

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Fire Wolf
ANH LEOD

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Divorcee Olivia has had her eye on much younger firefighter Smokie Monahan. She propositions him, never realizing he's had it bad for her since he first saw her luscious bod in a bikini a decade before. She plans a brief, hot, sexy encounter at the firehouse—in, out, done. But that quickly turns into a series of lusty hook-ups that neither can resist.

Smokie is a wolf shapeshifter, so he knows the scorching sex with a human isn't going to lead to anything more. Besides, Olivia insists it's just a fling—no more relationships for her. Then a mystical seer declares they are true mates.

Smokie thinks he's too young to settle down and Olivia thinks hot sex does *not* equal love. These two are about to discover just how pleasurable being stuck with each other for life can be.

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Fire Wolf

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Chapter One

“Wanna fuck?”

The sultry voice behind Smokie Monahan sure didn’t sound like any of his coworkers. No women worked in the Ladder Company One firehouse. That word, “fuck”, jolted him from contemplation of a new forty-eight-inch, flat-screen television. His cock jerked too as blood moved south. Had the newly outfitted breakroom been redecorated just for his pleasure? He had noted the new lock on the inside of the door.

Olivia Bilson posed in the doorway as he turned to check out the body belonging to the voice. *Hot damn*. He’d had a hard-on for Olivia since he’d first seen her in a bikini when he was fourteen. She’d been in her mid-twenties then, he guessed, but the last ten years hadn’t dimmed her special brand of high-octane sexy.

She wore a gray pencil skirt that outlined her full hips and slim legs. A fitted black jacket didn’t cover all the plunging cleavage her yellow silk blouse displayed to perfection. Her breasts were still high and rounded on top, like melons.

His palms began to itch.

“Excuse me?” Had he really heard her correctly?

Olivia glided forward, opened her closed fingers and tossed something on the coffee table. “Roll the dice, fireman.”

He glanced down and saw a pair of dice. Not ordinary dice though. Sex dice. He grinned. If he wasn’t dreaming this, his morning had just hit the red zone. The top of one die ordered him to *lick* and the other said *kiss*.

“Someone could come in.” He stomped his foot and felt the reverberation through his lower leg. Felt real. Not a dream at all.

Olivia slinked back to the door and pushed it until the lock clicked then turned the bolt. Ambient noise from outside stilled.

All Smokie could hear now was the sound of his own breath. Too bad the dice didn't order him to *wag* because if he had a tail in this form that's what it would do. Or *burn* which was the state of his blood right now.

"The door is locked." She smiled.

He licked his lips.

She glanced at the dice. "I don't think you're supposed to lick yourself."

"Involuntary reaction." His voice was a mere croak.

Her lips curved. "Is it hot in here?" Her hips swayed from side to side as she moved toward a water dispenser and took a cup.

"It's July. You're overdressed."

The plastic bottle did its *glug-glug* thing as her cup filled. She placed her lips on its rim. Smokie watched her neck as she swallowed, imagined the water was his cum riding down her throat. He felt a drop of pre-cum dampening his shorts.

"Just came from a meeting," she said. "So thirsty."

Back when he was fourteen, he could never have imagined, wasn't even capable of the complex emotions this situation gave him.

Sex in the firehouse wasn't unusual. Firefighters liked to blow off steam. Hell, he'd even participated a time or two, but not with the likes of Olivia Bilson. She was no hose bunny.

"Olivia, what are you doing here?"

She set a languid hand on her hip. Her dark brown eyes were intent on his. "Isn't it obvious?" She blew him a kiss. "There, you've licked and I've kissed. Now roll the dice."

He grabbed her cup, tossed the contents down his throat and threw it behind him.

Olivia's eyebrows rose as it bounced off the wall directly above an open garbage can and dropped inside. "That can needs a lid."

"What are you, an interior decorator?" Confused, but unwilling to back down, he grabbed the dice and dropped them on the table. They spun for a moment on the new, slick surface.

The dice stopped – *touch, taste.*

I'm a dead man.

"I like those orders," she purred, running her fingernail along the frayed collar of his T-shirt.

He'd showered after his shift and changed to comfortable clothes, had planned to go home as soon as he'd checked out the refurbished room. She stroked her fingers up his neck, rasping the day's growth of beard. He forgot any plans he'd made for the rest of the day.

"I guess you did the touching so I've got to do the tasting," he said.

"Mmmm," was Olivia's only response.

He bent to nuzzle her fragrant hair. It smelled of coconut and lemons, but the dice hadn't ordered him to smell. Still, he couldn't avoid it, and even in his human form his sense of smell was very strong.

His breath caught in his throat when he smelled another scent. Arousal. Female arousal. Her arousal.

"You want me."

She tilted her head up. "Is that an accusation, a statement or an order?"

Her expression was neutral. He had no idea what she was thinking.

"A thought," he said, not wanting to explain how he could smell the cream coating her pussy lips. How he wanted to dive between her legs right now, touch her bush, taste her lips, impale her with his tongue.

Hell, that was tasting, right? Twisting her game to his desire, he went to his knees and yanked her skirt up to her waist.

“This is what you want, right?” He stared up at her.

She found the edge of a red leather sofa with her fine-boned hand and held on, saying nothing. He noticed the lack of panties under her skirt and his cock came fiercely to attention.

Her stance widened and he growled with satisfaction at the sight of the honey brown hair curling between her legs. No wonder she smelled so good. The tips were damp with her excitement.

If he'd known this lush treasure hid beneath her bikini bottom a decade ago he might not have been able to keep his hands off her, even at fourteen. He'd been an early bloomer. With a savage moan, he spread her dripping labia and speared her with his tongue.

Her entire body arched back, pushing her naked pelvis into his face. He took full advantage, grateful he'd fast-forwarded this seduction she'd planned.

“Taste me,” she gasped.

He wouldn't take orders from her. His tongue leisurely explored the contours of her tight sheath before he licked the opening then travelled north toward her clit, meandering with nips along her labia.

Her body rocked with fine tremors. She was close to coming already, he knew. Damn, how long had it been for her?

He licked a tiny circle around her clit and considered sucking, but she'd explode, and his instructions had only been to taste. Damning the game, he pulled back and got off his knees.

“Why?” she asked.

He pointed. “Roll the dice, Olivia.”

She swallowed hard and turned to the table. He resisted the urge to palm her ass, to slam his cock between her truly excellent cheeks. He heard a clink on the table as the dice rolled.

"It says 'bite' and 'pinch'."

"Your turn."

She slid her arm around his waist and pulled close against him. The fabric of her bunched skirt kept them at a slight distance.

"Why don't you get naked?" he suggested.

"You first." She lifted the hem of his T-shirt.

"No, my idea."

She stayed still for a moment then slid her jacket off her shoulders. He pushed the sleeves down her arms and let the garment drop to the floor. Her breasts pushed against the yellow silk, her nipples clearly outlined against the thin fabric.

"Pinch." He knew what he would do when it came his turn.

"Bite," she said.

For a moment he considered *the* bite—the wolf bite—but she wasn't like him. She was human. At least he was pretty sure. She smelled human, though her floral perfume might be blocking his senses.

She pushed up the sleeve of his shirt and nipped at the tattoo there, the one that read Óðœß under the image of a snarling wolf-dog.

"Cute." She nipped again.

He'd never thought of the Brotherhood emblem as cute before. "My turn."

He hooked a diamond-hard fingernail under the edge of her collar. It ripped the sunny silk down the front.

She exhaled sharply, but didn't protest.

He growled in satisfaction when he saw her bra had a front closure. He flicked it open and saw small, round breasts, capped by long brown nipples. "Gorgeous." Resisting the urge to taste, he took one in his fingers and tweaked it. "No sound?"

She shuddered.

He found the other nipple and squeezed. "Still nothing?"

She bit her lip.

"You know what the dice said." He took one nipple in each hand and pinched. Hard.

Her head fell back and he smelled cream leaking from her pussy.

"Damn," she groaned. "Do it again."

He pinched even harder that time, adding a twist. When he let go, he saw her nipples had engorged, reddened. Beautiful. "You should pierce them, display them. So perfect."

Breathing hard, she gazed at him. "Fuck me, Smokie. Now. No second thoughts."

He smiled. "The dice haven't rolled that way yet, sweetheart." He crouched, letting his lips slide down her shoulder as he found the dice and tossed them.

"'Kiss' again," she reported. "'Nibble'."

"Getting repetitive," he muttered, finding her lips and sealing them with his own.

Her tongue entered his mouth immediately and he tangled his tongue with hers. He nibbled at it and she moaned around him. Without losing their liplock, he found the dice and rolled them.

"Thank God," she cried, when she saw the dice. *Love. Linger.*

"What do you want me to linger on?" Smokie asked.

"The orgasm part," she said, reaching for the elastic band of his orange sweatpants.

He ripped the remnants of her clothing off her upper body as soon as she'd freed his cock.

"You made me wait when you were sporting that beautiful, thick erection under there?" she asked when she'd removed the sweats.

"Every time you touched me, it got even bigger," he said, pulling her onto the couch.

"Wait."

In a sudden move, she dropped to the floor on all fours and began frantically rubbing at the floor with her hands.

"What's wrong?" Had she lost a contact lens?

"The condom was in my bra. It must have dropped."

He left the couch and crouched next to her, soon spotting the foil packet under the sofa. Reaching for it, he said, "Don't move."

"I'll sheath you," she protested, raising one arm.

"Don't move," he ordered. "You're perfect just like that." When he had the condom rolled on his cock, he positioned himself behind her perfect ass.

"Seriously?" she asked, rubbing her ass cheeks against his thigh.

"Mmmm, floor sex." He put his hands to her waist and tugged her back then stuck his thigh between her legs, forcing her to widen further. Her hot, sexy smell invaded his nostrils and he couldn't resist running his fingers up her inner thighs, collecting moisture, before he touched them to his lips. "You taste like the nectar of the gods." But he couldn't wait any longer and covered her with his body, finding her dripping channel with his cock. "Ready?"

"Please," she begged, pressing herself against the flared head even before he could press into her, rocking them together one inch at a time.

They both groaned as his cock stretched her pussy to its limit. His sac quivered against her as he seated himself.

She swore and nearly collapsed them to the floor when she lifted one of her hands.

"What are you doing?"

"My clit," she gasped. "I need contact to come."

"I'll touch you." He reached around her thigh to find her hot little nub, already fully out of its cover.

She moaned when he slid his fingers around the slick surface and clenched her inner muscles around his cock. He set a fast rhythm since it was obvious she'd accept nothing else.

The woman rocked like a wildcat in heat. She reared back after a few moments, sliding his cock into an entirely new level of depth. In his new position, Smokie noticed another change in the room. The decorator had hung a floor-length mirror on one of the breakroom walls. He watched her eyelids flutter shut. Her fingers found her distended nipples and played with them. Curly honey-brown tendrils floated around her cheeks where they'd come loose from her ponytail.

He'd never seen anything so beautiful, found a cunt that fit him so well. Sex in front of a mirror was new to him and he watched his fingers circle her clit with appreciation. She was a beautiful woman, especially with his cock working in and out of her cunt.

Her eyes opened and she gasped. "Forgot the mirror."

"Sweet, huh? A regular orgy palace." He tweaked her clit, watched her shudder against him.

She bent forward, was back on all fours, slamming against him with abandon. He pressed his palm against her clit and put one foot on the floor so he could thrust harder. A tingle in his balls told him he was close.

"What do you need to come?" he asked urgently.

"Keep fucking me," she said. "Fuck me and fuck me and fuck me."

"Like that?" he asked, wrapping his arms around her breasts, pulling her up and slamming himself against her body.

He thrust again and again, blind and deaf to his surroundings. She enveloped him, half-smothering him with her thick hair. He forgot to breathe, focused on nothing but the feeling of her tight sheath holding him, squeezing him.

"Okay, okay," she gasped.

He found her clit again and started to rub. She jerked hard against him, widened her thighs. He fell against her, pushing her torso to the floor, distantly hearing her scream of completion as he jettisoned his cum into the condom.

"Wow," she said, her cheek against the tile. "We came so hard I couldn't breathe there for a second."

Grinning, he carefully extracted himself and the condom. He might be younger than she was, but he knew enough to give her a good fuck. "Give me a few and I'll show you an even better time."

