.

When he thrust again, she felt him almost to her

bones. "Yes," she told him, "like that. Every time."

He inhaled and pulled away, but she kept tilting, finding his length and gripping him.

"It can't be fast," she gasped when she was impaled again. "I want to come multiple times."

"It will be fast," He growled. "You feel too good on my cock."

"Yeah, I like your cock." She lifted a hand, pushed her shoulder length hair out of her face, and tried to keep breathing. Her hands felt the knotted cords of his neck. Not only was he fucking her, he was practically holding her up, all 5'11" of her.

Of course he was as tall as his cock was long, as broad as he was thick. Hadn't she felt the power of his chest when she'd hunted for his pocket? She could trust his strength.

"I like it," she said. "All of it. Let me take you in."

He thrust into her again and she keened, a low sound that melted into the gentle waves on the river. She heard an answering sound from his throat and pressed harder, glad for the wall keeping her in position.

She squeezed and released as he entered. His hands, creeping to her ass for a better grip, felt slippery now from his perspiration and hers. Every moment was sensuous torture, ecstatic strain.

Damn, she didn't want to come, but she was so wide open to his thrusts. She tried to tilt, keep the pressure on her clit, but she was spiraling already, calling out, panting. The intensity made her senses dim, her ears buzz, and her vision go dark.

"Fuck." He pushed into her hard, ramming into her flesh, exploding in staccato bursts. Her body answered his, pulsing with his beat.

Then she couldn't breathe. His chest anchored her to the wall, his head resting against it. She put her hands on his pecs and pushed. He stumbled

back, his cock pulling out of her. Suddenly panicked, she ran toward the river and collapsed on her knees at the edge of a railing above the slope, gasping for air. It hadn't been enough, but she was winded anyway, overwhelmed. Too long out of practice. Too much time alone. Not enough food in her belly.

The breeze caught in her throat and she coughed. She sensed the man kneel beside her. He put his warm hand on her back.

"I'm Jem," he said, when the roaring had left her ears. "I have a wallet, money too, I think."

What an odd thing to say, as if she wouldn't know. "It doesn't matter," she said. "I told you, I've got a place to stay, money of my own."

"I want to take care of you."

"For tonight," she said bitterly. "No point in making this a regular event, like a relationship."

"Don't be angry," Jem said. "You don't really know me. But our bodies like each other."

There was an understatement. "Just give me a minute, okay? Then you can take me to my room." She felt nauseated, maybe as much from the hard contractions of her orgasm as from the pressure of his body against hers when she was leaning on the wall. It had felt so good at the time. She hated when it was over. But it had been ten full months and she had forgotten that sense of loss—as soon as it started it was going to be over.

She stared at the tiny lights dotting the water from houses on the Washington State side. Jem was humming something, his voice pitched low and his hand tangled in her hair. The tune was gorgeous and she recognized it from long ago.

When she sighed, he gave up his tune.

"We'd better get you to your room. Do you want me to carry you?"

"That's not necessary," she said. "You looked tired in the tasting room."

"I'm strong, but I came a long way to be here."

"Me too, I guess. I live in Beaverton, did you know?" She wanted him to know something about her.

She saw his teeth flash. "That's a funny name."

"Really." She held out her hand. "Help me stand."

After he helped her up, they went back across the terrace. Her legs trembled and her equilibrium was off, maybe as much from the wine as the sex. After she recovered her belongings, Jem led her toward the dumpster side, where he stooped and picked something up. It was a duffel bag.

"I brought this," he said, taking her hand again.

She fumbled for her car keys, which were hiding at the bottom of her purse. Though her hotel was just up a hill across the road, she'd driven so she'd have the trunk to store her photographic equipment. On Monday, she'd finish the job and return home to sort through the photos and update the brochure. But the rest of this weekend was playtime.

When they reached her car, she let go of his hand and stepped to the passenger side, which had the only lock that opened all the doors at once. She turned to invite him in and saw him haloed by the moonlight. The moon had been full the night before and it was still bright and prominent in the landscape.

She noticed he was hunched a bit, his arms hanging loosely at his sides, like any moment he would lean forward and walk on all fours. His hair bristled in the moonlight, making it appear longer than it was.

Her fingers trembled and the keys dropped out of her hands. Was this safe? The clattering noise of her key ring against the smooth paint of the door brought her to her senses. She bent and grabbed the keys, pulling them out of the lock. When she looked

up, he was moving toward her. She held out her keys defensively, points forward.

His smile was gentle as he reached her and he looked just as he had, his hair tousled from her fingers. "Everything okay?"

She swallowed hard, dismissing her strange fantasy. "The wine must be going to my head. All I've had to eat today is half of a fortune cookie."

Chapter Two

Catee wished Jem had offered to drive given her shaky condition, but instead he shut the door when she swung her legs into the driver seat and moved to the passenger side.

"I'm glad my hotel is just up the hill," she said.

"Let's go through the drive-thru first, get you something to eat." There was that voice of command again, but she didn't mind because he was taking care of her.

He had noticed how she was feeling and she appreciated it. "I thought only locals knew about that place."

He frowned as if irritated with himself. "I've been here before."

He must have something wrong with his memory. That was the only explanation that made sense. Getting involved should have been a bad idea, but his body was prime even if his mind was a little fuzzy at times. She couldn't resist, had never resisted, in fact. "Let's go," she agreed, realizing the shaking in her limbs hadn't subsided.

After picking up burgers and fries from the hole-in-the-wall restaurant, they got back in the car.

"Just sit here and eat," he urged. "You don't smell right."

"Okay," she agreed. Smell right? Maybe he meant look right? He was different, that was for sure.

"Here. You aren't moving very fast." He held a French fry, dripping with ketchup, to her mouth. She caught the drips of tart red sauce on her tongue,

then bit down on the fry, naughtily nipping the tip of his finger in the process.

He grinned. "No fair taking off my fingers. You can't be that hungry."

She noticed how his hair stood up from his scalp in thick tufts. He needed a comb. Her mouth went dry as she remembered what had caused his hair to get so mussed. He held up another fry and she took that one between her teeth too, knowing she needed to stabilize her blood sugar before any further activities of a sensual nature. Still, though, she desired him intensely and the nerve endings in her pussy flickered to life with each calorie she swallowed.

"Do they custom-cook hamburgers at this dive?" she asked, biting off another fry and opening her greasy bag. What she really wanted was her cheeseburger.

"Why?"

"You asked for it rare. I've never heard anyone request a specific doneness outside of a sit-down restaurant."

"Oh." He ate a fry. "I don't think I go into restaurants very often."

"Where do you live?"

He gestured vaguely in a way that could have meant south or east. "It's very rural. I have a lot of acreage."

"Do you farm or ranch?"

"No." He ate another fry, then took a sip from his milk carton. "It's all wild. Beautiful country."

"Then what do you live on?"

"I have businesses."

How did he manage to run them? Her eyes closed in bliss when she bit into her burger. The bun was sweet, laced with mayonnaise, ketchup, pickles, and cheese. Gastronomic heaven, but certainly caloric suicide. Still, if she was only going to manage

one meal a day, she could justify the meat and cheese. Besides, it came complete with a tomato slice and lettuce—all part of a balanced diet. Catee noticed Jem wasn't eating his tomato or lettuce, or the bun either, for that matter. The air in the car filled with the rich scent of beef.

"Are you on a special diet?" she asked, wiping her fingers on a scratchy paper napkin.

"No. I just like meat, mostly." He pulled a strip of the hamburger and dropped it into his mouth. His lips glistened.

He had a gorgeous mouth and, what the hell, her lips were greasy too. She tossed the remains of her burger onto the dashboard and wrapped her right arm around his neck, pulling him close.

His lips met hers, tasting of ketchup and surprise. *Delicious*. She opened her mouth, offering herself and his tongue moved in, exploring every contour and crevice.

He slid sensuously along her tongue, inviting her to play. She investigated his lips, his teeth. Thick muscles bunched under her wandering hands and he pulled her from her seat with his arms around her waist, until she was straddling his lap.

