

Lightning Strikes Twice Shelley Munro

Part of the Middlemarch Mates series.

Lisa Jordan lost her husband two years ago and now it's time to start living again. At the Middlemarch singles' ball, she's attracted to a sexy shifter, but his identity is a shock. Years ago she used to babysit him and now she feels like a dirty old woman.

Sam Mitchell has harbored a crush on Lisa for years and is eager to stake his claim. A few dances turns into a one-night stand full of exciting, satisfying sex. Sam wants more but first he'll need to persuade Lisa to his way of thinking.

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LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE

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Chapter One Inaugural Middlemarch Singles' Ball

"You need a man. Do you see anyone you like the look of? Someone sexy for a naughty fling."

"I don't want a man. And I don't need a one-night stand." Lisa Jordan scanned the packed marquee while trying not to dwell on her sister's outrageous suggestion.

Groups of men and women laughed and chatted and danced together. Rumor said the Middlemarch elders hoped the ball would attract women to the district. They wanted the female sex to distract the male feline shifters from mischief. If it was true, the plan was working because everywhere she turned, smiles and flirtation abounded.

Her right foot tapped in time with the rockin' tune the band played. David had loved to dance. A pang shot through her—bittersweet rather than agonized as it had once been.

Sweetheart, you have to move on. Charlotte is right – you do need a fling.

Lisa forced a smile as she continued scrutinizing the area, searching for childhood friends and familiar faces. David's ghostly voice was becoming increasingly pushy, urging her to move on after his unexpected illness and death. And she would—in her own time.

Why do I need a fling? I have the vibe you bought me. It works perfectly well. Besides onenight stands are tacky.

David's sexy chuckle echoed through her mind. *But they feel good. Remember when we met*?

Oh yeah. She remembered. Heat flooded her cheeks as she recalled leaving the party only two hours after initial introductions. They'd gone straight to her apartment

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and spent the rest of the weekend in bed. Their one-night stand had led to love and marriage. Lisa scowled. Point taken, but lightning never strikes in the same place twice.

A husky, masculine laugh snared her attention, and she let her gaze drift in that direction. A muscular body clad from head to foot in black. Her eyes scanned his length and came to rest on a tight butt. A tingle sprang to life, sinking downward in time with her gaze to settle in her pussy. She shifted her weight, aware of her red dress and lacy panties clinging to her skin. "Wow, I'd like to sink my teeth into his ass," she murmured. "Clothing optional." The words popped out of her mouth unbidden and she gasped in consternation.

The ghost of David sniggered along with her sister Charlotte.

"I could introduce you." A mischievous note entered Charlotte's voice, alerting Lisa to a pitfall.

"He's married," she said. "There's something wrong with him. That look on your face is a giveaway. His rear end is false advertising. He's old with buck teeth and dyed hair. A toupee."

"The front view is just as sexy," Charlotte reassured her.

The man turned and Lisa slapped her hand over her open mouth, but not before an *eep* of shock escaped. "Sam Mitchell. Oh my god, I feel like a dirty old woman."

"He's grown up fine."

"Not for me," Lisa said firmly while she mentally told her mutinous body to get a grip. Sam and his tantalizing butt were forbidden territory. "I used to babysit Sam and his sisters before the family moved to Christchurch."

"Which makes you not much older," her sister pointed out. "What are a few years when you're flat on a mattress in the dark?"

"Charlotte!"

"I loved David too, but he's been gone for almost two years. It's time for you to have some fun."

Charlotte is right, sweetheart. You need to spread your wings and soar again. Brush off your widow's weeds and fly like a butterfly in your red dress.

"He's heading this direction." Charlotte lifted a hand in a wave, and seconds later, he stood in front of them.

Tall—at least six inches taller than she—with short, black hair, broad shoulders and... Oh boy. *Eyes front. No. Higher!* He was *not* a prize bull for purchase. She did not need to study anything apart from his face and his sexy green eyes.

Lisa smiled and concentrated on holding her ground. She'd been mistaken. There was nothing wrong with his front view. One glance at his sinful body and her feline sat up and purred approval. Lisa totally agreed. Sam... He stole her breath and made her mind focus on sex and all those tingly good feelings that came along with horizontal togetherness.

"Lisa, it's great to see you. Charlotte told me you were coming to the singles' ball. You look just the same."

"You're taller."