She rolled over and stretched lazily, showing about as much consciousness of her naked body as a member of his wolf clan. Could she be? He wondered for a moment. No. She smelled human, and besides, she'd be allied with a clan if she was like him.

He watched her fingers drift to her nipples and begin to pluck at them. Her eyes opened and a dreamy smile drifted over her face as she found his gaze.

"You've still got it," he told her. "Near stranger to lover in less than twenty minutes."

"Mmmm. I'm glad I stopped by."

He looked down. "The hell with a few minutes, you've already got me hard again, you witch."

Banging at the breakroom door alerted him to the presence of others in the firehouse. Somehow, Olivia had made him forget all about his coworkers.

"Dude, c'mon! The game's about to start!" shouted another of the firefighters.

"I guess that's our cue," Olivia said ruefully.

"Sorry. They'll just break the door down if I tell them to leave. That new big-screen TV is calling."

He gathered what was left of her clothes and handed them to her then grabbed his sweats and hopped into them while trying to remember which of the new cabinets held Ladder Company One T-shirts. When he found one, he handed it to her. "Sorry I ripped your shirt."

She nuzzled his nude chest for a moment. "Never apologize for passion. It was seriously hot."

"Yeah?" He scratched his chin.

"We're going to do this again real soon, okay?"

"Yeah, absolutely."

She flicked one of his nipples. "I'll call you."

"Great. We can, ummm, do dinner?" She raised a perfect eyebrow, as if sensing he wasn't completely willing to pursue anything with her. And maybe he wasn't. Fucking Olivia Bilson was one thing, but dating her? He doubted she was looking for that from him. "Or a booty call?"

She raised the other eyebrow.

He shrugged as the banging intensified. "I'll think of something." After making sure they were both somewhat covered, he went and unlocked the door.

Somebody sniffed at the air then his buddy, Duke, grinned at him, though he was careful not to look at Olivia. Smokie realized the air was loaded with the scent of sex. The last thing he did before following Olivia out of the room was open a window.

When he shut the door behind him, he heard the guffaws of his fellow firefighters. "Sorry about that," he told Olivia.

She shrugged. "I asked for it. But in my defense, despite all these years of visiting my cousin here, surrounded by his hot coworkers, I never propositioned anyone until today." She waved her fingers at him. "See you around, Smokie."

He folded his arms and leaned against the wall, trying to look casual as her hips swung away from him. The best sex of his life and he couldn't find the words to invite her back to his place for round two.

* * * * *

Olivia smoothed her tomato-red jersey dress, which was low cut enough to display the leather strap that was stretched between her breasts, and checked her appearance in the mirror. Since she wasn't wearing panties, the material hugged her lower half like a second skin. A good thing, since she felt ready to jump out of her flesh. The arousal and excitement and strange new pain just killed her.

Sure, she'd intended her acrobatics with Smokie Monahan last week to be a one-time deal and he probably felt the same way. He was too young for her to consider him as more than a plaything, even if a mere glance at him at firehouse social functions these past two years had made her pussy cream in excitement. But then she'd stopped in at the Greek deli and restaurant at the edge of town yesterday. Shamsky, a volunteer firefighter and deli employee, hadn't stopped smirking at her the entire time Asta, the owner, had been preparing her takeout order.

He knew. She could tell from the way he muttered to Asta as she'd left that she'd been a major source of gossip around the firehouse. Sure, she'd pretended she didn't care what they were thinking when she left the breakroom that day, but she did. Men were worse than women about gossip.

Her mirror image looked a bit defeated, so she raised her head and stared straight at her reflection. She was taking her power back from men. Her hands crept to her breasts and she smiled.

The first step was to see if this thing with Smokie could be more than a one-time hook-up. So, last night, glass of white zin in hand, she'd called the firehouse and asked to speak to him then invited him over for dinner. No bachelor would resist a free meal, unless the woman who was inviting was thoroughly repulsive.

He'd said yes.

The doorbell rang and she widened her smile at the mirror, flashing her freshly whitened teeth. As she stepped into heels and walked down the steps, she rubbed her tense jaw with her fingers.

She hadn't cooked for a man since her divorce eight months before. And her ex had always said she was a terrible cook.

Her smile had all but dropped off her face by the time she answered the door. Smokie stood on her porch, a tissue-wrapped bundle in hand.

His initial smile faded when he saw her expression. "Am I too early? I can come back later."

She pasted her smile back on, which wasn't hard to do at the sight of well over six feet of prime firefighter in front of her. God, he was hot. "No. Sorry. I was thinking of something else. Are those for me?"

Smokie held out a rainbow bouquet of wildflowers. "Yes. Thanks for inviting me."

She took the flowers. "And thank you for coming. I'll just get these in some water."

Smokie, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt that had molded to his chiseled torso, followed her down the hallway and through the swinging door into the kitchen. Woefully out of date, just like the rest of the house, but even with prices so low right now, this was the best she could afford with her divorce settlement.

"Hasn't been updated since the early eighties, I'm afraid." She gestured at the peeling burgundy-and-blue-swirled wallpaper. "I've focused most of my efforts on the outside, so far."

If she centered her attention on him instead of the room, she could see they'd never get to dinner. Why was it that women felt the need to dress up, but men definitely looked best in the most casual of clothes? Those worn jeans were cupping him in all the right places. Firefighters prided themselves on the hard bodies they needed to do their jobs and save themselves from tricky situations. Smokie had trained himself into

calendar-worthy condition. Even his short black hair looked ready for action. How could she ever have thought once with him was enough, even if the point had been to bandage her bruised ego?

Heat pooled in her belly. How would he respond if she jumped him, simply latched her legs around his waist and pulled him to the floor? Hey, that might be a good thing, given her cooking skills.

"Are you going to remodel inside too?" he asked, seemingly oblivious to the sexual drift of her thoughts. "The outside looks fantastic, like the house is brand new."

"Thanks. I already started with the upstairs bathroom." She raised her heels out of her high sandals to grab a crystal vase on a top shelf. The movement had the skin of her breasts going taut against the breast binders she wore. Her nipples hardened as the circular spikes bit deliciously into her tender skin. She held back a tiny moan.

"Here." She felt his fingers taking the base of the vase and she released it to him.

"Thanks." God, just the feeling of his calloused fingers against hers almost gave her an orgasm.

"Sure. Doing all the work yourself?"

"Not the plumbing, but I can manage painting and tiles and that kind of stuff. It's kind of fun to get my hands dirty." She turned around and found him closer than she'd expected.

"That's sexy," Smokie said, staring at her chest. "I like a woman who's good with her hands."

She blushed and held back the urge to rub against him. What was she, in heat? "Speaking of hands, I'd better check the chicken. Could you put water in that?"

"Of course."

Behind her, she heard the faucet turn on as she opened the oven and stuck the thermometer into her five-pound bird. She'd basted it in butter and spices. Hopefully the recipe was foolproof.

Her menu included a bagged salad and pre-made garlic bread from the store. No ambition here, just a solid meal. And one firefighter for dessert.

As she closed the door, Smokie asked, "What are you smiling about?"

She licked her bottom lip. "The difference between the sexes."

"Meaning what?"

She touched him lightly between the pecs. "I bet you didn't think twice about what to wear tonight."

"And you did?"

She plucked at the side of her dress. "I'll have you know, I went on a special shopping trip for this."

"You only invited me over last night."

"Exactly. I've been in a tizzy all day and I'll bet you're only thinking about a free meal."

"Not exactly. That's not what I've been thinking about at all." He put his hands around her sides, just under her breasts, slid them down to her waist, and lifted her until she was sitting on the cold edge of her double sink, the rounded metal divider between digging, not unpleasantly, between the globes of her ass.

"Power move," she said, feeling her breath speed up, as if she'd been the one weight-lifting.

"What did you assume I was thinking about?" Smokie asked, finding the hem of her dress and inching it north.

"Ummm, food?" she ventured, wanting to close her eyes, throw her head back, and sink into the sensations of his rough fingers brushing her legs.

His fingers found the tops of her calves, squeezed softly, then moved to her knees and pulled them apart so he could nestle between them. He pulled her closer, rubbing the sensitive insides of her ass cheeks along the cold metal.

She felt herself grow damp against the cold surface, but she was warm everywhere he touched her. His fingers were at her thighs now, still lifting the fabric.

"How long until the chicken is done?" he asked, pushing the vase safely to the side.

"Huh? Chicken?" He grinned, but she wasn't sure why, lost as she was in his amber gaze. "You have too many clothes on. And you're really tall."

"All I have to do is unbutton and slide right into you," he murmured, when his fingers found the bare top of her hip. "Naughty girl. No panties again."

"I wanted to fuck you."

He pulled back in what she could tell was involuntary surprise and was afraid she'd gone too far, but then he laughed. "I want to fuck you again too."

She let out a breath. "Whew. That's a relief."

"What kind of bra are you wearing? I've been staring at it." He pulled down the top of her dress, imprisoning her upper arms in the jersey. "Damn, girl, what's that?"

She'd tightened the leather strap across her torso until her small breasts were plumped together. As he stared, she tilted one of the round disks, exposing the marks on her breasts.

He put his fingers to the top of one breast and stroked the pattern. "Show me your nipples."

"I can't, you've got my arms trapped."

His answering grin was devilish. "Forgot about that. You are so sexy." He bent and nibbled the curvy tops of her breasts. His teeth, along with the sensation of the spikes, had her creaming.

When he came up for air, he pulled down her dress so she could undo the strap of the binder. He moaned low in his throat when he saw how ripe her nipples were.

"You bought this for me?"

"You seemed to be really into my breasts. I've never even gotten my ears pierced, much less my nipples, but I thought this would feel good."

"Does it?"

"I've been wet ever since I put it on, just before you got here," she confessed.

"I like, and I'd like to unbutton and show you just how happy this makes me." His voice was a wisp of sound against her ear.

She leaned forward, settling her lips against his mouth. One of his hands found her hair and tilted her into a kiss while her fingers fluttered down his chest, searching for his belt. When she found the raised surface of his belt buckle, she got the contraption open then unbuttoned his jeans.

"Your skin is so soft here," she said, dusting her fingertips around the surface before teasing down the treasure trail. No resistance met her fingers. "Oh, you bad boy. Nothing but jeans here."

His tongue explored inside her mouth and she could say nothing more as their lips moved together. She struggled to undo the buttons and push his jeans down his thighs. He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a foil wrapper just as she freed his massive erection. His hands spread her legs apart before lifting her just enough to press the juncture of her thighs against his cock.

She pulled her mouth from his. "Patience, big boy."

When she held the condom wrapper to his teeth, he tore it open and she put the condom to his already-damp cock head then rolled it over his shaft. He ripped off his shirt.

"Goody," she said, finding his mouth again, tasting mint and man. His lips spread wide and she felt his chuckle.

"Do you like this dress very much?"

"This old rag?" she countered.

Before she knew what he was doing, he'd somehow ripped the neckline and split the jersey open in one smooth move.

He muttered something too low to hear and found one distended nipple with his mouth. The way he suckled had her writhing on the metal edge until she covered it with more cream. His fingers plucked at her other nipple.

She wriggled against him. "C'mon, Smokie, put your cock in me now." If she could impale herself she would, but her feet were dangling above the floor. Even so, she tried to pull his hips closer. His smooth muscles flexed under her fingers.

She bit his shoulder. "Tease!"

He thrust against her thigh, not inside her as she wanted. "Just warming up."

"Damn you!" Her fingers left his ass and tickled up the sides of his torso.

He twisted. "None of that." His mouth left her breast and found her neck.

When she tossed her head back, he grabbed her hips and slammed home inside her in one fast motion.

Instantly, her body clenched around him and she fell apart, undulating helplessly. His strong grip kept her in place when her arms dropped from his body as she lost herself in orgasm.

When she came back to herself, her face was resting on his biceps. She thought she'd been drooling.

"That's the first one," he muttered and pulled out just enough to make her gasp before he moved deep.

She found her strength again and reached under his arms then locked her fingers around his shoulders, molding her body to his. Sweat glued them together and their scents comingled, creating a counterpoint to the surprisingly good dinner smells.

But she couldn't get enough of him here. Her skin had been drowning in sensation from the breast binder before and now she needed more skin contact, more pressure, more cock. She widened her thighs in an attempt to take more of him. The edge of the sink dug into her thighs, creating an exquisite pain that sent her another level higher.