"Could we?" she asked. "Anyone could see us here. We're under the light."

His only answer was the creak of his zipper. Oh why not, she'd found possible exposure a turn-on at the winery. Every year, she became a little more daring. She grabbed her purse and felt through the little inside pocket for a condom.

"Thanks," he said, taking it from her. Deftly, he opened it and sheathed himself while her mouth watered anew at the sight of his luscious cock.

"I still want a taste," she told him.

"Later." He tossed the condom wrapper aside.

She pulled up her skirt, letting it settle around his lap, blocking their nudity if not the rhythm of

their actions. He pulled her down on his rigid cock. Her head fell back as she settled, her folds welcoming him with slick heat. The blood in her veins moved sluggishly, but her mind felt light. He pulled her deep, hard, sluicing through her core, setting a rhythm of impatient speed.

"I never stop wanting you," he said. "You're better than food."

"Then why?" she asked. "Never mind."

Catee bent her head and rested her face against his shoulder, letting him guide her rise and fall against him. Better than food? Yes, he was certainly better than her dinner. Her clit jolted every time she swiveled down on him. He was hitting an amazing spot deep inside her channel. Instinctively, she swayed on his lap, making circles, dancing almost. He hummed an old song and she fell into his rhythm.

After thirty seconds, he was having none of that game and contained her hips within his grasp, stopping her movements.

"Hey," she protested. She'd been having a good time.

"Focus," he said with a wolfish grin.

In response, she gripped him tightly with her pussy and tore at his shirt with her hands, knowing she was adding grease stains to the white fabric and not caring. The shirt was new and the buttonholes were stiff, but she got a few open and breathed in the scent of the pelt on his chest.

The hair felt springy against her face. It smelled warmly of some elemental spice. Her body responded by releasing even more moisture, drenching his cock. He pumped in and out, a straight up and down rhythm that hit every pleasure point in her body and brain.

"I should be eating," she moaned.

He responded by placing his fingers in her

mouth.

She laughed around them, sucking the French fry salt from his digits. "Don't tempt me. Oh God."

"You always tempt me." His words were forced through his lips slowly, like he was trying to hold them back.

A funny sensation boogied through her belly, like trickles of light were skipping through her center. It was beginning again. She clenched, keeping him in place so she could grind her clit against the root of his cock. He grabbed her ass and held on, making every moment a glorious torment. Catee's entire body began to vibrate with her coming orgasm. Jem pulled her flesh against his hips, keeping her clit tight against his pelvis until her body flew.

When she was shuddering, her head against his shoulder and her mind gloriously blank, he renewed his rhythm. She rested, breathing in his scent while his cock thrust deeper, the girth stretching her channel.

His breath was hot against her neck, his gasps the sexiest thing she'd ever heard.

"Come for me," she whispered. "Give it all to me."

He grunted and his release overtook him. Jem's cock jerked inside her pulsing channel while her insides fluttered faintly in response, a ghost of her previous orgasm. He muttered something against her hair as his grip on her ass softened. Now he rubbed, soothing the flesh, with his cock still buried deep inside her.

Her mind felt fuzzy and she wondered if she could fall asleep right here. She was so relaxed, despite the thick scent of cooling fast food. Jem stroked her back, his hand warm against the cool fabric of her blouse, and the world fell away.

Time passed. Catee opened her eyes for some

unknown reason and saw darkness. A sound to her left brought her upright, then a flash of light blinded her. She put a hand over her eyes, realizing where she was and that Jem was still beneath her.

Someone knocked on the passenger window. Jem stirred and rolled it down. The cashier from the restaurant stood a foot from the car with a flashlight.

"Everything okay?" the teen asked, pointing his beam into the car. "I'm closing up now."

Catee pushed at her skirt, making sure she and Jem were covered. He'd never even pulled out or disposed of the condom. She was sure the cashier would be able to smell sex in the air. After a long pause, the cashier turned the flashlight away. His face was eerily half yellow, half shadow, from the light.

"We're good," Jem said. "Tired."

"You can't stay in the parking lot. It's private property." The cashier made a face that looked distorted in the light. "I have to run off truckers all the time."

"Can you drive?" Jem asked Catee.

"We'll leave," she said, hoping the kid would move his flashlight completely away so she could get off Jem's lap without exposing either of them.

"Cool," the kid said. "We open early. I'd better not catch you here in the parking lot."

"You won't," she promised, not moving a muscle until the cashier was gone.

Jem rolled the window up and Catee moved back. The skin on her thighs caught his and it hurt to pull away.

"Sorry," she said. "We're kind of glued together."

"August is hot," he agreed, slowly pushing back against the seat so she could peel her limbs away. "October is cooler."

"Yes," she agreed. October sex was crisp and

under blankets. Sometimes she could even turn on the gas fireplace in the hotel room and watch the dancing light of the fire.

She smoothed her skirt as best she could, feeling moisture trickle down her thigh. Jem tossed debris into the food bag. The car roared to life when she rotated the key in the ignition.

The kid was putting trash into the bin on the side of the building. She waved as they drove away. As the car moved down the dark street, the giggles began.

“What are you laughing at?” he asked.

She glanced at Jem. The corners of his lips were beginning to twitch too. It was contagious.

“Just life, I guess,” she said between giggles.

“We’ve definitely given in to our urges tonight,” he agreed.

“Wine and food and sex and sleep,” she sighed. “It was wonderful, but now it’s time to find a bed. The nice thing about small towns is everything’s close. Here’s the road to the hotel.”

The gravel drive leading to the Damview was steep and windy, making her head spin by the time she pulled into a parking space in front of her door. Despite the warm night, she hadn’t had anything to drink since the wine. After she pulled her camera equipment from the trunk and back seat, they went to her room.

The first thing she noticed was the large picture window facing the river. Catee had been running late for the shoot when she’d checked in and hadn’t stopped to take in the surroundings. Just enough light came from the area to see the river. The view would be amazing during the day.

She glanced around the rest of the room. Two cozy chairs flanked the fireplace, but this was air-conditioning season. She found the machine and dialed the controls on the unit to cool. Eighty-five

degrees and a good night's sleep didn't go together.

"Want to go out tomorrow?" she asked.

"Out where?" Jem faced the window and peered out.

"On the water. I bet we could rent a skiff."

"Okay," he said, sounding skeptical.

"It will be fun if we bring enough water and sunscreen. I'm going to take a shower," she said. "Get comfortable."

"How about I join you?"

Not a bad idea. She stepped into the bathroom and took a look at the tub. "I don't think you'll fit."

He grinned. "I'm quite flexible."

Somehow, they made it through the motions of splashing water on their bodies and soaping up. Catee checked out his form as she shampooed her hair. He was a powerfully built man, strongly muscled but not too highly defined. He had a workman's body rather than a showy gym body. As her gaze drifted across his crotch, she saw his cock swell.

"You enjoy my attention, don't you?" she asked, brushing suds off her breasts.

He raised an eyebrow. "I like looking at you. Would you like help?"

"I can wash my own breasts." She leaned her head back into the water, smiling. "Men are such visual creatures."

He snaked an arm around her back and lowered his mouth to her breast. The feel of his teeth at her nipple sent a thrill to her pussy, dampening it far more than the shower spray.

"Is the soap out of your hair?" he asked.

"I think so."

"Good." He picked her up so her legs straddled his waist and stepped out of the tub.

She leaned over to turn off the water and they dripped their way to the bedroom, kissing and

clutching at each other. Her fingers found the strap of her purse on the chest of drawers as he walked by and, when he tossed her on the bed, she found another condom. He was so luscious standing above, his cock jutting proudly over her.

Her mouth had been craving a taste of him all evening. She pushed up on her elbows and sheathed his velvet thickness. His cock head slid soft and smooth against her tongue, until she found the little bumps at the edge. She nibbled at him, feeling his entire body come to attention.

He groaned as she took him more completely, swallowing him down. Jem's length was more than she could manage, so she wrapped her fist around his root and moved her mouth and hand in tandem. His warm cock swelled further, stretching her lips. He tasted sweet. She licked his head before swallowing him down again. His hips pistoned toward her face as he became lost in her embrace. She felt his fingers lightly stroking her damp hair. It felt wonderful, soothing the muscles strained by the awkward position of her nap in the car.