Charlotte snickered and another blush swept into Lisa's cheeks. Mortified, she cast her mind about for something to say that wouldn't make her sound like an idiot.

Sam's casual stance shrieked of confidence, a man sure of his place in the world. "I was probably about sixteen when you last saw me. I have grown since then. Come and dance." He took possession of her hand and tugged.

"Wouldn't you prefer to dance with someone your own age?"

A flash of something undecipherable flickered across his face, but his smile didn't shift. "I'm twenty-five. Old enough to choose my dance partners."

"And I'm thirty-two," Lisa protested.

"For goodness' sake, dance with the man," Charlotte said. "You might even enjoy yourself."

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That was the problem. From the instant she'd caught sight of him her hormones had jumped to attention and snapped a salute, her mind focusing on sin. Her pussy moistened and the feline part of her psyche dwelled on closer contact. Touching. Lots of touching.

She wanted Sam with an intensity she hadn't felt since David's death. It was exhilarating and scary and inappropriate as hell. She was an older woman and she should know better.

Sam guided Lisa onto the dance floor, not daring to release her trembling hand because he suspected she'd run. His feline stirred, taut and edgy with the need to act. Take control. He'd had a crush on Lisa since he was ten. The few times he'd seen her since only increased his need. It had taken him awhile to get his head around his unwavering desire for her, but he'd finally recognized it was his feline nature. Lisa was his mate.

And tonight was the night.

He intended to make his move and, if he were lucky, he'd get her into his bed and keep her there. She was as skittish as a wild cat, her unusual blue eyes holding wariness. She'd restrained her dark-brown hair in a tight knot at her nape, and he couldn't wait to release the pins and combs and watch the heavy mass tumble down her back. The only plus side about her bound hair was that it allowed him to appreciate the naked expanse of her back, the curve of her shoulders and neck left bare by her halterneck dress. Soon he'd touch her golden skin and test it for softness and smoothness. He wanted to make her purr, preferably once he got her out of her tight red dress.

Glad of the crush and the melodic ballad, he guided her into a dark corner and took her in his arms. Sweet and curvy with an underlying sexiness, her smile laced with mischief, or at least it used to be before her husband died. Sam wanted her so bad.

"You smell good." And her skin felt warm and silky beneath his fingertips. He trailed his fingers over her naked back again just because he could.

"So do you." Her muffled voice barely reached him, but he could smell her arousal, the floral and musky scent of her boosting his hopes. He didn't want a single night. He intended to have her future. A mate.

"Are you looking for a husband?"

Her head jerked up and she stared at him. She caught her bottom lip between her teeth. "No, but I get...lonely sometimes."

"You miss sex?" Shit, this conversation couldn't have gone better if he'd scripted the words himself. He hadn't even expected her to answer his question.

She swallowed but monitored his reaction. He let his interest loose, knowing it would show in his eyes, stamp the rest of his features. When she agreed, he didn't want any misunderstandings. He intended to fuck her tonight and into the small hours of the morning until they were both sated and exhausted.

After a long pause, she finally nodded, a tiny shudder working through her tense muscles. "Yes, I miss being with a man."

"I didn't think you'd admit it."

A laugh burst from her. "Me neither. I'm too old to discuss sex with you."

"But I'm taller," he reminded her.

She chuckled, a sultry sound that grabbed his nuts and twisted. Sam drew her even closer, letting her brush against his erection. It wouldn't hurt her to experience the physical proof of his attraction. "And I'm all grown up. I know about sex."

Something shifted in her then. She stiffened, and he knew she was aware of him as a man. An equal.

"But are you good at it?"

"You'll have to let me know." The last of the tension residing in his shoulders faded. She gave up trying to keep a few centimeters between their bodies and relaxed. Her full breasts flattened against his chest, and this time, he was the one who shuddered. Her breasts had featured in a few of his fantasies over the years.

"Are you propositioning me?" Despite his openness, surprise shaded her words.

"Of course."

"Why?" Lisa sounded interested. Intrigued.

He laughed. "Simple. You're sexy." He'd wait to tell her how much he wanted to taste her mouth. He probably shouldn't tell her he wanted to go down on her, lick her pussy and fuck her with his tongue until she came on his mouth. Nah, he'd spring that on her later.

Her eyes widened fractionally. "You don't mess around, do you?"

"I know what I want."