Helpless, her body let go again and she lost her grip on his shoulders as her pussy clenched around him, releasing even more of her cream. He changed his angle and lifted her body, pulling her against him as he thrust.

"Fuck me!" She rocked her hips against his, still in the throes of an intense orgasm.

"Second," he said.

"I can't come again. Blow your mind, Smokie. Fuck me like you want to."

"Liar."

She bit back a gasp when he pulled her away from the sink and turned, pressing her into the refrigerator. The vinyl let out a moan of protest as she crashed against it, the cool surface along her back making her shiver. The contrast between temperatures did things to her insides and she realized he was right. She had another orgasm in her.

Her hair tangled in the magnets high on the refrigerator when her head fell back. Smokie found her neck with his tongue and teeth, sucking and kissing until she knew she'd have marks the next day. She dug her fingers into his back and locked her legs around his waist. His cock never left her pussy. Her heels rocked against his taut ass. She pressed her knees toward the floor, trying to take more of him, devour the pleasure he offered. Her tender breasts were pressed so tightly against him that she could hardly breathe. The lack of oxygen made her even hotter.

Just when she thought she could hold on no longer, he jerked hard inside her and his knees buckled. As she felt his release, her body followed his as if their pleasure was linked. Her pussy spasmed repeatedly and she slid down the refrigerator until they both landed on the floor, him on his knees and her on her ass.

His lips met hers in another mind-blowing kiss. Magnets pinged on the floor as they fell around them and to the left a beeper sounded insistently.

"I guess we're finished cooking," Olivia said, pulling away and resting her head on his shoulder.

"Stick a fork in me, I'm done," Smokie agreed.

Chapter Two

Smokie opened his car door for Olivia. She looked fantastic tonight, a decade younger than her true age, flashing slim legs under a yellow sundress patterned with crystals around the neckline. He wondered if she ever dressed down, even owned a pair of jeans, but her girly and romantic style sure appealed to him.

As they walked under a streetlight on the way to the Brotherhood's restaurant, the light caught her crystals, making it seem as though she wore a necklace of stars. She had on no other jewelry, he noted, not even at her ears.

He grabbed her hand, pulled her toward him in a dance-style twirl that made her laugh then wrapped his arms around her.

"Feeling frisky?"

He blew into her right ear then licked his way to her downy-soft earlobe and sucked gently on it. The way she wriggled made his cock hard. "Always, where you're concerned."

She shook her head and pulled away. "It's just a fling, Smokie."

He turned her. "Don't you want me showing you how excited you make me?"

"Of course, just don't use words like always. I know what this is."

"No one is saying how long it's going to last."

She nodded, bit her lip. "Right. Let's live in the moment."

"I wasn't doing anything else, despite my choice of words. I can't help having a crush on you ever since I sprouted my first pubic hair."

The streetlight gleamed against her white teeth as she laughed.

He was glad the moment had lightened. He ushered her into the restaurant, which served the community, not just his pack, though it was closed each full moon for their

private parties. The Brotherhood, unlike the nearby Legion pack, could change at any time, but that didn't stop them from honoring their ancient ways with a full-moon ceremony and pack run.

Olivia's chest rose and fell as they seated themselves at a two-top behind a large ficus tree. He couldn't help noticing her nipples were hard.

"It smells amazing in here. I've eaten their takeaway numerous times, but never sat down."

"You won't regret it."

A pretty young cousin of Asta's came and took their order for a meal of *dolmades* and lamb. For dessert, she suggested *amygdalopita*, a nut cake.

Smokie only picked at his meal, distracted by both the sight of beautiful Olivia and the question of what she really thought about him. He had wondered what kind of woman propositioned a firefighter out of the blue like that, but she had called him later, so he had guessed she wanted a relationship with him. Now, he wasn't so sure. He knew he shouldn't care, not when he'd happily taken what she offered from the start, as if she were just some hose bunny, but he'd always turned down the groupies before this.

Maybe the real problem was, he didn't do meaningless flings. He preferred the girls who were really into him, the ones who cared if he called or not. Really, he'd only dated five or six girls in his life because he did relationships. Serial monogamy, his mother called it, but he'd been happy enough. Both the enjoyment of long-term closeness then the thrill of the chase again when things got too staid. Olivia was probably his only long-term crush. He'd pursued and won everyone else who had gotten his dick hard.

"Fantastic," Olivia praised, setting her fork down on the empty plate of *amygdalopita*. "I'd only had baklava before, but this was well worth ordering. Sorry I ate it all."

Smokie leaned across the table and wiped a stray streak of whipped cream from her cheek. "You're sweet enough for me."

As Olivia's hand moved under the table toward his button flap and gave his cock a quick, naughty squeeze, he saw Barkley enter the restaurant with his wife. The pack seer grinned and nodded when he saw Smokie then winked.

"I'm glad you called," Olivia said. "This was fun."

It seemed the seer approved of Smokie's date. He had never done so before, even when Smokie dated within the pack. He wondered what the approval meant as he smiled back at Olivia.

He paid their bill over her protest then they left, holding hands. When they were safely outside, he said, "I couldn't help noticing that you didn't wear a bra tonight."

He watched gleefully as her nipples pebbled and protruded against her dress in response.

She narrowed her eyes. "This has enough support and I'm not large."

"No toys tonight? But you have your own way of doing things." He pressed her up against the wall of the building next to the parking lot and found her nipples with his fingers. "Hold on, I feel something."

She grinned when he found the silver chain under her dress that linked the nipple clamps which easily adjusted to her comfort level. He considered raising the rings that would tighten the clamps, but he knew she was new to nipple bondage, had tried it just for him. The thought got him so hot he wanted to impale her on his cock instantly.

"Are you trying to make me crazy?"

"I went shopping in Seattle," she said. "You can find all kinds of stuff in the big city."

He tugged gently at the chain. He watched the skin above her neckline redden and she wriggled her hips. "Bet you're bare-assed under that dress, too."

In response, she lifted the front of her skirt. No one but him would be able to see that she wasn't wearing panties. He bit back a groan and found her lips with his. If he

didn't know better, he'd think she was one of the Brotherhood, considering how free she was with her body.

"You make me insane with lust," he muttered.

She kissed his jaw, licked his neck. "I'm so wet. Let's do it right here, okay?"

Smokie felt his shorts dampen as pre-cum leaked from his cock. "Anyone might pull up. We're in a parking lot!"

"Better do it fast then." She grabbed for his belt.

He let her have her way. Who was he kidding? She was a freaking miracle. Thankfully he had a condom in his back pocket. When she had his cock free, he rolled it on and hiked her right leg to his waist so he could access her slit.

He rubbed along her labia with his cock. She was as wet as she'd claimed and he pressed into her, found her cunt and slid home.

She muffled her cry of pleasure against his neck as he seated himself fully. He didn't pause or her give her time to accommodate him, simply took his pleasure exactly as he wanted—hard and fast. Her hips met his with every hungry thrust. He felt fine muscle tremors under the hand he used to keep her leg hiked.

The scent of them mingling was more of an aphrodisiac than the risk of them being caught. He wanted to last, but the feeling of her hot cunt trailing cream across his naked thighs made his balls tighten.

His hips ratcheted up their rhythm. Olivia's breath came in short bursts and she murmured something he was too focused to understand. Behind them, headlights flashed as a car pulled into the parking lot. He gripped her free hand in his and pumped once, twice, a third time, desperate to complete his mission before they were interrupted.

She let out a low, shrill sound. "You have to help me."

He let go of her hand and reached between their bodies, finding her slick nub. His fingers circled it then pressed. Her hips jerked then she sighed audibly and he felt a fresh release of her cream as her cunt milked him.

Stars flared in his darkened vision as he lost control, thrusting helplessly, deep inside her cunt. The tension broke as he found his release, jetting cum. While he panted, doors slammed nearby. He wished he could make them invisible.

He heard a low chuckle and a man's voice saying, "Fuck, people. Get a room."

Olivia buried her head in his shoulder. He released her leg and cradled her face, hoping the passersby couldn't see enough to identify her.

She was gasping by the time they were gone. "That was really close, huh?"

"It excited you when the car came," he observed.

She grinned, speaking between breaths. "It all excited me. You seeing the nipple clamps, the feel of the cold wall on my ass, the lights—as if we were going to get caught."

"We did get caught."

"Not in any meaningful way, like being recognized."

"Maybe, maybe not. I guess we'll find out."

"At least we weren't near a streetlight."

"Noticed that, did you? I thought you were all about the danger. First the breakroom, now this."

She stroked his face. "Are you irritated?"

He wrapped the condom in his restaurant receipt and stuffed it into his pocket then pulled his pants up and fixed her skirt. "Not at all, I just want to be clear about what really turns you on."

"Really?" She reached into her dress and removed the clamps and chain, moaning a bit as her blood flow rearranged itself.

"Sure, gives me more ideas about how to seduce you." He wagged his brows.

"I like a little bit of risk," she said slowly. "I'm not so in to beds. They remind me of duty sex."

"Duty sex?"

She made a face. "You know, the kind you don't really want. I was married for twelve years to Mister Tuesday-And-Saturday-Without-Fail, always in bed, on my back."

"At least we're killing your pattern."

She laughed. "You have no idea."

"Are you going to wear that nipple chain again for me?"

"You'll have to call and find out."

"Can I put in an order? I liked the binders too."

"Call and find out," she repeated.

After Smokie dropped Olivia at home, he still felt as though he was going out of his mind with sexual energy. He simply couldn't get enough of her and that need disturbed him enough that he declined her invitation to come inside for another round.

He parked his car at the firehouse and shifted in the darkest shadow of the building then set out for a run. The night wind felt glorious whistling past his muzzle and a sniff of the air brought news of his pack. He wasn't the only one running tonight.

In a clearing, he trotted toward his clan mates, tail held high. He shared sniffs with the two young females playing there then allowed them to rub his head with theirs. One brown-and-gray beauty had just licked his muzzle when two large males bounded into view. Duke and Shamsky. He'd interrupted a date. His theory was reinforced when his buddies bowed to the females. Yeah, they were both hoping to get some. He couldn't blame them, since he'd had some incredible sex tonight himself.

Pretending to scent prey, he howled a greeting and bounded off as the males pranced around the females. Truth be told, he only smelled mice. Luckily he wasn't hungry.

He ran aimlessly for miles and when he finally slowed, he found he'd circled around to Olivia's. Letting instinct take over, he raised his muzzle to the sky and howled.

Far away, he heard an answering howl from another wolf. A warning from King not to spend much time near town. When a light came on in Olivia's bedroom he raced into the woods.

After hours of rambling, and a snack of rabbit, he scented something acrid.

Smoke. Each Brotherhood member had one special talent and that was his. He had a better sense of smell than anyone else in his clan, especially for fire. Where was it coming from? He lifted his muzzle and let his inner senses open wide. Did he need to alert the firehouse?

The fire blazed near Cherry Blossom, where the Legion ran things. They weren't the enemy they had been, since Bijou had married the Legion's alpha, Marcus Pompey, but still, there was hostility. The Brotherhood stayed out of Cherry Blossom as much as possible.

He heard the distant wail of fire engines. As long as the fresh fire scent faded soon, he could go back to chasing rabbits and trying to outrun his lust.

He stopped and curled his body so his nose rested under his tail, waiting for the fire to worsen or be controlled.

* * * * *

"What, you don't want one?" Olivia slid to the floor, caressing Smokie's leg.

"You caught me off guard." He'd been inspecting his turnout gear for wear and tear when Olivia had slinked into the firehouse in a brown tunic and skirt that matched her eyes and complemented her golden, tanned skin tone. He suspected she'd left the nipple clamps at home. Of course, she'd already told him she'd come from another meeting, as she had the first time she'd appeared in business clothes and rocked his world.

The beautiful summer weather had most of the guys outside cleaning vehicles, but he'd taken a bucket of dirty water down the front and decided to do indoor cleaning after he changed his shirt. Seemed like he spent most of his time with a hard-on these days and he didn't care to have his wet jeans advertising the state of his cock to passersby, or to his fellow firefighters for that matter. He'd taken enough ribbing from Shamsky this morning when he'd accused Smokie of trying to poach his date.

Smokie hadn't told his friend he'd just come from a fantastic fuck and hadn't been looking for more. Oh well, just one of those misunderstandings and he was man enough to take the teasing.