She heard a howl and tilted her head just enough to realize it was Jem making that inhuman noise. He looked down, realizing she had stopped moving.

Leaning back, she popped his cock from her mouth. They stared at each other, both breathing hard.

"It's the first night," he said. "I'm still more animal than man."

She didn't know about that. They'd only had sex twice so far, and she was pretty sure there had been conversation in between. Yes, he'd thrown her on the bed, but all-in-all he'd been fairly civilized. She glanced at the clock. "It's Saturday morning, just barely."

"There's plenty of time yet. When do you go

back?”

“Monday.” She bent her knees and spread her legs, showing him her pussy. Idly, she dipped her finger into the moist heat and spread her juices up to her clit, fingering herself and arching into her own touch. With all the stimulation she’d received, her body was ready for more pleasure.

His eyes went black. “I want to do that.” He dropped to his knees and pulled her legs over his broad shoulders, then leaned down to tease her damp folds. Slowly, he played with her outer lips, then worked his way in until the tip of his tongue was close to her clit.

Now she was the one begging, howling. “Jem,” she cried, “Jem!”

He swirled his tongue through her heat, then found the hood hiding her pleasure button. His lips pursed around the tender skin and he suckled her clit. Every atom of her being focused on the exquisite magic he created along her nerve endings.

“More,” she demanded, then begged. “Like that, yes, like that.” The orgasm took over and she thrashed against the sheets. Her ears filled with a hissing sound, like she was too close to the dam in the river below. Dimly, she heard tearing sounds then Jem moved between her legs and slammed his sheathed cock into her. Catee took every inch, holding him with her feet pressed against his ass.

“I can’t get enough of you,” he said, pulling back as far as she’d let him before slamming into her channel again, pounding her flesh.

She was ready for more pleasure, unwilling to resist what he offered. Her body took it all, while her mind floated above, as if in the middle of one long orgasm. Together, they cried and begged and gasped and sighed and moaned—bodies exhausted from the long day but still so hungry for each other.

She sat up, clutching Jem’s back to keep

upright, changing positions and clawing his back with her nails. He didn't notice, just kept pumping his cock inside her moist depths. His back was damp with sweat, making her feet slippery on his ass. Time stretched out endlessly. Catee felt boneless, yet still tense.

"I never stop wanting you," he said. "No matter how far I roam."

"Yes, you're impossible to forget," she agreed.

She felt his muscles tensing. Her body readied in response, drawing him in, pussy clutching his cock.

His orgasm washed over him and she was mashed into the bed, bouncing a little as the hard motel mattress resisted. His solid weight followed, keeping her down. She bit at his shoulder, made dents in his biceps with her fingernails, and ground against his pelvis until the waves shattered over her body again. They breathed hard with their exertions, their chests touching with each exhalation. Now she felt better, good even, and not quite so hungry for him. She lifted her hands over her head and stretched, spine clicking into place. A little further down, her clit pulsed slowly.

"You are one hell of a good fuck," she murmured.

"Such unladylike language," he said.

"That was an unladylike fuck." She grinned. "I love August."

He moved away, disposed of the condom, then dropped on the mattress beside her. She saw red scratches as he stretched out.

"I'm sorry I scratched your back."

His massive shoulders shrugged. "I didn't even notice."

She held up her hands. "My nails are pretty long."

He took one arm by the wrist. "Talons," he agreed. "Why are they yellow?"

She turned over and wrapped one leg around his. "Why not yellow?"

"It's the color of old bruises."

"Then my nails will match my hips tomorrow," she said on a yawn. "You have one tight grip, buddy."

"Mmmm." He pulled her closest arm around his waist.

She reached up and played with his nipples. "Ever thought about getting them pierced?"

"That wouldn't work," he said.

"I have a tattoo, but I never could stand the idea of being punctured. Even my ears aren't pierced."

"I never noticed the tattoo."

"I'll point it out later." She yawned again. "Let's get some sleep."

Catee rolled over in the king-size bed later that morning. Instead of finding fresh, cool sheets, she bumped into a warm solid mass. A man-shaped, man-scented mass. She closed her eyes and smiled. It was August and she still had more time to spend with him.

"Let's get out on the water," she urged, tugging at Jem's arm. "Wake up!"

His face turned toward her, eyelashes fluttering. She started to sit up, then, without warning, found herself flat on her back, his haunches embracing her thighs.

"Wha—" was all she managed to get out of her mouth before his lips took hers in a searing kiss, almost as hot as the sunshine coming through the windows that faced the river.

After a moment, he released her.

"Good morning, world," she said and stroked his face.

Though he'd had a shadow the night before, his beard hadn't grown in any more. He also looked

astonishingly awake for someone who'd been dead to the world two minutes ago. Not only that, she sensed something was rising. Her blood thickened in response and she felt a quiver in her pussy.

"Where's that tattoo?" he asked, his eyes sparkling and alive in the morning sun. "I was trying to examine you earlier, but couldn't find it."

She grinned and reached to the bedside table for her purse, then tossed him a strip of condoms.

He caught them in a raised fist, so the strip waved like a banner over her face. "Where is it?"

Catee pointed at her hip then bit one condom away from the others. Jem tossed the rest to the other side of the room.

With one hand, she pushed him off her legs and used the other to hold the packet to her mouth to tear it open. He took the condom and sheathed himself as she watched, practically drooling at the sight of that thick gorgeous cock. He flipped her over to her stomach before she could protest.

Eagerly, she lowered her head and wriggled her ass in the air. Incredible, how she felt so clear-headed and full of life this morning—senses alert, her body on fire, and her pussy drenched with excitement.

"A wolf?" he asked in a surprised tone when he found her tattoo.

"Siberian Husky. We had two growing up. I got the tattoo when the last one died."

She felt his light touch on the small tattoo, then his weight moved over her body. He nuzzled her neck as he covered her like a warm blanket. His chest hair tickled her back while his cock probed her channel and slid in, stretching her into full awareness.

"Wow," she moaned, amazed by the perfect fit of his cock. "I need to wake up with a man beside me more often."

His teeth worried the skin at her neck, but he didn't react. She winced, feeling stupid. Jem wouldn't respond to that kind of comment and she usually ended up upset since she wanted him to. This experience needed to be enjoyed for what it was—hot, amazing, animal sex. For years, she'd focused on her career, traveling the country in search of the perfect shot. Relationships hadn't been her focus. She pushed back, spearing herself on his cock as she resolved to enjoy the moment. The movement brought her blood to a boil. Her clit was awake and swollen.

"Put your hand on me," she urged. "Rub me. Don't be gentle."

He bit her earlobe and complied. With only one arm to steady himself, she took even more of his weight.

"Harder!" she ordered. "C'mon, Jem, I need this." She needed to simply *feel*.

"And I need this," he grunted, slamming into her with the full force of his powerful thighs.

She stretched out her arms and grabbed at the sheets, her fingers sliding on the fabric as she attempted to anchor herself. Finally, she found the edge of the bed and gripped it. With each inch she drifted, he thrust again, moving her closer to the edge. She was hot, dizzy, crazy with lust.

"Hurry, I need to come." It was either orgasm or faint. But she trusted him to give her what she needed.

He slammed against her. Her channel took him in and held him tight, her clit a tight pearl at the top of her entrance. He was grinding into her. Catee could feel Jem deep inside as her belly began to flutter and her legs shook. She felt a moment of panic.

"I can't hold on," she said. "I'm going to fall."

At her words, he used his strength to flip them

over so he was on his back. She sat up with her back to him, his cock impaling her deeper than ever. Was he more than she could take? Gasping breaths tore from her throat as pleasure/pain wracked her insides.

Her body released moisture, lubricating his movements as she struggled to find a position that offered her as much ecstasy as it did him. He grabbed her hips and held her in place.

“Don’t wiggle so much,” he gasped.