"But I'm older –"

Irritated at her for not seeing the possibilities, he lowered his head and smothered her protesting words with his lips. He devoured her mouth, not giving her an opportunity to protest. This was war and he was in it to win.

Chapter Two

The instant his mouth touched hers, she was gone. Her hands curled behind his neck even as she wondered what the heck she was doing locking lips with a guy she used to babysit. Hot guy admittedly, but that was no excuse.

Sweetheart, stop worrying so much. You know Sam. You know his family. You're attracted to him. Give in, sweetheart. You might even enjoy yourself. Have your fling.

Maybe Charlotte was right. A one-night stand might make her feel alive again. She couldn't talk to her vibrator, and her vibe certainly didn't indulge in post-coital cuddles.

Our fling turned into something permanent, sweetheart. You promised me you'd try to open your heart to another man.

Lisa sighed. Mindful of her deathbed promise to David, she kept kissing Sam and opened herself to pleasure. She let her mind drift away, leaving whys and why-nots far behind. She made a shy foray with her tongue. Instantly, Sam took over, driving the kiss and fueling need in her. Their tongues stroked together, with each surge echoing in her pussy, making her needy. Desperate for more.

They were both feline shifters. She knew he'd notice her changed scent in the same way she'd smell him. One thing was for sure. This kiss felt good. Really good.

Sam pulled back when the music ceased. "Dance with me again."

"Yes."

They didn't speak. Instead they allowed their bodies to do their talking for them. A quick brush of lips. His hand drifted down to cup her butt. A whisper of his breath against her ear. The sensations built, layer by layer, the early sizzle in her nipples and pussy growing to a burning ache in her clit.

"Are you staying with your sister?" he murmured, breaking the silence between them three songs later.

"Yes."

"Come home with me."

Lisa frowned against Sam's chest. "I don't know." He was probably staying with his sister, and she didn't feel right about having a one-nighter in a friend's home.

"I'm house-sitting for Jocelyn and Martin. They've gone to the Gold Coast. I'm alone. Come home with me. Stay the night."

She wanted to say yes, but her mind wouldn't let go of the fact he was younger.

"Please."

If he'd shown arrogance or too much confidence, she would've rejected him immediately. Instead she heard a trace of pleading, and his uncertainty loosened her restraint. "All right."

Good grief. She couldn't believe she'd actually agreed to his proposal. When she should have felt fear or maybe shame, elation filled her. A sense of freedom and accomplishment arrived and another wave of arousal. Her skimpy panties were distinctly damp while her bare breasts seemed overly sensitive as they brushed the bodice of her red halter-neck dress.

Sam took her arm and led her off the dance floor. When someone jostled her, he wrapped a protective arm around her waist. His citrus aftershave made her want to burrow even nearer. The boy she'd once babysat was now much taller and broader, making her feel fragile in comparison.

They made their way over to Lisa's sister.

"Charlotte, I'm taking Lisa home."

"I see." No mistaking the laughter in her sister. "Will you be coming home later? Should I leave the back door open for you?"

Lisa scowled at Charlotte and opened her mouth to remonstrate, to say of course she'd be home.

Sam didn't miss a beat. "Lock the doors. We'll see you tomorrow."

Charlotte gave her a swift hug. "Have fun."

Self-consciousness suffused Lisa as she nodded at her sister. Sticking her nose in the air, Lisa collected her small clutch bag from under the table where she'd left it.

Charlotte smirked and whispered in her ear, "Enjoy yourself. You deserve someone sexy like Sam."

Sam hustled her out of the marquee, keeping his arm around her shoulders. Saber Mitchell wandered out in front of them, a mystery woman tucked under his arm. They disappeared around the corner into the darkness.

"Looks like my cousin Saber has found his own lady in red," Sam whispered in her ear, turning her in the opposite direction.

The last of her trepidation faded, and she hoped the mystery woman enjoyed her night as much as she intended to relish hers.

* * * * *

The drive to the house Sam was sitting could have been weird—a time for Lisa to build a case full of worries and reasons why she should tell Sam to drop her off at her sister's house. Instead, Sam told her about the horses he was breeding and training for polo. His enthusiasm and love for the horses on his Northern Canterbury farm came through clearly. Lisa worked at graphic design and they ended up talking about websites and the property she owned in Cashmere, a suburb at the southern end of Christchurch. Kismet, according to Sam. They actually lived and worked in the same province with only a short half-hour car journey separating them. And that was on a slow traffic day. Lisa couldn't help but smile at his boyish glee. The fifteen-minute drive to Jocelyn's place took no time at all.