"What you were doing looked pretty boring."

"My equipment means the difference between life and death sometimes."

"Of course," she said. "I just thought you could use a little break. No one inside but us."

Her slender fingertips edged up the inner seams of his jeans. Instantly, his cock throbbed as if most of the blood in his body had relocated. How had Olivia gained so much power over his body so quickly?

He took a deep breath, trying to stop the panting that seemed to be his regular breathing pattern around her. "I don't know much about you. Tell me something new."

She smiled. Today, for the first time since they'd hooked up, she wore red lipstick—all the better to leave a memorable ring around his cock that would have him remembering her the next time he showered. She'd been around the block enough to have used that lipstick on purpose.

"Why Smokie, I didn't know you cared."

He didn't want to care, didn't want a relationship with an older woman. Twenty-four was too young for anything serious, and she wasn't clan, was old enough that she might be looking for permanent again. But, things seemed to be progressing inexorably and he didn't know why.

She squeezed between his legs, so gently that his balls felt comforted instead of at risk.

"I care," he said, sounding strangled nonetheless. "I know you were a lifeguard back in the day, but that was a while back."

"I'm slowly getting a small business underway," she told him. "Now that I'm living here full-time again."

"And what brings you by?" he asked.

"The ride of your life." Her nimble fingers undid his belt buckle and his pants then pulled the fabric down his legs. She made an approving noise when she found his cock poking out of the waistband of his boxer-briefs then pulled those down too.

Now, he was naked from the waist to his socks. His skin stuck to the leather sofa, squeaking as she tugged his knees apart.

Olivia didn't go straight for his cock. No, the woman was too devious for that. She wriggled between his legs, until they were spread far apart, and began to stroke the insides of his thighs. First with fingers, then tongue—always careful not to smear her lipstick on his skin.

No, she was saving that, just as he'd expected. But, instead of intensifying her games, she backed off, leaned back. She pulled clips from her hair until it cascaded down, lemon-coconut fragrance filling his nose. Leaning forward again, she let the tips of her hair brush his legs until his skin prickled with awareness.

She rested her cheek on his knee. That soft, soft skin of her face trailed up one leg and down the other. He wanted to tell her to stop torturing him, to grab that gorgeous thick hair and slam his cock down her willing throat, but she was so beautiful to watch, he couldn't stop her.

His leg jerked when he felt her tongue in the fold of skin between his groin and leg. She moved past his throbbing cock and licked along the fold on the other side.

"You're killing me!"

"Mmmm." Her tongue licked across his stomach, under his bellybutton, over his pubic hair.

He couldn't stand it anymore and pushed his fingers through her hair, making a ponytail of it. She raised her face. Her lips were swollen from teasing along his hair-roughened legs.

"Suck me," he ordered. "Or I'm going to blow all over your pretty face."

Her red lips curved, a siren's taunt. "Maybe I'll let you do that anyway."

"Don't make me beg." He scarcely recognized his own hoarse voice.

She lifted her arms and disentangled his hands from her hair then clipped it back again. "I'm going to have to teach you some manners."

She turned to her purse and opened it then pulled out a silk-wrapped bundle of cards. Tarot, he recognized, though the pictures were a little different than he was used to seeing Nana, a clan elder, use.

What the hell? He wanted her on his cock!

"A sexual tarot," Olivia confirmed, seeing the question in his expression and ignoring the demand. "Hand drawn." She spread a few cards so he could see the swords were all erect cocks, the cups pussies. "Pick one for yourself."

He chose at random, wanting this over with so she could get back to the real cock.

"Ah, the ace of cocks," she said, grinning openly. "It's time to focus on you."

He groaned. "Could have told you that."

She used the card to stroke his leg. The muscles jerked under the abrasion as the card moved up.

"Pick one for yourself," he rasped.

She chose one at random and turned over the card. He saw a woman and rabbits.

"Traditionally pentacles. This is the queen of rabbits for this deck. Now, she's a lady I like. Classy, self-assured, yet doting."

"Sexual?"

She laughed. "Ever heard of fucking like bunnies?"

"And yet you aren't even touching my cock."

She stroked the card down her chest, between her breasts. Smokie ached to put his head between them, to bite her pretty nipples.

"Come here," he ordered. "If you won't suck me, I'll take on your damp little clit. Get you in the mood for more."

She dropped the card and hitched up her skirt to mount him, the heat in her gaze unmistakable.

From behind him the sound of the alarm went off. The light above the door flashed and his pager vibrated.

"Fire," he groaned. "Sorry, rain check." With deep regret, he lifted her from him and set her on the couch, then grabbed for his clothes.

"Be safe," she said. "Come by my house when you're off shift."

He leaned down and kissed her forehead, already focused on the mission ahead.

* * * * *

"Reported structure fire," Shamsky said as Smokie arrived at his turnout gear.

He pushed his pants legs over his boots and climbed into them then pulled up his gear. Four of the firefighters were assigned to the first-due engine and within two minutes they were racing toward the fire.

When they arrived, Smokie saw a two-story frame house with dark smoke billowing from all the street-facing upper windows.

"This is going to be a bad one," Barkley said, shaking his head.

"I'm going to do a walk around," Owen Hotchkiss, the chief officer, also Olivia's cousin, said. "Smokie, go next door to the left and see if they know if anyone's at home. Shamsky, to the right. Barkley, get the engine on the fire hydrant."

Smokie ran to the house he was assigned and banged on the door then rang the doorbell, but no answer came and no cars were parked in the driveway. When he returned, Shamsky was telling Owen, "The owner is pretty deaf and has no idea if anyone is in the house."

"We've got a motorcycle to the side here, but no cars."

"Maybe in the garage," Smokie suggested. The door was closed.

"Let's get going," Owen said.

They formed their attack line and after no response came from the front doorbell, Owen broke it open easily with his boot. "No fire visible here," he said.

They walked single file into a hallway that led to a living room, also clear, then peered into the kitchen to see no sign of fire all the way to the glass door leading out to the backyard. "Let's get upstairs and see what we're dealing with," Owen said.

Smokie could hear a siren outside, indicating the second-due engine was on its way from Ladder Company Two.

As they moved up the stairs leading to the second story from the entryway, the smoke became thicker until there was zero visibility.

"Let's try to get some ventilation," Owen said. "Shamsky, take south."

Shamsky left the hoseline and edged along the wall, looking for windows, while Owen and Smokie moved forward. Smokie thought they were in a long hallway. He felt a closed door to one side.

"Hear anyone?" Owen asked. Though not a shapeshifter himself, he knew his team had heightened abilities, though he never asked questions.

"No," Smokie reported.

Owen attempted to scan with a thermal imaging camera but didn't produce any useful results. "I think we're at the end of the hall."

"Got a door?"

"Yeah."

Smokie heard the CO open it and they edged forward.

"Hello?" Owen called, but there was no response.

"Should be windows ahead?" Smokie asked.

"Yeah, saw them outside."

They edged along until they met a wall.

"Can't find a latch." Owen swore.

Smokie heard breaking glass as Owen shattered the window.

"Got one window open," Shamsky reported. "Barkley's up the stairs, we're checking bedrooms."

Through his com unit, Smokie heard Barkley call out in obvious distress. "The hose is going flat!"

"Oh fuck," Shamsky swore.

Before anyone else could speak, Smokie backed into the hallway, ready to aid them. He felt a blast of heat unlike anything he'd ever experienced.

"Evacuate!" Owen screamed. "Now!"

Chapter Three

"I'm going down the stairwell," Barkley gasped.

"Don't do it!" Shamsky yelled.

Smokie felt a body against him and they both toppled over. Thankfully, the sensation of actively melting slacked off a bit down on the floor.

"Let's go back toward the master," he urged Shamsky. "We can bail out the window. It's only two stories up."

"What about Owen?"

Smokie called his name, but no answer. "He's already at the window. Hopefully he's bailed." He called for Barkley next. Nothing.

He and Shamsky reached out, crawled forward, but didn't feel anything, didn't hear anything more from Barkley. Hopefully the seer had made it down the stairs.

They crawled back toward the master and as Smokie reached the window and the welcome sight of blue sky polluted with smoke overhead, he saw Ladder Company Two had gotten a ladder up to the window Owen had broken. Their CO held out a hand to wave them closer and Smokie gestured him forward. The CO half climbed, half fell down it.

"Shouldn't have waited for us, man," Shamsky said.

When Owen was clear, Smokie pushed Shamsky out. As he was about to put his leg over, he heard something behind him.

He swore then dropped back to his knees and started searching for the hoseline. Crawling through what sounded like an inferno, he slowly made his way out of the bedroom, feeling like he was dying by inches. When would his oxygen run out? But he had to try to save whoever had called.

He bumped up against a solid shape and felt around it, discovering a fire hat. Barkley, most likely, or one of the other firefighters from the second-due engine. When he called, Barkley didn't answer. He grabbed the man around the chest and started pulling. Within seconds he realized another small body had collapsed there, clasped against the firefighter's chest.

Agonizingly, they moved down the hall one inch at a time. Smokie pushed them through the door to the master bedroom and separated the bodies. Barkley had been holding a dog, he realized. Cradling the tiny form in one arm, he rolled Barkley to the far wall then reached for the window.

It wasn't there. No blue sky. The thick smoke obscured everything, and he couldn't breathe well enough to think. He went into a crouch and felt for the windowsill. There it was. He stood, reached for the ladder, and released the dog, hoping someone unseen below would catch it. Then he fell back to his knees for Barkley, who was completely unresponsive.

To think, not an hour before, he'd been holding an armful of warm, lustful woman, rather than a middle-aged shapeshifter in mortally bad condition. With strength he hadn't known he possessed, he heaved Barkley onto his shoulder then climbed out the window.

He barely felt the ladder beneath him as he slid down, focused completely on holding the unconscious man against his body. Hands reached for them as their padded forms hit the ground.

Five firefighters surrounded Barkley's still form as Smokie pulled off his face mask and puked into the grass. Gasping and coughing, he felt shocked to be alive. He'd never been in a fire like that before.

When he caught a couple of breaths, he crawled over to the downed man, and was so grateful to see signs of life that he forgot his own injuries.

As three EMTs raced toward them, Barkley growled, "That woman's your true mate."

His eyes closed just as two EMTs knelt over him. Smokie tried to take a breath and found he couldn't. As he face-planted in the dirt next to Barkley, he distantly heard one of the EMTs shout.

For a moment, he wasn't sure if the smoke had gotten to him, or if Barkley's words were responsible for his collapse. Olivia wasn't his true mate. She wasn't even a shapeshifter. Still, their sexual chemistry, and his cock's inability to rest when they were apart, was unusual.

He felt a hand on his shoulder just as he lost consciousness.

* * * * *

Olivia saw the flash of a tail again when she locked her front door, ready for a run. Some kind of wildlife had been stalking her property for a few days now. Beasties weren't uncommon since she lived across the street from a wooded park where the creature probably dwelled. As she did some perfunctory stretches, she made a mental note to upgrade her garbage cans so nothing could break in for a snack. Her brain circled around to its favorite topic in less than ten seconds.

Smokie hadn't contacted her in a week. She'd had to read in the newspaper about the fire that had interrupted their last sexual adventure. Never before in her twenty-two years of dating had she been dumped without a word of explanation.

She knew he wasn't in the hospital. Her cousin Owen had told her that much. He was the reason she'd ended up with such hopeless lust for Smokie in the first place. She'd been Owen's hostess numerous times for fire station picnics, fundraising pancake breakfasts and the like. Smokie had been at all those events, seemingly oblivious to her. But one look at his dashing smile and his abundant muscles had made her cream every time. He wasn't just her go-to guy for personal pleasure sessions, he'd been her only guy as her marriage fell apart and ended.

Now she felt like the loser stalker-chick who'd gotten a one-night stand with the hot guy and was then cast aside.

She set off on a fast walk to warm up, pepper spray in her pocket just in case the wildlife decided to get too close. Maybe exercise would cure her of the sexual longing that kept her from sleeping well at night. She'd lost three pounds in the past week. Even food was unappetizing. Of course, trying to exercise at four in the afternoon in July was bound to take off any water weight too.

Shoving her hands into her ponytail, she growled aloud. "Let him go! You're too old to carry a torch for someone who isn't interested."