His shaky movements told her he was close. She had to get there too. Catee’s fingers found her clit and matched the rhythm he set inside her. Her body relaxed and opened to accommodate his cock in this new, deep position as she touched herself.

“Yes,” they said together as they perfected their movement, suspended in pure pleasure for endless moments.

“Let’s go forever,” she cried.

“Can’t,” he growled, pulling her hips against him.

She sank down on him, milking his cock to completion. Now they were again a perfect fit. Her body broke into a spiral of pleasure as he relaxed.

“Oh, yes,” she breathed, as the blood pulsed through her body. “That was it.”

When she finally caught her breath, she crawled away from him, feeling like she was losing a part of herself as his cock left her. “I think I need a nap.”

“I thought you wanted to get out on the river.”

She smiled. “In a minute.”

He touched her hair, then the mattress moved as he stood. “I’ll find the phone book and organize a boat rental.”

“You sound so sure of yourself today.”

He flashed his large white teeth at her. “A good night’s sleep works wonders.”

She rolled over to watch him as he bent down to

find the phone book. Jem was a strange man, but she'd become very attached to him, despite the short time they'd shared together. And no one made love like he did. She was still floating on the shivers from her orgasm.

If only the fun didn't have to end so soon.

Chapter Three

Three hours later, they had finished breakfast, done some shopping, and boarded their rented skiff. The river glistened around them, looking more crystalline than blue. The golden hills above were an unexpected sight for Catee, used to Pacific Northwest green. At first, she thought it looked like Arizona, then Egypt. She could see how the nineteenth century travelers on the Oregon Trail would get discouraged as they traveled through this barren landscape, yet Native Americans had thrived here for thousands of years, fishing and trapping.

"We won't want to be out too long," Jem said. "Even with that hat, your lily white skin is going to get burned."

"I know." Catee leaned against the side of the boat and enjoyed the sun beating against her sunglasses. "But it's glorious for now."

"Yes." He shook back his head, fluffing out his thick dark hair.

He wore newly purchased elongated sunglasses with very dark lenses, so it was hard to gauge his expression, but he looked a little uncomfortable. Maybe he wasn't a big fan of water. The bulky life jacket he wore didn't quite fit his large frame. It appeared confining, but since he'd confessed he didn't know how to swim, it was necessary. She wore one too, over a long, summer dress made of thin yellow jersey, but her lifejacket fit.

"Did you know the river wasn't always so calm around here? There were falls before the dam raised the water level." Catee had done a little internet

research.

“Celilo Falls,” Jem said.

Catee pursed her lips. “I wouldn’t have expected you to know that. Are you from around here originally?”

He flashed his teeth but didn’t answer her question. “I know what Celilo means, do you?”

She shook her head.

“Cleft in the rock.”

“Oh?”

“I like your Celilo,” Jem said, smirking.

She slapped his shoulder, blushing. “I’m not a rock.”

“But you certainly have a luscious cleft. I’d love to nibble on it right now.”

“Hmmm.” Her cleft tingled a bit at his words. The sun was hot on her skin, making her feel relaxed and peaceful, if a little horny.

She tried to straighten the Oregon T-shirt they’d bought him, but it was stuck in the life jacket. Then she had to grab her seat for balance as he steered the boat along the vegetation at the river’s edge. Above them on one side ran the I-84 freeway. On the other side, she saw nothing but hills under a gray-blue cloudless sky.

“What are you up to?”

Jem tossed his sunglasses away and pulled his legs over the seat to face her. “Come here.”

“Why?” she asked. He had a devilishly wicked expression on his handsome face.

He patted his lap. “Come and straddle me. I want to feel that Celilo.”

“If we capsize,” she warned, “you’d be in worse shape than me.”

“This skiff has a nice, flat bottom. We’ll be fine.”

Was he right or just too horny to be reasonably cautious? Catee left her bench, but stayed at a crouch as she stepped toward him. The boat swayed,

but he caught her by the breasts.

She glared. "You could have caught my waist."

He tweaked her nipples. "Why would I do that? C'mon, hike up your skirt."

She rolled her eyes, but did as he asked, shimmying her legs to tease him.

He made a tsking noise. "No panties again, I see. What a naughty girl you are."

She liked the free feeling and the way his gaze fixed on her body, like she was magnetic. She always felt a little free in August. "How does my Celilo look?"

He pushed his fingers through the springy hair she kept trimmed. It was too pretty to shave or wax. Her crowning glory was reddish brown these days, but she was a vibrant redhead below.

"It's like there's a fire going on down there." He skimmed a finger down her cleft.

She gulped and her clit pulsed, then his finger slid into the moist heat that waited for him.

"Sweetheart, you're all juicy for me," he crooned, adding another thick digit.

"Always," she agreed, circling her hips around the fingers that anchored her, feeling them drag along her sensitive lips. "No one else does it for me, Jem, and I just don't know what to do about it."

"Do this," he suggested, pushing her legs apart.

"Don't stop," she started to beg, but he pulled his finger away and tugged her down to straddle him. Her mons slid against his wide metal belt buckle and instinctively she rode the cool surface.

"You need to give me some of that," he said. "Move that Celilo south."

"I picked out these clothes for a reason," she said. "The buckle is so deliciously cool against my skin."

"You're such a kitten, Catee. Always rubbing against things."

“The only things I rub against are yours. Are you going to be able to breathe with that life jacket on?”

He unzipped the front. It immediately gaped wide open. “So there’s no one else? You close yourself away the rest of the year?”

“I tried to find someone else, after the first time we met. But it wasn’t any good. You ruined me for other guys.”

She saw his fingers shake as he pulled away his clothes. As his cock sprang forth between them, he opened and drew on a condom that had been in his pocket.

“I need you,” he told her as the boat rocked gently. “I need that Celilo around my cock.”

Catee rose over him, then pushed down, feeling his heat fill her dark channel. She allowed the river’s flow to determine their movement, letting the pleasure break over her in tiny waves.

“Think anyone can hear us?” she asked. “Or see us?”

Jem held her with one arm and put his free hand over his eyes to shade them. “We’re alone.”

“Good.” She pushed her toes into the bottom of the boat and began to ride his cock in earnest, bucking against his length, moving up and down his cock faster than she could have played him with her hand. Rivulets of musky moisture coated him as it dripped from her pussy. Between her breasts little drops of sweat formed and drizzled down her skin like warm icing. Her back felt damp under his exploring hands and she could hear him panting.

“It’s so hot,” she gasped.

He leaned over, cupped his hand into the river, and raised his palm to cascade water over her flushed face. Some caught in her hair and drifted down her neck. The coolness of it allowed her to increase her pace.

“More.” She found her rhythm again, riding him as he bathed her with his hand.

“My Celilo,” he murmured, squeezing her hips. “These are your rocks.”

He felt like a rock inside her as she spent herself against him, felt the wave of answering pleasure in his body. Despite the condom, she could feel the warmth of his ejaculation. His arms pulled her close and she rested her face against his salty neck.

Bones was a word that came to her as they drifted together. Her very bones ached for him every day they were apart. They played this game like they were strangers, but really, wasn't that the truth? She didn't know where he lived, what he did, what he *was*. He was different. She couldn't say what brought her to that conclusion, but he sensed things differently than other people and his personality always changed after their first night together, as if he'd found himself again. So what did that make him?

She had no idea. But he was truly her romantic mystery like the fortune cookie had said. Maybe he never did completely remember her until after the first morning. But then, what kept bringing him back to her? Every time she drove away, Catee was afraid he wouldn't return. She only knew one solution to her fears. How could she take their long separations out of the equation?

Her fingers touched the vegetation only inches away. The spot gave them a sense of privacy, but they weren't really protected from the sun. “I think your forehead and the tips of your ears are getting pink.”

He stirred to action, raising his head from her neck. “Your shoulders too. We'd better get going.”

“And do what?”

“Go back to the hotel? Or do you want to get something to eat?”

“A cool shower sounds nice, though I loved your river version.” She pulled herself away from him and pushed her skirt down, hunted for the cooler, and found a fresh bottle of water while Jem disposed of the condom and dressed.

