

Shifting Heat

L.M. Connolly

Andros was a severely disabled geek working for STORM but now he's a powerful shape-shifting dragon. Still a geek though. Meeting Faye when they're sharing the same air space is a bit of a shock they quickly overcome in a convenient hotel room. Hot, fast, rampant sex is just what Andros needs. Tangling with Faye between the sheets, against her desk, pretty much anywhere he can have her takes energy Andros now has in abundance. But he won't let his emotions follow.

Faye never met anyone in her long life as exciting as Andros. But he works for STORM, Faye's enemy. She's never had anyone so young, either. But she can't resist his strength, his determination—or his ripped body. Together they must hunt down a mutual enemy, but to defeat him they have to come to terms with what they are, were and will become.

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Chapter One

Could she go against a lifetime's beliefs? Could she cold-bloodedly seduce a man, someone she'd never met, and then steal from him?

For the greater good, she'd thought she could. Now she wasn't so sure.

Faye stared out the window of her hotel room, arms crossed over her chest. Another full moon, another night when she had to shape-shift. She had no choice about that. What she did afterward was up to her. Already her body tingled as the compulsion spread through her. A gift from nature, not always welcome or convenient, but no shape-shifter could resist. If they tried, they shifted anyway. Tonight—a night she could be certain she'd find dragons, griffins and other creatures out in their alternate forms—she planned to use it.

And the extra shot of libido that came at this time of the month, the only time shape-shifters were fertile, that would help. It would have to. She couldn't deny that she didn't want to go, was putting off the moment when she'd leave the relative safety of this room and face the unknown.

She'd even thought about seducing a woman. Faye was straight, relentlessly so. Although she'd tried same-sex romance, it hadn't been for her. But it didn't repel her, and perhaps if she tried for the sex that didn't attract her, she might have more chance of remaining impartial, doing the job and moving on. But she had to do what she could for her mentor. And only she could do this, only she could save him, because nobody else had her skills, and nobody else cared enough to risk their life for him.

Dark shapes passed across the faces of skyscrapers where unmasked Talents had already taken to the skies. Buildings were beginning to put on their lights, illuminating the glimmer of a scale on a dragon's wing, the soft variations on the golden fur of a griffin.

Life had been much simpler a couple of years ago. Faye sighed, remembering the days when every Talent had lived hidden among mankind. Most people, or most mortals anyway, had considered them legends and told stories about them, never dreaming Talents still existed. Fuzzing people's minds to disguise their true forms had worked and Faye feared it would become a dying art now that the fear of discovery was gone.

Too late now to reconsider the reveal. When the dragon flying over Central Park in daylight had refused to fuzz, refused to deny what he was, the game was up. The world was still coming to terms with it, and would be for a long time to come. Now dragons were on TV, shape-shifters in the Senate. Every Talent was urged to be honest, to reveal themselves for everyone's good. If certain politicians had their way, Talents would be *forced* to reveal themselves. She couldn't see the point. But it was done and finished. It couldn't be undone. Coming out had set Talent against Talent. Not that matters had always been peaceful between dragon and vampire, vampire and Sorcerer, but disputes were wrenching communities apart these days.

That first Talent had flown from the STORM building. Faye glanced across the expanse of Central Park to where the structure jutted into the sky. Normally it was indistinguishable from the other buildings surrounding it, but tonight anyone looking up could see it was STORM from the number of Talents around it, setting out for a night flight.

STORM was supposed to represent the rights of all Talents, but these days they took the part of the government too often. Soon they'd become another government agency and Talents would lose their valuable source of independent advice and help. It was happening already.

Faye glanced back at the blank, faceless hotel room and took a deep breath to strengthen her resolve before she took to the skies. A reminder of what she had to do tonight, why she wasn't in her comfortable apartment downtown.

She was taking action to protect the growing resistance, saving the one man who could make it work, who had the charisma and the following to face the people who would force every Talent to come out, whether they wanted to or not. Nobody should be forced to it, though Congress was trying to mandate, saying people should know when Talents lived in their neighborhood, as if they were undesirables.