On the other side of a screen of trees, she heard a wild howl that so perfectly matched her mood she almost responded. On second thought, she didn't want to know what was attached to that howl. A big dog at the very least. Shapeshifters were rumored to live in these parts as well. In fact, family lore said her great-grandmother had been part of a werewolf clan. Olivia had no recollection of the woman who'd died when she was two.

She reached for her can of pepper spray and reversed her direction, heading back to her house. It wouldn't hurt to visit Owen at the firehouse, right? Bring him that batch of brownies she'd made after lunch to keep her hands busy? She didn't even have to ask about Smokie. Hell, she'd been hanging out there before he'd ever passed the firefighter exam. She wouldn't hide from him.

* * * * *

Smokie smelled the rich scent of chocolate before he saw Olivia. At first, it made sense for him to duck into the breakroom, but was he really hiding there? After all, that's where she'd always found him. It was their place. So was he hiding from or welcoming her?

He cursed himself when he saw the door open, Owen's hand on the handle. Duke followed, tongue practically hanging out of his mouth, a gallon of vanilla fudge swirl ice cream in his hand. His friend had a major jones for chocolate. He was such a girl.

And then there was Olivia. His eyes skimmed her then he blinked and looked again. No sexy dress this time, but yoga pants, tennis shoes with those cute short socks tailed by pink pom-poms, and a fitted scoop-neck T-shirt that displayed her clavicle and a hint of cleavage.

Very sexy, yet just workout clothes. Not her seduction gear at all, but he found it even more endearing.

The sound of Rihanna's *Skin* erupted into the room, with the singer moaning about liking it rough.

"Dude," Duke said.

"Shit." Smokie hadn't recognized his own ring tone. He searched the couch for his phone while the others set up Olivia's treat. Not a blushing guy as a rule, he felt the tips of his ears grow hot.

"Smokie."

He closed his eyes when he recognized the voice of King, his alpha. When King called, there was either work or admonition in the air.

"Sir."

King growled. "Two 9-1-1 calls came in about an hour ago regarding a coyote sighting on Twelfth Street. Know anything about that?"

"Probably not a coyote."

"Probably you, mooning around your true mate's house, is my guess."

"I'm on shift," Smokie said, wondering who might be watching the street. "Twenty-four hours. I haven't left."

"Really."

"Really, sir. Anyone reported any missing cats? I've heard that one-third of a coyote's diet is house cats."

King laughed. "Good riddance."

"Besides, I weigh double what an average coyote does. It probably was a coyote, now that I think about it. Maybe one of the clan can go hunting for a snack."

"That's what troubles me, obviously. I doubt we've left enough population that they'd go into the residential areas. Plenty of mice and fruit in the woods."

"But no yummy cats."

He saw Olivia give him a funny look and realized the conversation sounded bizarre from his end. "I'll be happy to go out there tomorrow and take a look."

"You do that. I especially want to know if any of the Legion Clan is encroaching on our territory."

Smokie found that hard to believe. The memory of the famous shaming of their alpha four summers before was still fresh on many minds, even if it had resulted in Bijou finding her true mate.

"Did Barkley spread his news around? I mean, the guy had second-degree burns and smoke inhalation at the time he said...well, you know. He might have been wrong."

"He's never wrong," King growled. "You need to deal with this. I know you're young, but you're also very lucky."

"Right. Well, I'm at work right now."

"And so is your true mate. Talk to her. The sooner you claim her, the better. She's not a young woman, you know, though still very hot."

Smokie's jaw clenched. How did King know Olivia was there? He always seemed to know more than he should. Did he and Barkley share some kind of mental communication?

When Smokie was with Olivia, he never thought about the age difference. His reluctance didn't stem from that at all. It was simply the idea of tying himself down to one woman so soon. Until Olivia came around, he thought he had years of fooling

around in the meadow, a variety of hook-ups and short-term relationships still spread out in front of him.

How could one woman be enough? He was only twenty-four!

He said a respectful goodbye and hung up, catching Olivia watching him again. When she realized he'd noticed, she turned, her pert nose clearly in the air.

He was in the doghouse for sure. Had a week really passed since she'd straddled his lap in this very room, on that very couch? His cock went rock hard at the thought. He prayed he could get by without adjusting himself in a room full of people.

He thought of ice cubes and Antarctica, and untucked his T-shirt, hoping it would hide the evidence.

"Want some?" Owen asked. "Olivia's the best baker. Can't cook worth a damn though."

What he wanted when he saw his CO's cousin wasn't brownies.

"How would you know?" Olivia swatted her cousin on the arm. "You haven't eaten my food in twenty years!"

"That's because you gave me food poisoning."

"I was in high school!" Olivia protested. "I didn't know you were supposed to keep the hamburger meat chilled until you grilled it at a picnic."

"Both ends," Owen said contemplatively. "Don't think I've ever been that sick in my life."

"Gross!" Olivia said, making a face as Duke laughed.

Barkley walked into the room, followed by Shamsky.

"You're back!" she said, giving the older man a hug.

Smokie was confused at her recognition until he realized she'd probably known the seer for years, in his capacity of firefighter, thanks to Owen. The others gathered around the man, who, in typical shapeshifter fashion had completely recovered from his injuries in only a week. Owen, wise to their ways as usual, didn't comment.

Smokie wondered how much the man hid from the fire chief, who managed all nine stations serving the greater area, including Cherry Blossom, where the Legion Clan staffed the firehouse. He knew three of the local stations were mostly staffed by shapeshifters, so it wasn't as though they were a rarity.

He hung around in the background while everyone on shift drifted in and out, celebrating Barkley's return and eating Olivia's treats. Eventually, he caught Owen's attention.

"I've got to go out and teach that fire-prevention class at the senior center," Smokie said.

"Yep, we've got you covered."

Olivia had her back turned when he left, so he didn't say goodbye. His chest twinged when he left the room though. As much as he didn't want to admit it, he had it bad for his true mate.

Three hours later, stuffed with donuts and bad coffee, and covered with the fingerprints of far too many old ladies who wanted to check out his muscles, including one old broad who'd actually patted him on the ass, he returned to the firehouse.

He replaced his gear from the class in the training locker then went to the breakroom to see if any brownies were left to snag. The station was quiet, empty. He saw an emergency medical call listed on the white board. Hopefully something minor.

When he opened the door of the breakroom, he saw someone on the sofa. But it wasn't one of his fellow firefighters, it was Olivia.

He shoved his hands into the back pockets of his uniform pants. "All by yourself?"

"The guys just left on a call. I wasn't ready to go home yet."

"Why not?"

She hesitated. "Something howled in the woods when I went out for a run this afternoon. It spooked me, I guess."

"A couple of coyote calls came in earlier," Smokie said.

"It wasn't yipping. Coyotes sound more like dogs. This was more like a wolf. That eerie sound that gets into your bones." She shuddered.

"Someone called Wildlife Patrol," he said, wondering if she was right. "I'll look around for you when I go off shift, but that isn't until tomorrow afternoon."

"I called them too, not because of the howl, but because I thought I saw a tail passing by when I walked out of my house. But they hadn't found anything in response to any of the calls by the time I called back."

"I'll go into the woods tomorrow," Smokie said.

"I'll go too if you want."

"No." He intended to do the search in wolf form. "I can handle myself. All I need is my cell phone."

She touched his arm. "My hero."

He grinned, liking the sound of that, though he was alarmed by the way heat frissoned through his body, lifting his cock and tightening his balls. "At your service, m'lady."

"What was that before, about you liking it rough?" she purred.

Smokie laughed. "I didn't realize when I bought the ring tone that I'd get that part of the song. Some of the lyrics made sense as a ring tone."

"Am I supposed to believe that?" Her red lips curved.

Smokie shrugged, acting coy. He did like it kind of rough sometimes. What shapeshifter didn't? "Want to find out?"

She took her hand away from him, making his arm feel suddenly cold. "I'm supposed to be furious with you."

"You are?" Women. Sucked a man in then dropped the emotional bombshell.

She crossed her arms over those adorable, small breasts. "Sure, and I was, until I saw you, then I was just relieved you were okay. I mean, one minute, I'm straddling you then you have to run for a bad call and I never heard from you after."

He shifted uncomfortably. "Owen must have said something to you."

"He did. But you didn't. I know we're just hooking up, but we're both human beings and I was worried, okay?"

"Okay," he said, taking her point even if he wasn't a human being exactly. "I'm an asshole."

She uncrossed her arms and planted her hands on her hips. "So, what's been going on?"

He stared at the floor. Barkley's pronouncement had been what was going on, but he didn't want to share that with her. "Look, Olivia..."

"Yes?"

"I'm okay and you're okay, right? I made a mistake, plain and simple. But like you said, we're hooking up, and I'd love to fuck you right now. Right here. Can't that be enough?"

He heard her loud intake of breath and didn't know if he was about to get slapped, but then he glanced down and saw her nipples had pebbled under her thin shirt. Thank the gods she was just small enough to not wear bras.

She shook her head ruefully.

Before she could continue the conversation, he lifted both hands and placed them gently over those begging nipples. Her body wanted sex, even if her mouth wanted to keep talking.

"Smokie," she breathed.

Before she could say more, he slanted his mouth over hers and blocked speech with kisses. She didn't stop him, didn't resist, just rested her hands along his belt and rocked her body against his.

At that moment, he knew being with her again had been as inevitable as the moonrise. Sudden fury rose in him. He'd lost control of his life and he hated that. Until now, being a shapeshifter had expanded his horizons, not limited them. He pushed

Olivia's slim form until her back landed against the faux-brick wall alongside the entertainment unit. His teeth scraped along her neck. He pulled his hands from her breasts and used his nails to rip down her shirt. As he spread the tattered fabric open his hand brushed against a large, solid disk on the entertainment unit. He grasped it.

When he glanced at it, he saw a stray roll of yellow caution tape. That might add a measure of control to the situation.

Olivia's gaze followed his hands as he tore a strip of tape from the roll. She didn't resist as he lifted one of her wrists into the air and created a long manacle to anchor her arm above her head on a water pipe that came into the room above the windows.

If anything, her nipples were harder—ripe cherries begging to be plucked. He grabbed a big bag of chips from the table and removed the clip then opened and closed it in front of her nipple.

Her chest rose and fell rapidly and her pupils dilated.

"Wet yet?"

She whimpered.

He took that as a yes and closed the chip-bag clip over her nipple. Her knees buckled and he grabbed her around the waist. After a moment, she steadied herself, and, looking him in the eyes, lifted her other hand into the air.

He formed another manacle and wrapped the end of the tape around the water pipe. It wouldn't really hold her, but that wasn't the point. This was.

He took the clip off and closed it around the other nipple. She gasped as blood rushed back into her flesh. He laved the swollen tip with his tongue as her hips bucked against him.

Yeah, she wanted to give him control, trusted him even just as a hook-up. He liked that.

"What's with all the clothes, Olivia?" he asked, tugging at the waistband of her yoga pants. "Panties, socks? Not the girl I'm used to."

She laughed, a hoarse sound unlike her usual warm chime. "Exercise clothes."

"You don't consider what we do exercise?"

She chuckled again then bit back a gasp as he removed the clip. He admired the pretty stripe of vertical lines the clip made around her engorged nipple.

"Aren't you going to kiss it better?" she whispered. "You're rougher than I am."

He bent and did as she asked. Her body swayed toward his, almost as if he'd suspended her in the air instead of just raising her arms. The skin of her breasts smelled different than her hair, more coconut, less lemon.

"We should find a secluded beach," he decided. "I'd love to love you in some deserted cove, the weather as warm as this, sand under our toes." Love you? What was he saying? He meant "fuck you", not "love you".

She moaned in answer, sounding so irresistible that he had to walk his fingers down her gently rounded belly and find the damp curls above her slit. He found her clit and massaged it firmly, too horny to use a more delicate approach. He wanted her legs wrapped around him ASAP.

She tossed her head from side to side in response and her eyes closed. Taking that as agreement, he pushed her pants and panties down, pulling them off along with her shoes, until all she wore was socks and a thin gold-and-sapphire tennis bracelet.

Steadying her legs, he knelt on the floor. His cock thickened as he smelled her arousal up close. He licked up her slit then delicately opened her labia and let her cream cover his tongue. She tasted better than coconut or lemon any day.