Sam stopped his SUV in front of the house.

Lisa unfastened her belt and reached for the door.

He leaned over to snatch a kiss. Gentle and tender, it twisted her into knots of confusion and lust. *Let's not forget the desire to have his naked body under her hands with him*

at her mercy. When he lifted his head, feline shimmered in his eyes. Somehow she didn't think she'd be the one calling the shots and it didn't worry her in the slightest.

"Wait there. I'll get the door for you."

Lisa froze under the instant memories. David had always opened doors for her, treating her with care, like something precious. Living alone, she'd become used to doing everything for herself. A shiver worked through her, a yearning for a man to look after her.

Sam opened the passenger door and helped her out. An outside light, presumably on a sensor, flicked on, illuminating the footpath leading to the door. A surge of nerves hit her as she stepped inside.

"I should offer you a drink."

"I don't want a drink," Lisa said, shivering when his fingers glided down her bare back. Now that she'd said yes, all she wanted was him.

"Good." Sam's eyes gleamed and he swept her off her feet, striding rapidly down a dimly lit passage with Lisa clutching his shoulders. "There's a light to the right."

Lisa fumbled in the direction he indicated and switched on the light. They were in a room with a double bed. Sam set her on her feet, his gaze intense and searching and dark with desire.

"Can I undress you?"

"Yes." She swallowed, unable to say or do more.

He knelt in front of her to unbuckle her shoes, the warmth of his hands seeping into her feet and darting up her calves. His fingers skirted upward under the hem of her dress. Their gazes met and she drew a bracing breath. When his fingers smoothed across her inner thighs, her stomach muscles quivered. He knew exactly what his touch was doing to her, the knowledge evident in the devilish quirk of his lips.

He ran a finger along the leg of her panties, his calloused skin leaving a trail of sensual destruction rioting through her. She had no defenses against his attack. Instead,

she vibrated with need, almost purring out loud like the feline she was. She loved the way he stroked and petted her, constantly touching as if he could never get enough. He tugged her panties down her legs and tossed them aside. "Sit on the edge of the bed."

Bemused, she followed his instructions, sitting primly with her legs together.

Sam grinned. "Uh-uh. Not like that." He gently tugged her forward and parted her legs at the same time. To keep her balance, she fell back on her elbows. "Perfect."

"Ah, maybe we can play doctors and nurses another time." An attack of nerves. She tried to close her legs so he couldn't see her.

"Don't hide."

"You're not the one with your private parts on display."

"I can see I need to work faster to distract you." He brushed a kiss on her inner knee while his busy fingers lightly traced the delicate skin of her inner thighs. "You're beautiful."

"So why can't we both get naked and start fooling around?"

"I don't think I can control myself." He kissed her leg again, moving upward. She swallowed, her stomach bucking with nerves, excitement. "When I get inside you, it's not going to take much for me to explode. I want to make you feel good."

Oh god. She understood. Right now, she'd detonate if he touched her. Their dancing had been like foreplay and...

His tongue stroked along her folds and teased her clit. The muscles of her inner thighs quivered, her pulse spiking sharply at the rough lap of his tongue. A hungry whimper escaped her, a tickle of heat pulsing everywhere he licked. Each soft, tormenting stroke sent sensual flames zapping along her veins.

"Sam." Her hips bucked, driving her inflamed flesh against his tongue. She shuddered. "Sam."

He pushed two fingers inside her pussy, the intrusion filling an emptiness she hadn't been aware of until now. Her hands went down to grip his skull. She tugged his

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hair, attempting to direct his mouth to where she needed it. Direct stimulation. Now to cure the intense ache inside.

"Sam, please make me come now." She yanked his hair to reinforce her words.

"Ouch, woman."

"Sam." This time his name was a plea.

His husky laughed filled the room, the burst of hot air against her tender nub almost more than she could bear. She wriggled and squirmed, attempting to increase the pressure. The wet sound of his fingers stroking in and out of her should have embarrassed her but just drove her urgency higher.