“Yeah, let’s go back to the hotel.” He began to hum as he turned and started up the motor. “I like our showers,” he sang.

Her foot bounced to his song as they moved out of the vegetation. She pulled a small camera from the cooler and began to frame shots as his lyrics became more suggestive.

“I like your pussy in August and its hot, salty taste,” he crooned. “I like my cock inside you and our time is never a waste.”

“Smile,” she teased. She had better pictures of him than this, on a day when he was sweaty from heat and sex, but he looked relaxed and happy with that naughty tune on his lips.

That was one thing she’d noticed. He was a much more serious creature on their first night. She lightened his heart. Could she be important to him despite what little time they spent together?

Her mind churned as she drove them back to the hotel. What did she want from him? They’d been playing this game for seven years. She’d be thirty in a week. Though she was convinced he was unmarried, that was about all she was sure of.

“Do you have children?” she asked as they got out of the car.

He looked at her quizzically. “No. Do you?”

“Of course not. I barely have a life.” She pulled out the hotel card key and slid it into the lock.

“You travel a great deal,” he said. “For your photography assignments.”

“Yep. All over the world.” She pulled off her hat and sunglasses and dropped them on the bed. Her body was sticky and too warm.

“Do you remember how we met?”

“How could I forget?” she said, even though he always did.

Hurriedly, she continued. “You were a musician back then. I took head shots of you a couple times. You were going to use them for your cover, but you never released the CD. I didn’t see you again until the next August when I ran into you at the winery.”

“My life changed drastically that November,” he said, sitting on one of the chairs facing the small table in the room. “We met in August, did the shoot in October.”

“What happened? I liked your music.”

He shrugged. “Things changed. I was better off living a more retired life.”

She sat next to him and started to braid her hair away from her face. They had lowered the air conditioning in the room before they left and it was warm. “Did you have a health emergency?” Something had seriously affected him.

His lips tightened for a moment. “You could describe it that way.”

“What do you do for a living now?” She liked this, a conversation instead of just sex.

“I have investments. Like the winery.”

“You own that winery?”

He nodded.

“You never said.” She’d been hired to do the brochures a year after they’d met, in fact. Had he been behind the lucrative assignment from the beginning? She’d never questioned it before, but she hadn’t been established when she’d first gotten the job. It had been quite a coup.

“I don’t get too involved.” He shook his head, as if dispelling stray thoughts. “But it’s a good place to see you. We’ve made it work like this for years.”

“Seven years since we met,” she emphasized.

“We’ve been doing this a long time.” He opened

the ice cube bucket and unwrapped a plastic cup, then scooped the cubes into it.

"Twice a year—August and October." Would there ever be more?

He stood. "You look hot, Catee." He stepped behind her and gently touched her shoulder with the cup. It was cool from the ice and he stroked her back with it.

She dropped her chin to her chest. "That feels good."

"More?"

"Yes."

Jem put a cube directly on her skin. Catee could feel rivulets drip down her back as it melted.

"What are you doing?"

"Making love to you."

Her heart thrilled at the words. The word, really. *Love*. "I'm a mess."

She felt his lips on the crown of her head as he laid a gentle kiss there. "You're never a mess. You're organized, competent, lovely."

She tilted her head in surprise. "Thanks."

He touched her chin. "It's all true. I'm lucky to spend time with you."

"We could be together more," she suggested. "I mean, I'd like to, when I'm not traveling."

"It wouldn't work," he said. "It just wouldn't."

Her stomach burned all of a sudden, though from the heat or the casual cruelty of his words, she couldn't say. Still, she was a fighter. "Why not? You like me. We've never had an argument. Don't you think we're compatible?"

"You don't know anything about my life." He said it without inflection and she couldn't see his face.

Don't read anything into it. "Only what you tell me," she agreed. "But I want to know more."

"Listen to my body," he said, setting the ice cube

in the cup he'd put on the table.

Isn't that what she always did? Was it only their bodies meeting all these years?

The chairs had wheels and he turned her so they were facing. He held out his hands so she could take them and be pulled upright.

They went into the bathroom where he turned on the shower and undressed them both, their clothes becoming a mingled heap on the floor. She felt limp, both physically and emotionally, full of wanting and waiting.

In the shower, he soaped her gently. When she was clean, he lifted her out and toweled her off, then found a bottle of aloe vera in her toiletry bag and smoothed it over her skin. She drifted on the bed as he spread the cool gel, then massaged her shoulders. Slowly, he worked his way down her body, relaxing and exciting her. He avoided intimate areas, but when he started to massage her feet, she realized there were more erotic zones on her body than just her Celilo. Her deep womanly places began to heat as he worked at the muscles and played with her toes. Her body felt heavy, limp, and tranquil.

"I could get used to this," she murmured.

He rubbed her arches and she let out an involuntary groan of delight. "You've got a long drive coming up. It's good to relax tonight."

She didn't like to remember that. How could he be content with them separating so soon? She rolled over and started to sit up, deciding it was now or never. Her feet slipped from his grasp.

Before she could take another breath, she was flat on her back with him on top of her.

"What are you doing?" she squeaked. He'd pushed the air out of her lungs.

"Isn't this what you wanted?" he asked, nibbling her neck.

"Not exactly. I was going to ask you a question."

She pushed him up so she could breathe. Her hands curved around solid muscle and it took effort to hold him even with his arms taking most of his weight.

He wriggled his hips so his cock positioned between her legs, nudging her pussy. "What?"

She bit her lip. "I wanted to know if you'd consider seeing me again?"

"In October," he said. "Like always." He nuzzled her cheek.

Usually her eyes would have drifted closed, but she felt different now, more mind than body.

"And after?" She wrapped her arms around his broad back and let him settle back down.

"Next August after your brochure shoot." His cock bumped against her moist lips, but she didn't open to him yet.

She might have said they could hire someone else for the shoot, but since he was the owner, she realized that wasn't going to happen.

"Are we a couple?" she asked. "Or a long-term fling? I want some definition here."

He plumped the sides of her breasts and rested back on them, smiling. "We're lovers."

That told her nothing. "Do you have lots of lovers?"

"No." His smile widened.

"Then don't you want more sex? I'm not out of town fifty weeks a year and it's only a two-hour drive for me to here. I could come every month, or nearly. We could see each other more."

"I don't live around here."

He sounded so reasonable, as if her question was silly and he was making a sensible point. But it wasn't sensible, not after so much time. "Then where do you come from? I've never seen your car. Do you garage it at the winery? If so, why doesn't that Briana woman seem to know you?"

He pushed her right leg aside with his thigh

then slid his fingers up the delicate inside flesh.

She felt her nipples pebble against his chest. Her pussy lips were spreading along with her legs and he could enter her now if he tried. "You're trying to distract me."

His smile was devious. "Sweet distraction, lover. Give me a kiss."

"No."

He touched her cheek with his nose, then licked the sensitive spot where her hairline met her temple. His fingers continued to tease her leg, creeping closer to her folds.

"Am I ever going to get anything from you but sex?" she asked.

He touched her clit. Maybe that was his answer. He began to gently circle her sensitive bud. This was all he was offering. As turned on as she was, she felt a burning sensation in her eyes. But she wouldn't cry. She still wanted his body. For seven years, it had been enough.

Her legs bent and slid against his back, providing the clear invitation he wanted. He reached for the bedside table and found the condoms, then sheathed himself.

She closed her eyes and let out a breath, focusing on the fluttering sensations building in her body.

She was wet and ready as he entered her, even if she despaired. He took control, pulling her legs up his torso until her feet were alongside his ears. Her hips moved against him, but in little strokes as the position made him go so deep. After all their adventures of the past twenty-four hours, her body could take anything he had to offer. If only her heart wasn't so open and ready too, for more than he seemed willing to give.

She bowed back as he put his hand on her mound and began to move in time with his thrusts.

She pushed away her wants and fears, drifting instead on the pleasure, on the scent of his body, on the lazy August afternoon. Afterward, Catee fell asleep spooned against him and dreamed of a future she wasn't sure was possible.