A crock of shit, the whole thing. Lousy excuses. The authorities just wanted control.

Enough. Time to go. Grabbing the pouch holding her hotel keycard, she prepared for the shape-shift. She dropped her robe to the floor and hooked the pouch's long cord around her neck. Although it dropped to the floor, it wouldn't trail once she'd shape-shifted.

The process came as naturally to her as breathing. It no longer excited or surprised her—she'd done it too often. So she didn't watch the mirror or hold her breath as she leaned forward and let the familiar shape of the dragon come upon her, changing the shape of her bones, the appearance of her skin. She watched the scales spread, urging the shape-shift to hurry, pushing the pace to get out there and get the job done.

Tonight she could fly free. Usually she let old habits rule her and fuzzed, but tonight she wanted someone to see her. She didn't know who yet, but she'd know him when she saw him. Someone vulnerable who came from that building.

Someone to seduce.

Andros hated the moment of chilly awareness combined with the vulnerability he always experienced when he got naked. He stepped out on to the roof of the STORM building and shivered. One of his colleagues, Nick Ivy, a roc shape-shifter, grinned. "You're new, aren't you?"

"I've worked for STORM for a while." Andros tried not to cover his genitals, tried to act nonchalant.

The man's grin broadened. "I meant to shape-shifting. I know you. You're a geek, aren't you?"

Andros hated to make assumptions, but this big, muscular man with an all-over golden tan—shit, *all over*—didn't look as if he spent his days hunched over a computer screen. "Yep, that's me." He felt used to the label. More a part of him than the dragon he'd so recently become. "It's getting cold, isn't it?" Some of the chill of early fall might account for the goose bumps pimpling his skin. But it wouldn't explain away the nerves prickling with the compulsion to shape-shift and the anxiety nagging at him.

"You'll get used to it." Nick's grin broadened. "It'll get worse first, mind you. It's only September."

Oh right, the cool air. Usually New York in September was mild, but this happened to be one of those evenings when an unaccountable chill swept over the city, especially this high up. Still, Andros wouldn't swap it for the sultriness of L.A., where he'd spent most of his life before his recent move.

Neither could he get used to being naked with a bunch of other people, most of them strangers, and in a weird pretense of politeness, not let his gaze fall to their groins or stare at nipples tightening against the cold. It was like not acknowledging an elephant in the room. He'd spent much of his life getting naked for doctors and specialists before his conversion but he'd never gotten over the shyness of revealing his body. In the company of other naked people it seemed worse, not better.

He felt much happier these days. At least he could walk. He'd gone from a geek with a lifelong illness that would have eventually killed him to a powerful creature who could fly. It was too much, sometimes. He should be grateful. Shit, he was grateful, but he was also scared and unsure.

He turned his gaze outward to the lights flickering on in the tall buildings. Blessed evidence of ordinary life. Andros had always loved living in the middle of cities, watching the life going on around him. It gave him a reason not to look at himself, to forget his condition for a time.

Nick Ivy was still staring at him. Fuck, Andros would hate to disappoint the guy, but he was relentlessly straight. But this time, when his gaze flickered over him, he couldn't help noticing the rising erection. The big man glanced down at his body and up at Andros again. "It's okay. We get horny this time of the month. It doesn't happen to you?"

Andros shook his head, then nodded, then changed his mind. "I'm sorry, you're real good-looking and all that, but—"

Nick threw back his dark head and howled with laughter, but cut it off abruptly and shook his head. "I'm not hitting on you." Several people nearby glanced at them and grinned. Andros felt like any kind of fool but studiously kept his gaze at face level. He had no intention of discovering he was the only male on top of this building without an erection. But as he thought that, he felt his cock twitch. *Oh fuck.* Nick, seemingly without Andros' inhibitions, glanced down. "Yep, you too. It's the imperative to procreate. At least, that's what someone told me a long time ago. We're animals, guy. Anyone will tell you that."

He lost the smile completely and his eyes turned grave. "I bet you've seen some good stuff, working where you do."