"This time, Lisa." Promise shimmered in his words, making her believe. She sucked in a hoarse breath, and when his mouth closed over her clit and sucked, she released it in a scream. Pleasure ripped through her, darting down her legs and swelling through her upper torso. Her vagina contracted repeatedly around his fingers, the spasms going on for long moments. Gradually the explosions quieted and her tense muscles relaxed.

Sam removed his fingers and stood in a fluid move. His hands went to his shirt, and without taking his gaze off her, he started undoing the buttons. "Take off your dress, Lisa. If it's not off by the time I'm naked, I won't be responsible for damages."

The unvarnished need in his face had her standing on shaky legs. Trembling fingers managed the side zipper of her dress and unfastened the button behind her neck. The fabric slid away from her torso and down her hips. Cool air washed over her breasts, making her nipples tighten.

"You're gorgeous." He didn't give her time to study her fill of him, scooping her off her feet and tossing her on the bed instead. He followed her down, the hard contours of his face intent and hungry. His lips settled on hers as he nudged her legs apart.

Sam buried himself in Lisa's wet core with one seamless stroke. She stretched to accommodate him, hot flesh clinging and massaging his shaft. It was even better than he imagined. So much better. He wanted to go slow, to make this last for as long as possible. Didn't happen. Luckily the strain on his features didn't seem to scare her.

With each hard stroke, a purr of pleasure escaped her. He liked it and smiled. Something to tease her about later.

"Wrap your legs around me, sweetheart."

"Like this?"

"Yeah. Perfect." Slipping his hand between their straining bodies, he gave her clit some extra attention. She snatched a deep breath and let out one of her sexy purrs. Seconds later, rhythmic pulses of her channel almost short-circuited his brain. He moaned and thrust, invading. Retreating while Lisa clutched his back, her fingernails digging into his flesh. His breaths came faster, his heart pounding with each rapid stroke. His balls drew up and his cock seemed to swell. A faint tingle started in his nuts and he felt the surge of come as it blasted up his cock and he exploded.

Gasping for breath, Sam slipped from Lisa's warmth and drew her into his arms. "Hell, I didn't use a condom." And he couldn't find it in himself to care. Imagining her round with his child gave him a sense of satisfaction.

"I'm taking birth control shots."

Disappointment slammed him first, followed by a sliver of jealousy. It crawled through his gut, taking him by surprise. Man, he was a goner. He drew in a careful breath, fighting the urge to ask why when her husband died some time ago.

As if she sensed his inner turmoil, she added, "You're the first man I've even considered sleeping with since... The shots help my cycle."

Relief filled him at her admission and he started to kiss her again, everywhere he could reach. Her face, her throat, her breasts and taut nipples.

"I want you again," he whispered against her breast. He pictured himself plunging into her from behind, one hand tweaking a nipple and the other delicately playing her clit. And as the tiny quivers started in her pussy, he'd sink his teeth into the marking site, claiming her as his mate. Blood surged into his cock when the vision played through his mind. "Yes."

Her instant agreement and quick smile gave him confidence. "Can I take you from behind?"

This time silence greeted his question, and when he checked her expression, he found a furrow between her brows. "This is a fling. One night then we go our separate ways."

"I want more." This wasn't the time for pussyfooting around. He didn't intend to let her go without a fight.

"But I'm so much old –"

Sam clapped his hand over her mouth. "You are perfect for me. You're smart and sexy, you know my family and you're a leopard shifter like me. You're the woman for me. My other half. Tell me you don't feel the heat between us, the pull to take things further."

She turned away but not before he caught her gnawing on her bottom lip. He grasped her arm when she would have rolled off the bed.

"Lisa, give us a chance. Come and stay with me during the weekends. Let me woo you. Let me prove to you how good things could be between us."

The desperation in his tone stilled Lisa, made her pause. Sam was right. They were good together, but a future? She shook her head as common sense warred with her gut instinct.

He's a good man, sweetheart. He cares for you, will cherish and love you. Give him a chance.

David *would* choose this moment to yammer in her mind, when she needed onehundred-percent focus. And going to bat for his replacement—what sort of haunting was this?

"Lisa?"

She went with David's advice plus her gut, sliding back onto the bed, her lips meeting Sam's. When they finally parted from their lip-lock, he lifted her over him and she sank down onto his cock. She rocked up and down, savoring the friction, the hot pleasure that fluttered through her with each slide.

"Touch your nipples. Pull on them," Sam instructed.

She followed his order, tugged at her nipples as she ground against him.