The dream didn't end well. Catee was panting, running. She woke with a start, her heart pounding and her skin damp with sweat. Her thoughts were disordered, but she remembered something had been chasing her. A clock. One of those melting clocks out of a Salvador Dali painting. Good grief, was her upcoming birthday really affecting her this much?

"What's wrong?" Jem asked.

She sat up, the sheets with her since they were stuck to her back, surprised to hear his voice in front of her. Instead of sleeping next to her, Jem had pulled a chair in front of the big picture window and was staring out at the river. His naked body was as still and as beautiful as a stone statue.

"Can't sleep?" she asked.

"I don't like staying indoors very much."

"Not a city boy?" She craved information about him, as if she could fix him more tightly in her heart.

"Never. I practically live in the woods. On the edge, at least." He paused. "I have a house near a cottonwood forest in central Oregon."

Information! "You live south of me, then. How did you end up with the winery?"

"I bought a portfolio of properties from a man who was retiring. He had the winery, a pottery studio, some fast food restaurants, even a heavy equipment dealership."

"Sounds diverse."

"Yeah. And they all pretty much run themselves."

"So you don't dial in very often?"

"No. I spend most of my time in the woods."

"I guess that record was what, a vanity project then? If you didn't need the money?"

He turned away from the window. "No, it was released. It was a big hit in most of the world. I just never became a celebrity here. I used the money I earned to buy my businesses. My family never had any money. We camped on vacations because it was all we could afford. That's how I fell in love with the outdoors."

She spoke without thinking. "Why do you always seem so different when we first meet? I used to think it was part of the game we played with each other, but sometimes I wonder. Are you just a really good actor?"

He smiled faintly. "My mind drifts far away when we aren't together."

She hoped that didn't mean he did drugs or something. "Do you think we could meet more often? Not just August and October?" She'd keep asking until she had a real answer.

"Why?"

"I get lonely."

"It always sounds like you stay busy with your work and travel."

Her stomach, though empty, began to churn. "It's just a job like any other. The best part of my life is the time we spend together."

"I understand." His voice had softened.

Did he? Could he really understand the three-hundred fifty-odd days when they weren't together had become gray to her, that it was only these few days that provided any color anymore?

He looked down, shaking his head. "You're my touchstone. When the summer is in its glory, then again as winter begins to close in. I'm alone otherwise."

"You don't have to be. I'd like to spend more time with you."

“It wouldn’t work. You’re an urban woman. I can hardly stand to be in a small town for a few days.” He sounded sad, as if he truly believed they were incompatible.

She could change, it would hardly hurt at all. “I love the outdoors. I shoot two nature calendars every year. I spend weeks in tents in the middle of scenic wilderness.”

“I mostly live outside, that’s a lot different than your lifestyle.”

“Are you trying to let me down easy or is that really your argument against us trying to have a real relationship? I’m almost thirty and I don’t want to get old alone.” She paused, squeezing her eyes shut. “I can’t imagine being with anyone else, but I need more, Jem. I’ve often wished I had a copy of your CD so I could hear your voice. I dream about you. I want you in my life for real, not just this fantasy we live for the few days we’re together. I could have made other choices, could have had other men, but I waited for you. I’m still waiting.”

“It’s complicated.” Looking up, he captured her gaze with his own and she could see he really believed that.

“How could it be? We’re just two people. I can move south. Relocating is no big deal. I can go where you are. You have a house, even if you aren’t often in it. I can set up there. We can’t be together all the time, but enough.”

“When is your birthday?” he asked.

“Next Friday. Why? Do you want to celebrate with me?” She hated the tremor in her voice, but she wanted this so badly.

“As long as you understand I can’t live your urban life.” He rose from his chair and sat down on the bed next to her, taking her hand in his.

His hand was solid, warm. He wasn’t a dream, she really had him for these few days each year. Was

he finally willing to accept more time with her?

"That's fine. We can compromise." She forced herself to breathe, smile, hold in her anticipation.

"No, we can't."

Why not? "So it's your way or the highway?"

"It's my way or we keep things as they are, at least until you find someone else."

"There won't be someone else," she insisted, kissing his fingers. "Your face is imprinted on my heart. I never even look at other men anymore."

He kissed her fingers too, then wrapped both her hands in his warm grip. "I feel the same way, Catee, but I always thought you'd move on because I couldn't give you enough."

"I guess you did until now," she said, staring into his eyes. "I love you."

He squeezed her hand. "If you want to celebrate your birthday with me and talk about our future, visit me next weekend."

It might not be a declaration of love, but it was an enormous step forward.

"Set up the tent," she joked. "I'm there."

On Monday morning, Jem watched Catee drive away from the hotel. He still felt a little shocky, as if his human heart didn't quite know how to expand around the knowledge of his woman's love. A future? How could Catee possibly accept the future he had to share? Still, she made it clear he had to act or it was time for them to part forever. In one direction or another, she was intent on making a change.

He'd never want to cause her pain, but it was part of the bargain. If she, however improbably, accepted, at least it would be only momentary. They would have a long life together, though it would be very different from the one she had probably imagined.

The truth was, he loved her too, so much that

even after weeks in wolf form, he could always find her again. She was always there ahead of him. Maybe, if he dared dream it, soon she'd be beside him too.

With that thought on his mind, Jem melted into the hills behind the motel. Soon the human vanished and a wolf loped his way south. The wolf smelled female on his flesh and was content with the results of his long journey.

Chapter Four

The next Friday, Catee stepped out of the Chinese restaurant near her apartment, clutching a small container of hot and sour soup and some cookies for dinner later. Her friends had thrown her a lunch to celebrate the big three-o, but she'd left the evening free, not sure what she'd be doing.

Jem had emailed her directions to his house, but going there seemed like such a big risk now that she was back in her regular life again. What if she discovered something strange about her dream lover? Maybe six or eight days a year of perfect sex were worth a little mystery. How many people had even that much great sex in a year? She'd never had one stupendous sexual encounter until she met him.

In the parking lot, she stood until the soup started to burn her hand. How could she make this decision? She looked down at her food while she shifted it to the other hand. Then she had an idea.

A fortune cookie had started her down this road, right? She might as well look to another for guidance.

After she set her soup on the hood of her car, she leaned against it and tucked all the cookies but one into her pocket. With trembling fingers, she opened the cellophane. It was so bright this summer afternoon that Catee saw spots, so she fumbled with the cookie and nearly lost it to the pebbled ground before she cracked it open.

You will take a chance—and win.

Her pulse began to race. If that wasn't a message from the Fates, she didn't know what was.

She unlocked her car, got in, and drove east. The soup slid off her car and splashed onto the street when she made the first turn, but she scarcely noticed. If she believed the cookie, and she had to, everything was going to be just fine.

Since she'd found out Jem's album had actually been released, Catee had bought it for her iPod. His songs kept her company as she drove out of Beaverton and toward Portland. Her feet tapped as she sang along, having already memorized most of the words.

Eventually, she passed the Damview Hotel and went through The Dalles, then turned south at Biggs Junction. The road wove through hills that seemed to push against her car. For miles, the arid landscape held little but sagebrush, scrub oak, and grasses. When she saw the Elk Crossing sign Jem had mentioned, she took the next exit then found the dirt road that led to his property. By then, she'd rolled the window down to enjoy the clean nearly-September air.

He had told her there were deer, antelope, and elk, but she didn't see any evidence of the magnificent animals as she drove, tiny rocks popping against her tires. She was raising a cloud of dust that probably scared off any animals in the vicinity.

Cottonwood trees began to appear above the brush as she continued along the road, darkening what was already becoming twilight. Would she reach his cabin before dark? He said he lived simply and she was afraid to know what that meant. No electricity? She'd passed some very dilapidated properties on her drive down here.

When the vista opened again, she saw not a cabin, but a house made of logs, like one of those designer homes along I-5. There was a wide window

on one side and she was sure it would have a view of Mt. Hood to the west. In Native American lore the pointy, dormant volcano had once been a chief who had competed for a woman with another chief. All three were transformed into local volcanoes.