"Oh, Smokie."

He lifted his head. "Don't think the door is locked. Think we'll get company?"

She gasped as his tongue touched her again. He slid his fingers up her smooth legs then circled her ass. She really was a runner. Her muscles were well-defined, rounded, sexy as hell. His cock could burst through the zipper of his uniform pants, it was so hard.

"The things you do to me, girl," he whispered, reaching into his pocket for a condom while he continued to lick her.

She yelped and bucked her hips. He gave up the quest for his condom for now, knowing she was close to coming. He slicked his fingers through her cream then rubbed them between her cheeks. She clenched around his fingers, grinding against his tongue. Gently, he slid his pinky into her anus.

She came in jagged jerks and he had to grab her ass to keep her upright. The feeling of her smooth, muscled skin under his hands reminded him of his own needs. He released her, undid his pants and rolled on the condom as soon as he found it.

"Ready?" he asked.

Just as he'd imagined, her legs lifted around his waist. He found her channel ready for him. His cock entered in one smooth, mind-bending glide. Despite her orgasm, despite being slick with cream, she was still so tight. And so hot. He grabbed her ass again and began to pump.

Olivia was a tall woman and her head found his temple. He felt her nip along the outer shell of his ear then her sharp little teeth found his earlobe. She nibbled until each bite felt like a flash of fire down his body into his cock. He drove harder inside her and she locked her ankles around his waist in response to the onslaught.

"You're absolutely perfect, you know that?"

"That's my line," he panted.

"You're the perfect fuck," she said in a soft voice that lowered in register when he thrust again. "Perfect."

Barkley's tortured voice drifted through Smokie's mind again. He pushed the words aside. "Perfect fuck" didn't mean true mate. Even if she was perfect. Her camaraderie with the firefighters and commitment to the firehouse that was so central to his life, fit his existence. She had that sweet little house, the marvelous baking, and hot-as-fire sex in her favor. That body—slim and muscled, athletic, just like he was. Those pert, naughty nipples.

But she wasn't a shapeshifter and didn't it come down to that? How could a human be a true mate? Yet, Barkley had never been wrong. Smokie didn't really believe the pronouncement was false. The seer had thought he was dying, right? He wouldn't have gotten it wrong.

Except he hadn't been dying. His injuries were minor for their kind.

A hard bite on his ear refocused his attention.

"Excuse me? Your cock is in my pussy? Wanna focus?"

Smokie found her mouth with his. "Sorry. Long day."

He made sure she had no cause for complaint after that, changing the angle of his thrusts so every glide of his body rocked her clit. Soon she was gasping and crying out with every movement.

Behind them, he heard the door open then footfalls as someone moved inside, observed their tangled bodies.

"Excuse me." Someone laughed when Olivia shrieked. The door closed again.

"Should have set those brownies outside," Smokie said.

Olivia wriggled against him. "I think the tape's coming undone."

"My sex manacles? Never." But he smoothed his movements, deepened them with every thrust.

"Don't stop, even if they come in again." She rotated her hips.

"I won't," he promised, giving as good as he got.

She swiveled against him, matching every slide and thrust he made. Gods, she really was perfect.

"Yes, yes...oh yeah," she keened, losing her grip on his ear as she came.

Her channel tightened and released, tightened and released. Smokie felt his orgasm start somewhere at the base of his spine then his balls released and it felt as if his whole body poured into hers.

When he could think again, he steadied her. After grabbing his belt, he opened the pouch with his utility knife then reached up and cut the tape. He caught her neatly then lowered them both, half naked, onto the sofa.

"I need a nap," she murmured against his chest.

"Mmmm," was all that came from his lips.

Chapter Four

The next night after his shift ended, Smokie called King to notify his alpha that he'd be hunting in the woods near Olivia's house, dangerously close to civilization.

"Don't let anyone see you," King warned. "We don't need any more 9-1-1 calls."

"I'll stay off the streets," Smokie promised. "But something else is out there. A wolf, if Olivia is correct. If it's still there, I'll find it."

Of course, if he'd really been worried about what he might find he'd have brought a buddy along, but the moon wouldn't be full for three days, so whatever lurked wasn't a member of the Legion Clan. They could only shift during the full moon. Either a member of the Brotherhood was roaming too close to city limits or something, or someone, entirely unknown was out there.

He drove to the parking lot at the south end of the woods, which was a park entrance and far enough from Olivia's house that she wouldn't see him, then strolled a mile into the woods. He hadn't seen anyone since the first hundred yards of his walk, so he shifted under the shelter of a tall evergreen.

After he'd shifted form, he lifted his muzzle to the still summer air and sniffed. No fires bigger than a campfire anywhere nearby. Something big up north—Tacoma, maybe. A warehouse fire?

His ears perked forward as he checked for other scents. Wolf. One of his kind, or the wild equivalent, was nearby. He listened, but heard nothing to alarm him so he set off in the direction of the scent.

It didn't escape his notice that he travelled in the direction of Olivia's home. She had been an architect at one time, Owen had told him, though she hadn't built her current house. Very early in her career, when she was about his age, she'd won an

international competition for a building overseas, in the Middle East somewhere. He wondered why she'd left the field.

Was a wolf tracking Olivia or someone else in her neighborhood? No one in the Brotherhood lived within two miles of her property. He'd checked.

He heard a low howl of greeting and a dainty gray-and-brown wolf trotted into view from behind a stand of alders. Recognizing her as clan, he allowed the female wolf to lick his nuzzle. She whined quietly, a mating sound. He remembered this female was Duke's date from the other night. Her nose bumped his and her entire body moved closer. Something about the mating behavior made his hackles rise.

Turning, he drove farther into the woods, past a reservoir, up the hills, out of the reaches of civilization and onto land privately owned by King on behalf of the clan. The female wolf followed him. He set too fast a pace for any play.

As they'd climbed, the air had cooled. He figured there'd be no involuntary erections to explain away in the chill. After a deep breath for strength, he shifted so he could find out what she wanted.

The female wolf did the same. He recognized her as eighteen-year-old Daisy Dell, a clan member as cutesy as her name. Despite her age, she strutted, clearly feeling sexy while sky-clad.

He needed to keep this all business. Grateful for the cold, he folded his arms across his chest. "I didn't recognize you before. You don't run with the clan in wolf form."

"My parents prefer to keep rituals in the family. It's not worth arguing about." She stopped a couple feet away and cocked a rounded hip.

"Why are you shifting so close to civilization? Haven't your parents explained the rules? The authorities are getting wildlife complaint calls."

She smirked. "I knew you hung around that area a lot and I wanted to find you."

"I might pass by," he admitted. "But I don't run on the street."

"I wanted to see her too," Daisy said. She toyed with a strand of her long bleached-blonde hair.

"Her who?"

"The human you're fucking. I wanted to see what your type was."

"Why is it any of your business?"

She shrugged, making her breasts bounce. "I'm interested. You're hot."

"It doesn't bother you that I'm with someone else?"

"Word is she's your true mate but you haven't made a move to claim her. I figured I had a window of opportunity."

"You're dating Duke."

"Just a way to lose my virginity," she said matter-of-factly. "It needed to be clan or my father would freak. It's okay with Duke. He meets my father's guidelines."

"I guess he isn't your true mate," Smokie said flatly.

"Barkley can only tell if he sees true mates together. Since we don't go to rituals, he hasn't had much opportunity to see me."

"I'm sure your time will come."

She put her hand on his arm and leaned in so her breasts almost brushed his chest. "So what do you think? Me and you?"

"I have a true mate. I should value that."

"Should?"

He swallowed. "Will. I guess I should thank you for making me realize even I think it's important."

"She's human." Daisy made a face.

"I'll tell her what I am. If she can't accept it, well, I don't know the consequences of that exactly, but I'll be honest."

Her features screwed together. "She's older than you."

"What's your point?"

The girl sighed. "You know who I am now, if you want me."

"I won't."

"That's really rude," she huffed.

"So is making unwanted advances toward someone in a relationship," he responded. "Try your wiles on someone your own age."

"There isn't anyone. It's not like there's tons of us. The largest group is the guys your age—you and Shamsky and Duke."

"And Krypto. He's less than two years younger than us."

"He's in college."

"Maybe you can follow him to school next year." He could only hope.

She rolled her eyes.

"Or you can go after a Legion shifter."

Her expression didn't change.

"That's it then. I'm out of here. I'll have to tell King who was roaming around. I suggest you don't break the rules again."

Daisy grabbed his arm. This time the gesture wasn't seductive. "What if he tells my father?"

"I'll ask him not to, but you'd better promise you're going to behave."

"I don't have a reason to hang out around here if you've chosen the human."

"In the future, you might want to reconsider stalking," he advised. "Not the best way to get a date."

She crossed her arms over her breasts and turned away, her walk jerky now instead of seductive.

"I didn't mean to make you cry," he called. "Just some advice."

"I'm not crying, I'm mad," she yelled back.

"Krypto is home on break," he shouted. "I just saw him last week."

She stopped moving and her head turned to her shoulder. "Really?"

"And he's single." Probably willing too, if a girl like Daisy went after him. For a shifter, Krypto was a nerd.

"Thanks."

He lifted a hand and moved into the trees. "Any time." Now for the important stuff. He shifted and returned to his clothes. He fired off a text to King then jogged toward Olivia's house. On second thought, he slowed to a walk. He could use a little time to consider what he would say to his true mate. A little time to reconcile himself to the idea that his bachelorhood was all but over. Why didn't it bug him more? Maybe the true mate magic worked on him already.

Still, her house came into view much too quickly and he knew she waited for him there, to see if he'd found anything. She'd be concerned too, worried about his safety in the woods, though no worry was necessary. She needed to know the truth.

He scrubbed his hands over his face and pushed a branch out of his way so he could admire her house. The green-and-blue paint scheme both blended her house into the parklike setting and made it stand out from other nearby houses. Kind of like her. She blended into the background of the town, yet when you got closer, she stood out with her beauty and vibrant personality.

He squared his shoulders and crossed the street then knocked on her door.

"Your shirt!" The cry burst from Olivia's lips when she appeared. She put her hands to his face, his chest. "Are you hurt?"

He looked down, confused, then saw he'd caught the collar of his T-shirt on a branch and torn it away from the rest of the fabric. "No, I'm fine. I didn't even notice the tear." He noticed muddy paw prints on his jeans, as if something had stepped on his clothes where he'd left them. An animal should have scented the wolf on his clothes and stayed away. He licked his lips.

She let out a breath. "Did you see anything?"

He froze, realizing he hadn't prepared what to say. A coyote? Had he called Wildlife Patrol? No, he needed to tell her the exact truth. "Can I come in?"

She pulled her headband from her hair and massaged her scalp. "Sure, but I'm covered in ink. I could clean up, make us some dinner."

He took one of her hands in his and saw it was smudged with black ink. "What were you doing?"

"Calligraphy. It's a side job slash hobby. I have a commission for wedding invitations for a former governor's daughter."

"You have a studio in the house?"

"Yes, in one of the extra bedrooms. You can check it out if you want while I clean up."

All the bedrooms were upstairs so Smokie climbed the steps and peeked in the rooms. The one with the best light was lined with tables on two sides and a huge storage unit that rested against the wall with no windows. It was filled with paper, inks and other tools of Olivia's work. The wall with the door was covered with framed pen and ink sketches as well as the letter O in various fancy styles. He peered closer and saw the sketches were all signed "O. Bilson". She was a talented artist. The fact that at least three of the drawings were of wolves made him wonder. Wasn't that one King? Another could be Bijou Pompey.

"How did I not know you did this?" he asked when she entered the room. "You must have your work displayed around town."

"Not really. I've done some local weddings, of course. Invitations, place settings. But I don't sell my drawings."

"You like to draw wildlife," he noted.

"It's a thing I do," she said, shoving her hands into the pockets of her cutoffs.

Very short cutoffs, he saw. She had spectacular legs and certainly couldn't get away with wearing a skirt this short, so he was happy to see jeans at last. "You still swim?"

She nodded. "A friend of mine has an indoor pool. I go there a couple times a week."

"Nice."

She smiled. "What do you want for dinner, Smokie?"

"We could go out," he said doubtfully.

"You can't think I'm going to poison you. Owen's my cousin. He was talking about something from when we were kids."

"You fed me before and I didn't croak, but you weren't expecting to cook for me now."