"Can't hang on," he muttered, and he flipped her over, pumping his cock into her in fevered strokes. Lisa hung on for the ride, shattering a few seconds before he came too.

It was difficult to miss the satisfaction in Sam. His face and eyes glowed with it, yet he didn't make any smartass comments. Instead he sighed with contentment, regarding her with a lazy grin.

"What?"

"There's so much I want to do with your sexy body. I don't know where to start."

Lisa wriggled about on his spent cock and tightened her inner muscles in order to tease him. He was still partially erect, the drag of his flesh over her clit firing a ball of heat at her.

"Don't start something you don't want to finish," he warned.

She clambered off him. "I want to explore you."

Grinning, he raised his hands and placed them under his hands. "Have at it, sweetheart. Do your worst."

"Leave your hands right where they are."

"Yes, ma'am."

Lisa snorted. Sam might behave like a lazy housecat right now, but she knew it was merely a disguise. He was a sleek jungle beast in his prime. Velvet tension bloomed in her, tugging at her breasts and her restraint. She couldn't wait to see him in his feline form, to run with him and experience the wind rushing over her fur. When he shifted, he'd be bigger than her. She stared at his bulging pectorals, his ridged abs and let her attention wander down to his flat stomach.

"Are you gonna touch me anytime soon?"

"Shush," she chided. "I'm trying to decide where to touch first." Her eyes strayed lower to his cock and her tongue darted out to moisten her lips. His cock pulsed and thickened while she watched. Her gaze darted up to meet his. "Don't even think it. This is my turn."

Sam smirked. "I bet you take forever to open your presents."

It was a subtle warning. If she didn't hurry, he'd take over again. She leaned forward and nibbled one pectoral muscle. He tasted salty — a little spicy. And he was all hers to explore. A kiss. A leisurely lave of tongue across a nipple. Her mouth headed south, following in the wake of her busy fingers. Already, his erection dug into her hip.

"I can think of a place that needs attention."

Lisa smiled against his abdomen, tracing her lips down the delicate skin where his torso and leg met. "Where would that be? Here?" She lightly bit his upper thigh, silently laughing at his huff of complaint. "Here?" She moved to his inner thigh. "Or here?" Finally she closed her mouth around the tip of his cock.

"Perfect choice."

Lisa gave up her teasing and settled in to give him pleasure. Each sound, each shudder she pulled from him gave her enjoyment in return. Soon he was rocking into her mouth, his breathing unsteady as she made greedy, slurping sounds and sucked him off. His hands came down to grip her skull, the tug of his fingers in her hair bringing an echo of sensation in her. Without warning, he pulled from her touch and tossed her on her back.

"I don't want to come alone," he said, rubbing her swollen clit with a firm motion. He slid into her, sank deep and pinched her nub. Lisa came so hard she saw stars. Sam followed her into orgasm, holding her for long moments afterward. Her loud yawn brought a chuckle. "Have I tired you out, sweetheart?"

"A little." She'd certainly feel a few aches and pains tomorrow in limbs unused to vigorous lovemaking. Not that she cared.

He tugged back the covers and helped her underneath, drawing her into his arms. "We have a future, Lisa. Let me prove it."

"All right," she whispered. "We can see how things work out."

"We're good together. You'll see." Sam kissed her one last time, and she fell asleep with a smile on her face.

Chapter Three A few months later, just north of Christchurch

He'd said he wanted to woo her. Lisa smiled as she climbed from her car and headed for Sam's house. He'd said he might be running late because he had a buyer coming to see a horse and to wait for him. They intended to run together in feline form, and she couldn't wait to embrace this side of her with a man she cared about. A shudder of pleasure worked through her at the idea of running and sparring together as leopards.

Deep in thought, she collided with the bulk in front of her.

"Ah, beautiful Lisa." One of Sam's friends wrapped his arms around her to halt a fall. "Are you free Friday night? Come out to dinner with me."

"Thanks, but no. I'm with Sam." Cade was gorgeous, his athletic prowess securing him a place in the region's representative rugby team. All the girls wanted him. Apart from her.

Cade shrugged. "I can see why Sam is crazy for you. You have class. If you change your mind, you know where to find me."

She stepped away from him. "I won't change my mind. Have you seen Sam?"

"He's at the stables."