The thought gave her pause. She had never worried about Jem having other women until this August, but they were apart most of the time and he was dangerously attractive. What if she had competition despite his denials? What else would have kept their relationship in its tidy little box? She pushed her foot down on the pedal, speeding her toward the cabin. There could be someone with him. Though he'd finally told her where he lived, it wasn't like they'd set up a definite time for her arrival. She'd just been happy to see he had an internet connection. That would make her being here much easier if she decided to stay.

She pulled into the packed dirt driveway that circled around the front of his house. Large boulders and plantings gave structure to the drive, and behind, an old rocker rested invitingly on a long porch. A light shone from the front window and the porch light was on. At least there appeared to be electricity.

As she stepped from the car, the front door opened. Jem stepped out, looking like his Saturday self, alert and rested. She drank in the sight of his broad, friendly face. His teeth showed as he grinned at her dusty sedan. She waved and he responded, his gait loose-hipped and easy as he stepped off the porch. His feet and chest were bare.

"It's the birthday girl," he said, tapping the trunk of her car. "Any luggage?"

She shook her head, wondering when he'd touch her, if he was alone, if he was glad she had come. The questions overwhelmed her for a moment, but she forced her throat to open and her mouth to

move. "I didn't know I was coming."

His eyebrows knit together. "I don't blame you."

"Were you expecting someone else? The lights—" she gestured to the porch.

"I was hoping for you."

Her heart thumped in her chest, suddenly lighter. "You were?"

He nodded, a hint of a smile on his lips. "Of course. Even if you didn't answer my email."

"Sorry about that. I was nervous until I saw you." She searched for words, then fell back on the usual thing she might say. "Ready for some hot sex on a different weekend than usual?"

He tilted his head. "Is that all I am to you?"

She held back a laugh. "No. Or I wouldn't be here. I admit there've been times when I liked the little compartment we tucked each other into. I felt there was a special treat waiting for me all the time, but there's a big difference between the way a woman thinks when she's in her mid-twenties and when she's thirty."

"So you're thirty now?"

She made a show of checking her watch. Her friends had given it to her as a joke birthday present. It was hot pink and glowed in the dark. "I was born at nine twenty-two in the evening."

"So you're still twenty-nine. Plenty of time to make a considered decision."

"Yeah, before the panic hits." She clasped her hands behind her back, as if to put the watch out her mind.

"Come here." He held out his arms.

With a happy spring to her step, she moved swiftly across the four feet separating them and tucked her cheek against his chest. She smelled his familiar scent and felt like she was home.

"It's hard to believe it's only been three days since we last saw each other," she murmured. There

wasn't the usual shock of unfamiliarity to his embrace. He was just, well, familiar. Wouldn't it be nice if that were always the case? She glanced up. One thing hadn't changed. That intense look let her know what was coming.

His lips met hers in a searing kiss, somehow mingling with the mountainous, forest air, both different and yet the same as his riverside kisses. No water here, no winery, no hotel room. Just the trees and brush and his animal scent.

Her tongue skimmed his lips and he let her in, tangling with her as she explored the contours of his mouth, his large, square teeth. His hands drifted down her back, pulling her close to his aroused body. She tugged at his hair when he ground his erection into her belly, making her pussy swell.

She broke the kiss and looked up, pushing his fringe of hair to one side. "You fit here. I'm used to you vague the first night, but you aren't now."

He lifted his chin, settled again. "No. I've hung around all week, keeping body and soul together so we could talk. I took care of a lot of business, actually."

"Do we need to talk right now?" She let her fingers slide down his neck.

His hands moved to her shoulders and he stepped back so their torsos were no longer joined. "Maybe I'm reading too much into this visit. But in my mind, we've gone as far as we can without the truth."

"What truth?" The butterflies were back in her stomach. Nothing strange lingered here in the woods. Jem lived in a normal house, in an off-the-beaten-track but perfectly acceptable kind of place. She felt safe here, like she could belong. It was a sanctuary in the wilderness.

He pressed his lips together, then his brow furrowed. She had a sudden realization that this

was the moment that could change everything.

"I'm listening, Jem." She put her hands atop his.

"I'm not like other men. I have a secret."

She kept her gaze on him. "This secret has kept us from being a real couple."

He nodded. "Yes."

"I want to stay with you," she said. "I let out a breath I'd been holding for years when I saw you here. This is so right. It seems normal."

His lips curved. "I felt the same way when I saw you get out of the car. I'd been happy enough, I thought, but really I'd just been marking time."

She felt her face light up. "Yes, that's how I've felt, increasingly, as the years have gone by. At first, there were all kinds of adventures, all kinds of firsts, but the last two or three years I feel like I've been living for August, then for October. Everything kind of goes dark until summer's end."

He nodded. "Yes, that's exactly how I've been living. We're quite a pair."

"At least we come alive together." She leaned into him again, curling her arms around his neck and standing on tiptoe so she could lick across his upper lip and taste his mouth. She lifted her heels and rubbed her mons against his cock.

His hands cupped her ass as he raised her to the hood of the car. It was warm from the drive and she lifted her hips so he could pull off her panties and toss them into the underbrush.

"You're mine," he growled into her ear. "Even if you've turned into some proper panty-wearing type."

"I'll never wear them again," she promised, pushing down the loose black pants he wore. His cock sprang free, long and thick. She rolled her hand along the tip of his cock then smoothed the moisture along his length, pumping him into even greater arousal.

His back arched in pleasure, but his gaze stayed

firmly on hers. "I want you with me forever."

"I want that too." She never wanted to say goodbye to him again, wanted to sleep with him every night and wake up with him, fresh and clear, with no hint of vagueness in his eyes.

He leaned over her, his cock bumping the entrance to her channel. "I only have one birthday gift for you. But if you accept, it will change your life in more ways than seem possible."

Was it a ring, she wondered? Was he going to propose? She tightened her muscles, spreading her legs apart as he smoothly dove down her channel. Her moist heat welcomed him and his body scent and heat surrounded her like a warm embrace.

"Ahhh," she gasped. Her head fell back against the hood of her car. She was boneless yet taut, bowed around him.

He moved away then surged inside her again. "Do you want my gift?"

Her eyes opened. "Of course. What is it?" Maybe they'd have an October wedding at the winery?

He pressed in again. She felt moisture trickle down her thigh and pumped against him, forcing him against her clit. He felt so perfect inside her. She wanted this every day, forever.

"It's a bite."

"What? I don't understand." No ring?

He stopped moving, buried deep inside her. "A wolf bite."

She swallowed, stared into his eyes. "What?" she repeated, thinking this was simply another game he played. Did he belong to some kind of secret club that required members get bit by an animal?

"That's why I'm out of sync when we meet." He let go of the breast he'd been squeezing and gestured out into the hills. "That's where I roam."

He paused, giving her time to reflect. Roam? His word choice evoked an image of wild animals. He

almost made it sound as if *he* were the animal.

“More and more these last few years, I just stay out there, wandering, until it’s time to see you again. Something in the air changes and I know I need to head north to you.”

“You use the air instead of a calendar?” She meant it as a joke, but his solemn expression connected to some part of her that *knew* he was different.

“My senses aren’t like yours,” he said.

She swallowed hard, knowing this leap of faith was both insane and realistic. Was she ready to hear this? “You’re a werewolf?”

He nodded.

She’d heard of beings like him, but only in fairy tales. Yet she knew it was true, had always known he was different. She should be terrified, but she wasn’t. He was her Jem. “Wow,” she said, her voice shaky.

He continued in earnest. “Yes, I was bitten after we met. That’s why I never went on the road. It comes over me, this urge to change, to run. I can’t live indoors for long. I love the open sky too much.”

She put a hand to her head as if it would hold in the questions. “Who bit you?”

He kissed her forehead then swallowed, meeting her gaze. “There was a bar fight. I was on break during a gig and went out into the parking lot for some fresh air. Two men were fighting. A woman was against the building, crying, or so I thought.”

“Was she the werewolf?” She caught her breath as he pulled out only to thrust again, distracting her from her tumultuous thoughts.