"How about we compromise? I have a good frozen pizza and salad fixings. You could open a bottle of wine."

"Deal." He followed her back downstairs, and checked her small wine rack. He found a bottle of fruity red wine that he'd had before and liked then placed it in her refrigerator so it would chill. After he'd done that, he leaned against Olivia's kitchen counter and watched her doctor a frozen cheese pizza with mushrooms, onions, green peppers and more cheese.

"No meat, I'm afraid."

"No problem," he said, hungry after his trek through the forest but feeling the telltale signs of a churning gut. Nerves, he supposed. He'd never shared his shapeshifter status with a human before.

She slid her round pizza pan into the oven and pulled out a plastic box of peppery arugula out the fridge. She sliced in carrots and a tomato before bringing out olive oil, vinegar and herbs.

"You should invite Owen over for dinner. He might be pleasantly surprised." He'd never known anyone to make their own salad dressing before.

Olivia snorted. "A box of pizza and a salad would not impress Mister Grill Expert."

"He does make a mean burger," Smokie admitted.

"That's the least of it. I'm not a red meat fan but even I like his ribs."

"I like my meat raw, usually," Smokie blurted.

Olivia's fingers stilled on the kitchen timer she'd been setting. "Huh? Like steak tartare?"

"No, not from a restaurant. Fresh killed."

She took her hand off the timer. "You're veering into TMI territory, Smokie. What are you trying to tell me?"

"You can tell I'm trying to tell you something?" He rubbed his palms against his jeans.

"Wasn't born yesterday." Her lips tightened, as if she'd wished she hadn't said something that reminded him of their age difference.

But it didn't really matter. A true mate was a true mate, after all. "I'm part of a clan group, called the Brotherhood of the Óëœß – dog."

"What's that?"

"Have you ever seen an emblem around town? Or my tattoo, for that matter. The snarling dog's face?"

"Sure. Besides on your arm, I just saw it at the end of the school year. I brought in some invitations I'd done for a retirement party and sneaked into the science exhibit. An exhibition about wolves had an emblem like that on each of the poster boards."

"It was probably made by one of the Brotherhood children. We have a special affinity for wolves."

"So do I, actually."

At his raised eyebrows, she continued. "Did Owen ever tell you? There's an old family legend that we're descended from werewolves on one side. Funny, huh?"

Smokie felt his eyelids freeze at very wide open. "Really?"

She shrugged. "Every time I see a wolf I just have to draw it."

"I thought I recognized the subjects of a couple of your drawings."

"Are you a wolf tracker? I see them sometimes when I'm hiking with Owen and his sister. But until this past week I'd never suspected one might be lurking around my house."

"Yeah, about that."

Olivia wiped her hands on a kitchen towel. "Did you see one?"

"Yes, a wolf was hanging around, not a coyote. Looking for me, actually."

"You've lost me."

Smokie cleared his throat. Time for the big reveal. "Remember when we went to the Greek restaurant?"

"What does that have to do with wolf sightings?"

"Bear with me." He gripped the edge of the counter over the dishwasher. "This Brotherhood of mine, we have a seer. You know Barkley. That's him. Anyway, he sees auras and he looked at ours at the restaurant. He didn't say anything then, but after that fire, before the EMTs took him, he said we were true mates."

"You disappeared out of my life after that."

"I was frustrated. I didn't know what to do. But being out in the woods just now clarified things for me."

Olivia made a sound. "I'm trying to bear with you, but this is very confusing."

"Right. 'True mates' means we're meant to be together, you and me. True mates can't even be apart for very long or they die. It's a huge deal. The true-mate ceremony is more binding than marriage for my people."

"So you want to bind to me for the rest of our lives, because Barkley the firefighter who is really a seer saw our auras?" She started to smile, as if she thought he was joking, then her expression became pained when she saw he was serious.

"I'd never have thought it, since you're human, but it sounds as if maybe you have shifter blood, which is great. Less of a transition for you."

Her words came slowly. "A transition to what?"

"Our world. Knowing about us."

"Are you going to bite me?"

"No, you can stay human. I have no problem with that."

"Huh."

He knew he was losing her, so he summed up. "I'm a shapeshifter, a werewolf. And you're my true mate."

She said nothing, just stood before him, blinking. "Why did you decide it was okay to tell me now, when it wasn't before?"

"A girl from my clan hit on me and I got angry because she knows you're my true mate. I thought it was so disrespectful of her, but after all, I hadn't claimed you. I hadn't realized how important this was to me until that."

"I had a werewolf stalker?" She clasped her glass cruet of homemade salad dressing and shook it.

He took it from her when she started to shake a little too vigorously. "Sort of. But I told her to stop it. She was breaking the rules of our clan anyway, being in wolf form so close to town."

"I see."

"So what do you say? There's a ceremony we can do. Mostly people plan for it, like a wedding. We can get married too, of course, if you want."

Olivia folded her arms across her chest. "I say no way."

"What?" The word emerged strangled, half-formed.

"I'm not going through some kind of mystical binding ceremony with you."

"You aren't?" Smokie's mind felt encased in sticky marshmallow fluff. He set the leaking bottle down on the counter. "But we could die."

"You admitted you didn't really want me until some chick, excuse me, werewolf chick, hit on you." Her mouth twisted.

"That just reminded me of my priorities. You know I want you." He wanted to grab her, crush his mouth to hers, prove himself, but that would only prove lust, not love, and who was he to talk about love anyway?

"I know you want to fuck me, Smokie, but that's not enough. Come on."

"But we're true mates." His voice was almost pleading.

"So said my ex-husband. He wasn't all freaky mystical about it, but nonetheless, I'm not going to commit to someone again just because the stars are aligned or whatever. I made a promise to myself that I'm only going to get serious with my best friend, someone who really loves me, next time. I'm too old to make more mistakes."

"It wouldn't be a mistake though. True mates are perfect for each other, happy." How could he make her understand? "We've been happy together so far, right?"

The oven made a clicking sound and Smokie smelled slightly overdone pizza. Olivia swore and opened the oven then grabbed a mitt and pulled out the tray.

"Enough baloney, Monahan." She tossed the pizza in the sink.

"It's not burned," he protested. "Just a little crispy."

"I'm not hungry. I'll see you later, okay?"

He put his hands to his head, ran his fingers through his hair, forgetting he had dressing on them. Now his head smelled like Italian herbs. "I've told you about us all wrong. I'm sorry."

She remained at the sink. Her head was down and he wondered if he'd made her cry. Two crying women in one afternoon. Geez.

"I'll get out of here, give you time to think. I'm sorry I can't make this easier." Awkwardly, he patted her shoulder then left the house. He knew leaving was the wrong thing to do but he had no idea what the right thing would be.

If he didn't fix things, he had just handed them both a death sentence.

Chapter Five

Olivia heard the doorbell early the next afternoon and debated whether to open it. She peered out the open window of her studio down to the front porch. Smokie. He'd tilted his head upward and she could see his sad puppy expression.

Funny that she should see him as a puppy when he claimed to be a wolf. He'd been one in her dreams the night before, endlessly pouncing on her then becoming human again—a big, strong male. A firefighter who made everyone safer because he did a dangerous job.

He'd get another chance with her, she decided. Not just because of who he was in the community, but who he was to her. Lover. Entertainer. Friend? He meant well, she understood that much deep in her bones. Owen regarded him highly. She wasn't even sure she didn't believe Smokie, but then she'd trusted her ex and look where it had gotten her. A lost career that had been so promising and lucrative. Years in New York with a flaky artist when she had belonged on the west coast.

The doorbell rang again. She sighed, wiped her inky fingers on a baby wipe and went to answer.

When she opened it, Smokie held out flowers. White roses, no less.

"Are you trying to tell me your intentions are pure?"

He grinned suddenly, a dirty smile she'd seen on his face more than a time or two before he'd taken her clothes off. "Never, and you like that about me."

She had a sudden memory of the way that breast binder had bitten into her tender flesh. Cream rushed into her pussy and she was reminded of how sexy he made her feel, how experimental. "You're right about that, Smokie. I'd take you up to my bed right now, if you wanted."

"I want you."

His words were simple, but she knew they were loaded.

"You're trying to take away my free will with this true mate stuff, even if it's real. I should get to choose my husband."

"Your elderly neighbors next door are sitting on the front porch," he advised. "You want them to hear this?"

"Considering they are Owen's parents, probably not." She held the door open.

"I didn't know they were the Hotchkisses."

"Tony had a bad stroke a few years back. He's never been the same. My aunt has aged too, trying to take care of him."

"That's commitment, though. I mean, it can be hard, but I'm sure it's worth it to her."

"She loves him, I'll give her that."

"It doesn't mean anything to you?"

She shook her head. "Of course it does. Uncle Tony is a great guy, treated her like a queen back in the day. Of course Aunt Divna should stick things out when he needs her."

"That's love."

"I feel like you're playing the girl in this scene and I'm the guy, shying away from commitment," Olivia said. "I got hurt, you know. I was married. I'm so much older than you."

"True mates don't hurt each other," he said, handing her the roses. "They can't. It's like a promise from the universe."

She walked into the kitchen, tense and confused and turned on. Why couldn't this relationship stay simple? She found a vase to put the flowers in and set them in the sink. "Then how come you didn't knock on my door years ago, as soon as you were old enough?"

"I didn't know about us. Only Barkley did. I can't explain it."

She ran the water, too upset to care for the flowers properly. "I don't like it. It's not respectful. It doesn't give me a choice. Just because I want to jump your bones doesn't mean I want to give you my whole life."

Smokie licked his lips and looked up at the ceiling before finding her gaze again. "Can you think back, Olivia? Do you remember why you propositioned me in the first place? Was that your normal thing?"

She turned off the water and turned to face him. "No. I just always thought you'd be fun. It took me months to find the guts to come to you."

"Just fun? I have a committed job, a committed clan, I'm a committed kind of guy."

She swallowed hard. "Why did you agree to fuck me if I was being such a skank?"

That dirty grin flashed across his face again. "I've wanted you for ten years, you know that. The sight of you in a bikini rocked my world. I wasn't wrong. We're great together."

She felt her nostrils flare as her nerves hit a new level. "Could have gotten complicated around the station, with Owen there. He'd kick your ass if you treated me badly."

Smokie casually rested his hands on his belt. Even now she wanted to take that belt apart with her teeth and slide that gorgeous cock down her throat. He was simply killing her with his hotness.

"Owen couldn't take me, and you're worth it. You've always fascinated me. Even without the mystical woo-woo."

She sighed. "I guess you were worth it too. I'm just not sure where that leaves us now."

"C'mon." He took her hand.

"What?"

"I want to show you something. Put on your hiking boots."

She looked at him, chewing at the edge of her lip. Something told her she wanted to see what he had in mind. She went upstairs and put on jeans, boots and thick socks, found her sunglasses, hat and a handkerchief to tie around her neck, then grabbed a backpack on the way out that held a couple of bottles of water, energy bars, sketchpad, pencils and a blanket.

They crossed the street and walked through the evergreen tree line then moved into the woods. Smokie took the pack from her and shouldered it then held her hand as they walked on the trail toward the reservoir. The afternoon heat roasted most people and she only spotted two college-age guys out of earshot ahead of them. She could feel sweat collecting under her breasts and trickling down her stomach.

Two miles in, she saw the chain-link fence around the reservoir. Smokie directed them to a path leading to the left past a stand of cottonwoods. She followed him for another few hundred yards before they veered into the brush off the trail.

"Do you know where you're going?" She wondered if she had a compass in her pack.

"Oh yeah. This is my normal path."

"Let's stop for a second." She untied her handkerchief and wiped her face then took a sip of water.

"Ready to go?" he asked, less than a minute later, so full of energy that he bounced on the balls of his feet.

"Absolutely." She took another sip of water then capped the bottle.

They walked another mile, partially shaded by tall trees. He took the lead with her trailing behind him, glad she'd worn jeans instead of shorts, given the undergrowth. The sun lowered a bit as they progressed, lessening the intense brightness, though the late afternoon was the hottest part of the day around there.

"Want an energy bar?" She hoped for another break.

He paused, glanced around, then lowered the pack to the ground and pointed to a tree stump next to him. "Have a seat."

"You want to show me something here?"