At Andros' frown, he explained. "Hate mail. Or rather, hate email. STORM is open now too, and the letters keep coming."

"I hardly see them. I built a filter to channel them to a folder, then I archive them without looking." Why let that kind of grief into his life? "Want a copy?" Something he could do.

"Hey, sure, I'd love that."

Andros felt better, useful. That was why he'd turned to computing. His body might be weak, but his brain worked just fine. Always had.

Someone nudged Nick. "Your turn."

So many people packed this roof on the three days a month of compulsion that they had to stand in line.

Nick nodded at him and turned around. He stepped forward and calmly dropped off the building, joining others doing exactly the same thing. To the uninformed eye, it might look like some kind of weird mass suicide, naked bodies dropping off the side of a tall building. Some of them whooped as they fell.

Then, with a flap of powerful wings, the transformed shape-shifter appeared, swooping in the sky in a spectacular display of aerobatics. Dragons mostly, but griffins and other creatures amassed there too, wings sweeping up to catch the currents, creating an even stronger breeze up here. All kinds of flying beasts appeared, some rarely seen even by other Talents. He thought he spotted a basilisk, but the dull gray being disappeared around the edge of another building almost as soon as he saw it.

With a deadly shriek and a thrust of powerful wings, the roc soared up above the roof. His razor-sharp beak and huge talons were a testament to his form, the huge bird that was everything an eagle should be but bigger, better. He blinked once, his lid sliding over the dark eye and then, with an agile twist, he turned and flew off in the direction of Central Park.

His turn.

Unlike the more experienced Talents here, and that meant most of them, Andros didn't enjoy the thrill of hurling himself off a building and changing his form mid-flight, however much his colleagues told him about the exhilaration of transforming with air rushing around their arms, finding an air current and riding it. Swooping their wings down and rising higher. It sounded like less of a thrill right now, and more like dancing with death. He'd never enjoyed roller coasters much, either. Unlike his sister Ania, who'd shrieked her way around every theme park California had to offer. But now he could do something Ania couldn't. He could fly.

Still scared that he'd lose the knack and plummet out of the sky, Andros decided to shape-shift and take to the air on top of this building before he ventured farther. It had taken some time before he was able to rise up higher than ten feet or so, but at least he could do that now. And bank, and dip. He wished his friend Jack Hargreaves had stayed here instead of moving to England, because Jack was a new shape-shifter too. They'd learned their new skills together, laughing at each other's clumsiness. It didn't matter between them because they were both new. Except Jack, as a jaguar-god shape-shifter, couldn't fly. But he'd laughed plenty, as had Andros when Jack had tripped over his paws and lost coordination.

The human population on the rooftop had thinned some and Andros shivered as a fresh breeze drifted over his skin, putting goose bumps on his goose bumps. He concentrated, lifted his head and stared at the rising moon. The breeze sifted through his hair, tickling his scalp. All he had to do was let it happen.

Then he felt it. A prickling sensation as scales slid over his skin. He still had no idea how it happened, but inside, his body relaxed as it obeyed the monthly compulsion. His boss, Ann Reynolds, had told him once that it was Nature's way of forcing shape-shifters to acknowledge their true being. Maybe so, otherwise some might prefer to remain in human form, their base form.

Though, despite his fears, Andros couldn't imagine choosing not to fly. Overcoming his fear acted like a high, and every time he did it, his apprehension lessened. Once in the air, he found flying a thrill like no other. The nearest he could get to describing it would be a sustained orgasm, not the high, fast kind, but the long-drawn-out, flowing ones. And thank fuck he'd had a few more of those recently than he'd managed before his conversion, even though he'd had to go solo. The extra boost to his libido at this time of the month helped too.

There was also a lot to be said for basic good health.

The tarred, blackened surface of the roof receded as his size increased. He used to shape-shift with his eyes closed but it wasn't cool, so now he forced himself to watch. He just didn't turn his head very much until he'd completed the shape-shift, otherwise the process made him nauseous. The feeling of moving without moving, the way sitting in a train and watching the next train move made him feel as though he were moving himself. Weird. These days the whole world had turned weird. The elastic of his ID ankle bracelet stretched to take the increased size of his leg. That ID would get him back on to STORM's roof. Otherwise, on his return, a bunch of heavily armed security staff would arrive before he'd shape-shifted back.