"Thanks." Lisa lifted her hand in farewell and strode to the stable block, anxious to meet Sam. Charlotte was right. The seven years between them didn't matter any longer.

He was showing a bay horse and talking to the female buyer when she arrived, so Lisa hung back, content to watch until he'd finished. Sam returned the horse to the stable. Lisa was about to approach the couple when the woman went straight into Sam's arms and they kissed.

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Lisa jammed her hand against her mouth to halt her croak of protest. Betrayal cut like a dagger to her heart. Tears welled and she realized she'd fallen for Sam. Hard. Which was why witnessing his duplicity hurt so much. Stumbling, she turned to flee, glad she'd discovered his disloyalty before she'd admitted she loved him.

Wait!

Lisa froze at the stern voice. David hadn't spoken to her much recently, and while part of her missed the connection, she understood. She'd moved on while David remained rooted in the past.

Turn around and watch them. Now.

Slowly Lisa turned, steeling her heart against the pain of seeing Sam embrace someone else. She started to retreat again.

Sam's friend had his hands all over you earlier. To an outsider, it might have appeared as if you were willing but you and I know better.

This time when Lisa turned to watch, she was better prepared. She studied the nuances and realized what David meant. The woman clung to Sam while Sam's hands pushed at her shoulders. He wasn't a willing participant. She stepped closer.

"Damn, Katrina. How many times do I have to tell you? I'm not interested," Sam snapped.

"That's right," Lisa said. "Because he has all the woman he can handle with me."

"Lisa." Sam appeared apprehensive while she approached, until she winked at him.

She stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek. "Almost done?"

"Katrina, what have you decided about the horse?"

The woman scowled in an unattractive manner. "It's not worth the price you're asking."

"It's a fair price."

Katrina shrugged one shoulder. "Call me if you want to negotiate." She sauntered off with a twitch of her jeans-clad ass.

Shelley Munro

Sam turned to her with a troubled frown. "Lisa, I didn't kiss – "

She slapped fingers over his mouth. "I know. I saw you weren't an eager participant. Although you could have pushed her a bit harder and made her end up on the ground on her ass. You ready to go for a run?" She stepped away from him but watched him expectantly.

"As soon as I make sure my visitors have gone? Why is Cade's scent on you?"

"I wasn't looking where I was going. I crashed right into him."

Sam growled deep in his throat. "He didn't have to cop a feel at the same time."

Fifteen minutes later they stood at the edge of a stand of trees. Rolling hills stretched out to Lisa's right while to her left the Canterbury plains extended into the distance.

"Are you ready?" Sam asked, a twinkle in his green eyes.

"Yes." Lisa was ready to commit to Sam. The last few months had made her realize how much they complemented each other, how right they were together. She loved him and wanted to take the next step. With a carefree laugh, she started tearing off her clothes. Footwear flew off, clothes dropped to the ground and finally she was naked.

Lisa called her feline in her mind, embracing the pain of the shift as muscles twisted, bones lengthened and black fur rushed across her skin. She loped away, glorying in her enhanced senses—the scent of the grasses and soil, the green aroma from the trees, the sharp call of a bird hidden somewhere in the trees. When Sam raced up behind her, she increased her speed, tearing across the ground, luxuriating in the play of muscles. Sam leaped at her and they tumbled in a pile, mock snarling and testing their strength against each other.

Finally Sam nudged her to the right and in minutes she found herself overlooking a pond. The sun shone over the surface, making it glint like a jewel. Lisa followed Sam and they entered a private, grassy spot with views over the pond. After prowling over to her, he rubbed against her shoulder, nudged her head and finally licked across her muzzle with a rasp of his tongue. He made a handsome cat, bigger than her, solid and muscular. She trembled with need, her purrs of pleasure halting abruptly when he stepped away from her.

He shifted, rolling smoothly to his feet to stare down at her. "Shift."

It was an order and one she obeyed instantly. Seconds later she threw herself at him, trusting him to catch her and keep her safe.

"I love you, Sam," she whispered.

He gripped her shoulders and pushed her away to study her face. Male arrogance surfaced in him, finding an outlet in a smirk. "About time."

Lisa laughed, her amusement ending with a shriek when he seized her in his arms. They sank to the grass together, lips meeting in an urgent kiss. Her brain short-circuited under his raw and primal kisses, and all she could do was hang on for the ride. His cock swelled between them and an answering arousal throbbed through her pussy, her flesh dampening in preparation for their joining.