He kissed her temple, then his voice lowered as his story flowed. “You picked up on that. Yes, the whole fight was a setup. I broke up the fight, then she ran to me and gave me a hug. I thought I was the big man, stopping some dude from hurting her

guy, but she bit me. I pushed her away and threatened to call the cops, but I had to finish my gig.”

She shook her head and wriggled against him, keeping him hard through his story. No matter what he was—or what he’d become after they met—he was still her lover, and she wanted every rock hard inch of him to stay inside her drenched channel.

“You’re distracting me,” he said, his voice raspy.

“Hmmm.” Her hands caressed his shoulders, tweaked his nipples then drifted to his waist. “Go on.”

“After the performance was over, I got back on the tour bus. We had to drive through the night to get to a show in Phoenix. I woke about five in the morning with my neck and shoulder absolutely throbbing.” His voice cracked. “By the time I got to the doctor, it was all purple and swollen. She gave me antibiotics.”

“Then what?” She played with the hair on his low belly and pulsed her pussy around his cock.

“It got better. But a couple of weeks later, during another show, the moon came up. I felt dizzy, not to mention sick with fear.”

She wriggled again and stroked the back of his neck with her fingers. His story was incredible, but she could hear the sincerity in his voice. This story explained so much, even though it made her head swim.

“I cut out between shows and ran into the parking lot. That was when I changed.”

“What about the show?” she prompted.

“I didn’t know what was happening. My vision, not to mention my mind, felt like they were going black. Somehow I asserted my will, got back into the bar, and into the bathroom.” The skin around his eyes tightened and creased above his nose. “I literally saw my face re-form.”

She touched his cheek. He must have been horrified.

He blinked. "After, I went to Europe on tour, and all was normal until the next full moon. That's when I realized I had to drop out, get off the road. I moved out here as soon as I could. I was afraid I'd hurt people. But it's not like I transform into something out of a horror movie. I can even control it a little. I'm just a wolf."

She was fascinated, even turned on a bit by this new reality. What did that say about her? "Have you seen others like you?"

"That woman found me again somehow, the one who bit me. She wanted me to be her mate, part of her pack. But even then, I knew you were something special and refused. She said my life would be extended, but over time I'd become more and more comfortable as a wolf and not so interested in being human again. That's why she wanted me, because her last mate had disappeared into the woods for good. She wanted to stay human, liked clothes and jewelry and makeup and dancing and music."

"A girly wolf."

"Exactly. But I wanted you. Tall and athletic, no makeup, no fancy clothes."

She frowned at the description. "I can clean myself up when it's necessary. And I like music."

He entered her again as if grounding himself. "So do I. I love my wolf time, but I want you enough to keep my human side alive. I won't ever let go completely. And I want to be with you no matter what the cost."

She couldn't believe they were having this conversation while making love, but this was the important part, not the rest. Them, together. She'd made this decision and it had nothing to do with turning thirty. He was hers no matter what. "I want that for us too."

“Then what could our future be?” he asked. “If you’re human and I’m a wolf?”

“So, you want to bite me?” she asked. “Then we can grow old together?”

His hips worked against her, his cock moving in and out, finding new angles, new places to excite sensation in her body.

“I just want you,” he whispered. “I love you, Catee.”

She felt sweat break out on his back. Her fingers slid, tightening on the smooth muscles of his ass as they flexed. She tucked her toes under, playing with the space between his globes.

Would accepting the bite mean leaving her life behind completely? That possibility didn’t thrill her. She still loved her work and her friends. It would be a big change, to be sure, but what new partnership didn’t come with compromise? Jem’s personality hadn’t changed when he was bitten. Since she’d met him before his transformation, she knew that much was true. She’d still be Catee. That gave her the strength to respond.

“Do it,” she said, making a snap decision. “I like the outdoors and I love you too. We’ll be together no matter what, and that’s what’s important to me.”

“Are you sure? You can’t go back once you accept my bite.”

She tilted her neck in response. There was no doubt in her mind that this was right. “We’ll form our own pack.”

He smiled tenderly, then bent his head. His teeth grazed the muscle at the junction of neck and shoulder, growing sharper as they closed in. His cock kept moving inside her, keeping her attention split. She shivered, feeling her orgasm close in. When his fangs opened the prominent vein in her neck, she screamed, head falling back, her body convulsing with pleasure despite the shocking sensation in her

neck, in her blood. His teeth bit in harder, his body surged then pumped, streaming his seed into her. The intensity nearly made her black out. She sobbed, but the pleasure/pain was lessening now.

Moments later, he removed his teeth and lapped at the wound with his tongue. She felt blood trickling down her neck, but instinctively knew he was clotting it, closing the bite.

“Don’t worry,” he whispered. “I know how to make it heal correctly. The night I was changed, I pushed her away before she could soothe the wound.”

She would have nodded but her neck hurt. He staggered back, his cock leaving her body, then picked her up and cradled her against his chest.

“It won’t hurt in the morning. And now, we can be together always.”

“Will we still go to the winery?” she asked, drowsy now.

He was carrying her away from the car, up the porch to the house.

As if reading her mind, he said, “We’ll get married there. No matter what, we’ll never forget Celilo Falls or our annual game.”

“I love you,” she whispered.

He nuzzled her hair as he trod the steps. “I love you too. Thank you for accepting me.”

Catee heard a plunk and saw another fortune cookie drop out of her pocket. Jem stepped on it, not noticing, but it was okay, she had her good fortune now. She didn’t need any more guidance. Besides, she could guess what it would have said.

You thrive on adventure, try something new.

About the author...

Anh Leod hopes readers will enjoy her romantic, erotic stories and will fall in love with her characters as much as she does when she creates them.

Her favorite things are love and chocolate. She writes about love because it's awfully hard to write about chocolate all the time.

Anh is married, lives in the Pacific Northwest and also writes fiction and non-fiction under the name Heather Hiestand. You can find more information about her publications under both names at her website.

Visit Anh Leod at www.anhleod.com.

Also available

Destined To Mate

by

C.A. Salo

A feline mated to a werewolf?

As a Chimera, half lioness/half human, Alexis Xanthis, has never released the beast within. Until she meets Lykan Alpha, Morgan LeVey. Being near him triggers a powerful need to mate, but is Morgan strong enough to dominate her feline side and still handle the human half with a gentle hand? And will the powers that be allow it?

Chapter One

"Are you sure she's the one?" Morgan LeVey watched the petite brunette walk out of the brownstone house from across the street.

"She's the only woman who's entered the house all week," Rafael answered. "Are you sure you were told correctly?"

Morgan inhaled deeply. "Positive. Although she smells of vamps, it's not strong." Frowning, he picked up another unusual scent as he followed, liking the golden highlights shining in the long brown hair that flowed down her slender back.

"I noticed that also. Plus a scent I cannot place. It's almost feline, but it's not...could she be a guardian?"

"A guardian's scent is usually more predominate."

"Maybe the blood sucker hasn't bitten her yet."

"Guardian in training? It's a possibility."

"She knows his current guardian, an old man. A granddaughter training to take his place?" Rafe shrugged as they slipped through the park's gate.

Morgan frowned at her leisurely walk, as though the oncoming darkness was no concern. Most humans didn't walk the park alone at night unless they were courting trouble. Why he was here and what he had to do with this woman was a mystery. He'd received specific information on where to find this little human, but the *what* and *why* of it was still unknown.

Snorting, he met Rafe's glance. "This is a waste of my time." He was a Lykan Alpha for love of the Gods, not a soldier to go running after a quarry in

the night. Now, if it was a hunt that ended with a sexual encounter or a meal, that might be different. The corners of his lips lifted as he pictured the dainty brunette running while he gave chase. A rush of blood flooded the tip of his cock.

“What are you smiling at?”

“Her on the run.”

“I do believe I know how this ends.”

“Hey, we all have our erotic fantasies.”

“Then I’d put her in a little red leather number. Now, that would be fucking hot.”

“I think you’re on to something there my friend.” Morgan grinned, knowing he’d be between her shapely thighs soon enough.

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