He'd learned to accept the sensation of cracking, reshaping bones and muscle by now, but if he could shape-shift faster, he'd hardly notice it at all. Or so his colleagues told him. At first they'd stayed back, nannying him, but Andros had done with that. After a lifetime of coddling, he tended to get impatient with people who asked him if he was okay. A shame a kid with a debilitating condition like muscular dystrophy hated being cared for, but there it was. His surly responses to the twentieth "Are you feeling okay today?" had gotten him a bad rep, probably

with reason, but sometimes that had proved too much on top of the constant pain. And his resentment against the world, that he should be burdened with this illness when he'd done nothing to deserve it.

Not that he had it anymore. The first few shape-shifts had taken care of the disease. Jesus, if he could market that as a cure, he'd make a fortune.

He shuddered, but this time not with cold. His dragon form didn't feel the cold the way his human form did. He swung out his wing, enjoying the sensation of the breeze rippling across his leathery skin, ruffling the scales. Exhilarating power surged through him, but that was nothing to what he felt when he swept his wings down—which was possible now with few people left on the roof—and felt his body respond, rising with an effortless strength that defeated his remaining forebodings.

One downsweep of his wings brought him into contact with the air currents and he left STORM behind, surging through the air. Like swimming but better, without the resistance of water. After a few powerful thrusts, he allowed himself to drift lazily in the direction of Central Park.

It was almost tradition now for the winged Talents to head there. After all, Alessandro Gianetti had done the first daylight unfuzzed flight there.

Soaring up, he effortlessly avoided the other dragons and flying creatures, enjoying their company but not feeling the need to communicate. *Heaven*. This part of shape-shifting had filled Andros with joy when he'd first discovered it. Countless dreams of flying just didn't compare with the reality.

Only when he glanced down did he realize how high he'd climbed. Above the tall buildings, even overtopping the Empire State Building, which dominated the midtown skyline. Creatures danced and soared around its spire, chasing each other or just demonstrating their skills.

Flickers of bright light from below indicated the inevitable flashes of cameras. Tourists and locals gathered in Central Park and on top of the tall buildings, as well as the street. Some of the building owners held special late openings on the nights of the full moon each month to take advantage of the newest attraction. Sparks of light twinkled over the green swathe of the park below, broken only by the calm blue-gray of the reservoir and lake. Andros could appreciate the true beauty of the park as he never had before.

On his descent, he encountered a blue dragon, one whose scales gleamed in the waning light. He banked to avoid it but it swooped and swerved, following him, and a tingle in his mind told him she wanted to communicate. Oh yes, she. He sensed the feminine essence of her, had scented her as he passed but hadn't wanted to intrude on anyone's enjoyment tonight.

Seemed she wanted to enjoy it with him. So he slowed and powered his wings, driving himself up until he floated above her, then swooped behind her to tease her with an extra surge of air to throw her slightly off course. Andros had rarely played before. Life had seemed too short for him to waste time doing anything like that. He'd taken a laptop when he'd accompanied his sister to theme parks, used the time to work on a current project, but now—now he had all the time in the world to play. Hundreds of years to learn how to do something just for the exhilaration that coursed through his veins.

He heard her laughter in his mind. Dragons rarely used their vocal chords—a bellow, a roar, an odd clicking sound and a kind of purr were more or less the extent of their verbal skills. But their telepathy reflected all the verbal dexterity they had in their human forms. Her amusement tickled his senses, gave him a flush of arousal to add to his already heightened state.

She swept past him, brushing his wing with hers. A sweet touch that sent shivers through him. He liked this game. He responded, twisting his flexible body around to come back at her, rushing toward her, only to soar over her head and sweep up, hovering. But dragons couldn't hover long so he flew past her and turned.

Not fast enough. She'd already whirled around and her body was still curved, supple and lithe. As he watched, it straightened and she flicked her tail in a cheeky demonstration of control. She didn't try to speak to him telepathically, only sent him a warm surge of laughter, which he returned in full.