"Damn, Lisa. I never thought I'd hear you say those words. I'm crazy about you. I want you for my mate, to share my life and have children with you."

"Yes," she agreed, pressing closer.

"Can I take you from behind?"

This time there was an unasked question lurking in his words, but she didn't hesitate. "Take me. I'm all yours."

Sam flipped her over, stroking her buttocks and tugging on her nipples in the manner she liked. She shivered beneath his touch, parting her legs under his guidance. One big hand pushed aside the fall of her hair so he could nuzzle her neck, his ragged breathing hinting at his urgency.

"Sam." Her voice held both yearning and need. She was fine with a fast pace.

"Steady, sweetheart. There's no need to hurry."

Shelley Munro

A frustrated groan escaped her and Sam's laugh rang out. His tongue darted across her marking spot before he retreated to tease the whorls of her ear.

Lisa snatched a hasty breath, her skin incredibly sensitive beneath his searching tongue. "I think you're wrong. I want you to fuck me, bite me, take me in all ways." The play of his fingers, the way his tongue teased her made her belly clench, her nerve endings sizzle with impatience. He was going to send her mad. She turned her head to glower at him and he laughed again.

Sam continued at his own pace, feathering kisses down her throat, making teasing forays over her marking site. The breeze cooled her skin while a bird in a nearby tree serenaded them with sweet song. Beneath her hands and knees, crushed grass let off a distinctive fresh, green scent. The next time she smelled trampled grass, she'd think of this moment, recall the way he'd touched her and the care and love that came with each of his caresses. Love swelled inside her for this special man.

He crowded her, covering her with his larger frame while his fingers tested her readiness. A harsh growl escaped her when he finally pushed into her, his cock stretching her silken walls. Fiery sensation flared in her pussy, her pulse skittering while the rich scent of arousal swirled around them. He started to shaft her deeply. She pushed back, trembling because she was so close.

Sam grunted and shoved into her, his teeth fastening on the fleshy pad of skin where shoulder and neck met. Pain streaked through her, following immediately by a contrasting shard of pleasure that made her cry out. She went liquid deep inside, the hum of pleasure building with each decisive push of his shaft. Tension spiked, the rasp of his tongue across her marking spot and the urgent tempo of his cock too much to bear. She shattered, pulsing around his shaft, ecstasy striking her hard. Strangled gasps tore from her throat as she sobbed out her pleasure.

Sam pulled back and pounded into her again, groaning. His big body shook as climax took him, his teeth still gripping her. When the spasms finally eased, Sam released his grasp. He lapped his tongue over the wound to allow the enzymes in their blood to mingle and the mark to heal.

Long minutes later, he separated their bodies and turned her to face him. There was no mistaking the smug grin of triumph in her new mate. She couldn't help her rueful smile in return and the wave of love swelling inside her.

I told you he loves you. The two are you are good together. It's time for me to leave.

David?

I'll always love you, but now you have Sam. He's a worthy mate. My work here is done.

David? He didn't answer, and Lisa realized he'd really gone this time. But instead of an aching emptiness, she felt acceptance. Love.

She wound her arms around Sam's neck and pressed her lips against his to redirect some of his smugness. "You. Me. A bed. Tonight," she said when their lips parted. "By tomorrow morning you're gonna wear a matching mark."

"I can't wait. I love you, Lisa."

Lisa let out a rumbling purr and smiled because this time she truly believed. Sam Mitchell was her mate. Lightning really could strike the same place twice.

About the Author

Shelley lives in Auckland, New Zealand, with her husband and a small, bossy dog named Scotty.

Typical New Zealanders, Shelley and her husband left home for their big OE soon after they married (translation of New Zealand-speak: big overseas experience), a yearlong adventure lengthened to six years of roaming the world. Enduring memories include being almost sat on by a mountain gorilla in Rwanda, lazing on white sandy beaches in India, whale watching in Alaska, searching for leprechauns in Ireland and dealing with ghosts in an English pub.

While travel is still a big attraction, these days Shelley is most likely found in front of her computer following another love—that of writing stories of romance and adventure. Other interests include watching rugby and rugby league (strictly for research purposes *grin*), being walked by the dog and curling up with a good book.

Shelley welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her <u>author bio page</u> at <u>www.ellorascave.com</u>.

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