He nodded, very solemn. Excitement danced down her spine along with a hint of nerves. He was a firefighter, a community hero, her cousin's friend. She knew she could trust him, but out in the forest she felt primitive, aware of her delicacy next to his brawn.

Taking out her water bottle again, she sat on the stump. He said nothing more, just started to shuck his clothes, a Ladder Company One T-shirt and cargo shorts, blue-boxer briefs, hiking boots and athletic socks.

"Mmmm," she said, feeling a sensation very different from heat exhaustion. She could find the energy to take that strong cock into her and roll around on the ground a little. That patch of grass to her left might have enough spring to be comfortable.

She glanced up, expecting to see a condom in his hand, that dirty grin back on his face.

Instead, his torso bent forward. His nose elongated. Cracking noises shocked her into immobility. They emanated from his body. His hands became paws and she could see a tail emerging. The water bottle dropped from her hands, spilling its contents. Her mind froze. All she could do was watch. When a wolf stood proudly in front of her, more beautiful than any creature she'd ever sketched, she rocked back, fell off her stump. As she scrambled back, he padded toward her. Much of his mass had dissipated in the mystical transformation, but he was still huge.

She held back a scream as an odd thought grabbed her barely functioning brain. He was still gorgeous, similar to the wolves she'd sketched over the past eight months. She'd never been so close to one before. Would he attack? Were all the wolves she'd seen shapeshifters, maybe people she knew? None of them had attacked. She couldn't gather enough muscle control to move, even if he wanted to hurt her.

No, he stopped a foot away, waited for her to approach. Somehow, she knew this was a test, the biggest she'd ever faced.

C'mon, Olivia, your future is now. What did she want? To be alone or to be embraced in a pure, mystical love by a genuine shapeshifter? One she was crazy hot for? Really liked? Had spent the past two years fantasizing about in her lonely bed, only to discover the reality was far better than anything she'd imagined?

She didn't even have to marry him. That took her anxiety down a notch.

She reached out her hand, touched an ear and stroked his fur. The wolf put its nose against hers then stepped back. She held her breath, waiting, itching to reach for one of her pencils.

As quickly as he'd begun it, he reversed the transformation. When he'd finished, Smokie lay on the ground, panting.

"You're a truly gorgeous wolf," she marveled, finding her tree stump again. Her legs felt absurdly weak.

"You weren't scared." His expression showed pride in her for her strength.

"I was terrified," she admitted, "but you behaved perfectly. So pretty."

He pushed into a sitting position. "I prefer handsome, rugged, dashing." He trailed off when she left the stump and crawled toward him, poked him in his very human belly.

"I don't think I ever appreciated this six-pack until now, outside, in the sunlight." She noted that, just below his fantastic abs, his cock was thickening and lifting in front of her gaze as she stroked the springy hair on his lower belly. Her fingers itched to move down.

"See something you like?" His voice had gone hoarse and she knew he meant more than he said.

Did she like him? Of course, but something had been holding her back from seeing him as more than a hook-up. His age? His dangerous job? The fact of his secret shapeshifting self? "I see everything that I like," she admitted honestly.

"Checking me out in wolf form didn't seem to bother you."

"I think it's cool." She laughed. "I'd rather you turn into a wolf than a jerk."

"The Brotherhood is pretty flexible. We aren't forced to turn by the full moon or anything like that. It doesn't limit us."

"Convenient."

"Yeah."

"So I have one important inquiry," she said, asking the question she'd had ever since she'd first met him.

He came up on his haunches, his cock jutting forward. "Anything."

"Is Smokie really your name?"

He laughed. "I'm afraid so. It's a clan tradition to give names associated with some famous dog."

"Who was Smokie?"

"Oh, there's been more than one. I think I was predestined for my career as a result, though."

The words tumbled out. "Just like you were predestined for me?"

His brow furrowed. "I have no idea how the true mate stuff works. You'll have to ask Barkley."

"Trust me, I will."

"Seems like you had something else on your mind a minute ago."

She found the remains of her water and tilted the bottle against her lips, savoring the sun-warmed ounce left at the bottom. Admittedly, sweat wasn't the only thing dampening her body. Creamy arousal dampened her engorged labia, her aching channel. Could she give in to lust when so much was at stake?

She untied her handkerchief, used it to mop her face. "Do you want some water?"

"That's not what I want, no."

She sighed. "I'm afraid."

He dropped his knees to the dirt and moved toward her, circling her waist with his corded arms. "Afraid of what?"

She leaned into his strength. "Of what sex with you makes me feel. I don't want to make decisions based on great sex, even if it's really explosively combustive, wonderful sex. What if I make a mistake again? What if all the emotional attachment I feel for you is just because of the sex?"

"We aren't exactly incompatible."

"No, and that's why one hook-up became two, then that became dating. But sex with you makes my brain go all mushy."

"Maybe that's how it's meant to be. I feel the same way. You turn my insides into goo."

"Goo?" She felt the corners of her mouth turning up.

"Goo," he said in a definite tone. "And my cock into a volcano ready to blow."

"Smokie..."

"Stop thinking," he said.

She let his mouth take hers, heard herself mewl as she opened to him, let his tongue lick in, explore the mysterious dark inner contours. Her body released a new flood of warmth, readying her pussy for his entry.

"At least let me put down the blanket," she said, pushing against his arms.

"I'll do it." He opened her pack and laid out the small blanket then looked at it doubtfully. "Which part of your body do you want on this?"

She looked down, realized it was only a lap blanket. "Whatever." She unbuttoned and unzipped her jeans, pulled down the tiny, yellow cotton thong she wore underneath.

His jaw dropped. "You're naked, I mean, really naked." He touched a finger to her waxed pussy. "Me like."

"I was hot so I had it done," she said, pleased by his reaction.

"You're soaked," he said reverently, moving his finger along her slit. "I love how excited you get for me."

She found his cock with her fingers, rubbed his pre-cum into his skin. "What's not to love, fire wolf? Got a condom?"

He thrust his enormous erection into her hand. "I'm not capable of moving away when your hand is on my cock."

"Oh right." Laughing, she let go of him so he could dig through his clothes and find the condom.

He handed it to her. She noticed his hands were shaking so she ripped the packet open and sheathed him. Then she let her fingers roam his damp, scorching skin.

"You really are on fire for me." She couldn't wait to feel his cock deep inside her pussy, loving her as only he could.

"I'm your fire wolf," he said, nuzzling her neck.

He lifted her and she wrapped her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist. His toes found the blanket and he kicked it into his hand then spread it against a wide, ancient tree before pressing her against it.

Touched by how he protected her, she rewarded him with a kiss then angled her body so her pussy rested conveniently near his cock. He probed her.

"No teasing. Take me!" she begged.

He entered her channel in one mind-bending thrust that had the sky dimming to black before her dazzled eyes.

She closed her lids and felt. Felt sweat-slicked shoulders, plumped with strong muscle, the tiny hairs at the back of his neck. Moving her hands down, she found thick

arms, bulging biceps, ridged forearms, his back, every part of him warm and carved, physically perfect in all ways imaginable.

His cock, so long and thick, yet perfectly formed for her body, forced stars to explode behind her eyelids with every pulsating thrust. Her hips began to move, speeding up the total break with reality that she sensed was coming. An orgasm so intense she knew she'd risk losing consciousness. But she didn't want to miss a second of it, even when she was so desperate to lose herself, to feel that completion.

"Come with me," she begged. "Together, fast."

She heard his harsh breathing.

"Want it to last."

"No, fast, hard, now. Give it to me." Her fingernails dug into his skin. Her hips pumped frantically.

He slammed her against the tree, moving her up and down the blanket as his knees flexed. His cock plumbed new depths inside her body until her cream flowed around it. Even the insides of her thighs were sweating from the summer heat.

She screamed. "Now! Oh yes!" The world came apart and she broke around him. Her hands tightened convulsively then her entire body relaxed, losing the tension of the last twenty-four hours.

He pressed her against the tree and thrust repeatedly. Eventually he groaned deep in his throat and spurted his cum inside her.

Panting, she found his neck with her fingers, felt the tendons strain as he gave himself utterly to her. He sagged, holding her against the tree with his body. They rested together, clutching each other's sweat-soaked bodies under the shade of the tree.

"Wow, I thought I was going to pass out there," she said, feeling weak.

"We have to start having sex lying down," he rasped.

"Let's figure out how to make this blanket work horizontally," she suggested. "And share my other bottle of water."

"Done." He lowered her to the ground.

After a momentary stagger, she found her balance. He reached for the bottle of water while she spread out the blanket on a patch of dirt near the three-foot-wide spread of grass.

"Toes on the grass, head on the blanket," she suggested.

He dropped his warm T-shirt at the top. "Gives us a bit more room. Let's take a nap."

She cuffed him on the shoulder. "You're such a guy."

He went to his knees on the blanket and pulled her close, nestling her head against his neck. "Please go through the ceremony with me. I love you too much to let you die."

"Love?" she retorted gently. "You mean post-coital bliss?"

"No. Loving, in love, whatever. I care enough to bind myself to you."

"But do you really love me?" she persisted.

He kissed the top of her head. "As I live and breathe, Olivia Bilson, I do. It took me ten years to figure it out, but I do."

She nodded. Earlier, she'd decided to trust him. He'd never lied and she was sure he never would. He really did love her. A tiny pain that had resided in her chest for years finally vanished. She'd finally found her true love. "Let's do it. No dying here. I have too much to live for."

"Is that just post-coital agreement?"

"Anyone who can give me an orgasm like that deserves a mystical binding ceremony."

She knew she sounded flippant, because he turned on his side and stuck his hand under his chin.

"Seriously. This is serious."

"I'm not letting you go," she said. "No more disappearing for a week. I can't go that long without sex with you. Sorry. If it takes a ceremony to get that cock up close and personal on a regular basis, I'm up for it. We'll figure out the rest later."

"We really are perfect for each other," he said. "Not just sexually. Being true mates is a real confidence builder. It means we have a great future ahead of us."

She stared into his eyes, felt the sincerity she saw there. "Somehow I believe you. You aren't my ex. You've never steered me wrong."

"Okay then. It's a good thing we're already naked, because the mating tattoo goes on your ass."

"Yours too, I hope?"

"Of course. Stand up and bend over."

She did as he asked then listened to him begin some kind of chant. He paused after a few seconds.

"This will sting a little, like having your ear pierced."

Glad for years of yoga, she rested her palms on the grass. "Do your worst."

Again, he began a low chant in a language she didn't understand. Glancing to her side she saw Smokie had shifted his arm. It had become a furry wolf's leg ending in a paw with long, sharp claws. She watched his paw move then it was on her ass. She tensed.

Claws pricked her skin, hurting her barely at all, then he shifted back.

She glanced at her butt cheek and saw five tiny points of blood in the shape of a half circle.

"Now put your right fingers to each spot," he instructed.

She obeyed.

"Put your fingers on my ass in the same place." He continued the chant as she touched each of her blood-tipped fingers to the same spot high on his right butt cheek.

Her fingers tingled. The blood became one with his skin, until all that remained

were five raised spots. At the same time, the half circle of pricks on her butt tingled too. Instead of bloody spots she now saw a matching paw mark where he'd clawed her.

"Now what?"

"Whatever we want, Olivia. Your life, your choice."

She grinned. "I do love having you around. Love, in love, whatever."

"Yeah?"

"Why don't you move in with me? We'll take it from there."

"I like that idea."

She took his hand in hers. "Anything else I should know about?"

"We're not just stronger and faster, we live longer."

"My family is pretty long-lived too. Must be the shapeshifter blood. Think I could become one?"

"I think we could make that happen." He squeezed her hand.

"Let me think about it."

"Take all the time you need. Either way, I'm not going anywhere." He tucked her body along his and turned his face to the sky.

"What?"

"I smell smoke, but for once I have something better to do than fight it." His face relaxed. "There."

"What?"

"I hear the sirens. They're on their way."

"That's good." She snuggled closer.

"You know, we shifters each have a special talent."

"I wonder what mine would be, if I decided to become one."

"I look forward to finding out."

She pushed him backward and straddled him. "For now, let's work on this special talent."

"Which one is that?"

"The one that takes me out of my mind with sexual ecstasy."

His dirty grin returned. "My favorite special talent of all time."

About the Author

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

She also writes Blush books as Heather Hiestand.

Anh welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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