Aerobatics were nothing new to Andros, he'd practiced plenty since his conversion last year. But doing it for sheer joy, playing with another dragon, was new to him. At least it was in this intensity. He felt a connection to her, a link he'd rarely felt since his sister fell in love and married. He wouldn't have it any other way, seeing Ania so happy, but he'd missed her, missed their easy companionship. Not that he'd tell anyone or admit it. It would feel disloyal when she'd found such happiness.

He wondered what this woman looked like in her human form. Almost as soon as he thought it, she sent him an image. It flicked across his mind, there and gone, teasing him with its brief appearance, but he wanted to see more. He got an impression of dark hair cut short, feathery, intense dark eyes and honeyed skin, almost Mediterranean in its warm tone. He wanted to taste. To see more, to feel more. His libido returned in force, spurring him on to take what she seemed to be offering.

Andros sent her an image of himself as he was now. He'd long ago abandoned the pitch-black hair dye that had contrasted violently with his Polish-pale skin, so he sent her the tousled blond of his reality. His eyes, ice blue, gleamed in a face that he'd allowed to tan a little in the summer just past. He'd abandoned the emo look, although he still wore some of the clothes, but he didn't bother with details. He sent her his face and a glimpse of his body clad in jeans and T-shirt.

She seemed to approve. He sent her his name and received hers in return. *Cara*.

Pretty.

Their first telepathic conversation. Andros shivered, delighted by the response. Even if this came to nothing more, she'd already brightened his evening. Other flying creatures sped past them, dragons, griffins and the occasional bird, probably pissed-off by this invasion of its air space. Now he'd opened his mind, fleeting images crossed it, images from the Talents and floating, random images from the less-disciplined mortals below.

He was closer to the ground, not close enough to discern faces, but close enough to see the disparate colors where they massed. He turned his attention away from them and back to the utterly fascinating blue dragon. *Cara*.

This play showed him a whole new facet of being a Talent. While everyone had treated him with friendship and kindness, nobody had shown an interest like this before. Not in *him*.

When *Cara* fled across the park and then glanced back, he got the message. She flipped her tail at him and he followed, playfully catching up with her and then letting her get ahead. Her back view was as good as the front. Lissome, supple, mouthwatering. She sent him an image, his golden body entwined with hers, their tails wound around each other, the combined power of their wings sending them high into the blue sky. She mirrored his movements as he moved in rhythmic thrusts against her, responding by pressing close, rubbing her neck against his where the skin was at its most sensitive.

Desire roared inside him. If he could have caught up with her, he'd have copied the actions of the dragons in the telepathic vision she'd sent him.

Fuck. He was actually thinking about dragon sex? Andros the dragon and Cara the dragon? Most Talents preferred to make love in their human forms, but that sight made him wonder how many shape-shifters fucked in their other forms.

She continued to send him visual messages, going from dragon embrace to human form, copying the clothes he'd used in his vision but then letting the garments grow more transparent until they disappeared, melted away and he saw his naked body caressing hers. She held up her breasts in invitation and he accepted, bent to suckle and taste.

He hadn't had sex for a while. He'd thought it a way of testing his resolve. Or maybe it was a bad habit he needed to break.

No time like the present.

He chased after her, his wings beating a breeze to stir the hair of the people below. They were still taking pictures, the flashes brighter now the natural light had faded. They sparkled after them in a wake he approved of. Benign fireworks. For the first time he wondered about the dragons-breathing-fire thing. Would it impress her? Could he do it? He had no fucking idea. Maybe. He knew how it was done, but he hadn't tried it yet.

She took him to the other side of the park, the West Side, and then down Eighth. Heh. It usually gave him a stupid, childish kick to go the wrong way down Eighth Avenue. Right now he didn't give a fuck.

He followed her to the balcony of a hotel. Not one of the spectacular five-star establishments around the Park, but a more modest place. Although to call any hotel around here modest was probably an understatement.

He hesitated, a sense of self-preservation belatedly creeping up on him, dampening his mood. People still kidnapped Talents and imprisoned them in laboratories to experiment on them. This could be a honey trap.

Read me, she said softly. *I just like you, that's all. I want you. Make my New York holiday special.*

He trusted his instincts and nothing alerted him to danger. His boss always told him to trust the way he felt about a person, and this person had no malice lingering around her.

So he hovered above the balcony and shape-shifted, landing with a soft thump. He followed her into the dimly lit room. Only when his toes dug into the soft carpet did Andros remember that he was naked.

She wasn't. She stood before him wearing a silk robe. She must have shape-shifted and grabbed it before he had time to land. More experienced than he was, that was for sure.

But the blue silk outlined her figure in an utterly enticing way, a way that made his mouth water. Before he could put his reactions through a filter of civilization, Andros reached for her.

Faye shuddered, pure reaction arcing through her as his mouth touched hers. Shit, she'd meant to choose someone she didn't connect with, someone she wouldn't feel too bad about double-crossing. Not this. She'd never felt like this just from a kiss. She spread her palms over the skin of his back, hungry to touch as much of him as she could. So smooth, the indent of his spine flexible and delicious. She wanted to taste his skin, but if he took his mouth from hers right now, she'd kill him.

Pure lust took over from intellect and reason. She had to fight back. But this could well be a losing battle.

She opened her mouth when he touched her lips with his tongue, welcoming him in. So good. So fucking good, she could eat him alive. Desire rose, dampened her thighs, made her take a deep breath through her nose—his male, aroused scent teasing her, rousing her appetite. He tasted like nobody else she'd ever had. Spicy, delicious. Tempting. He swept his tongue around her mouth and she tasted him back. He let her take control, move her tongue against his. She liked that. Occasionally she wanted to be dominated, for the man to take and take, but only sometimes. The rest of the time she preferred a meeting of equals. A fucking of equals.

Her skin prickled. That flight should have soothed her raging libido, given her more control, but from the moment her mind had connected with his, her hunger for him had only risen. As if on cue, he moved his hand over her back, sliding it along the silk of her robe, caressing her. The robe made the movement sexier, the notion that she still had one secret left to reveal. He'd seen her other form, but he hadn't seen her naked. Would he like her body, and would she let him remove her garment?

That tantalizing final barrier of cloth remained between them, teasing and tantalizing her with its presence but, too engrossed in kissing him, she lost herself in his arms.

When he'd shown her his mental image of himself, she'd seen a slender, willowy youth. But the man who held her now didn't feel like that. No bulging muscles for sure, but strength flowed through him with the ease and power of an athlete.

He tugged her even closer and she went, her breasts squashed against the hard planes of his chest, her arms snaking around him to pull him tight. He lifted his mouth from hers and smiled, his eyes creasing slightly at the corners. "Hello," he said.

She huffed a small laugh. "Hello."

He smoothed his hands down her body, curved them around her butt and lifted her so her body ground against his erect cock. The pressure made her soak the fabric she wore, her desire manifesting itself in the juice flowing from her. But when she reached for her waist, tried to push between them to loosen the tie, he gave her a hug and touched his lips to her forehead. His tongue snaked out to touch her, as if he couldn't help himself. "No, don't. Let me do it."

She was all over that idea. When she first spotted the ankle bracelet that denoted him a STORM employee she'd gone for him with cool determination to get what she needed and go. He wasn't an operative. They usually had red anklets. Andros had a blue one. An internal worker. Perfect, as long as he had the security level she needed. She'd have to take a chance on that because she couldn't go back now.

All she could think of right now was having him, letting him take her and then taking him. Then doing it again. No, she couldn't do that, *had* to remember her mission, but she'd let go, just for a while, enjoy what they had. And just as she'd said, let him give her a memory to take with her when she left. She'd lose herself in this, forget about the rest for however long it took them. Now she thought about it, she realized she hadn't gotten down and dirty with anybody for a long time. Far too long.

That must be it. No sex for a while could drive a dragon crazy, especially at this time of the month.

She drew away. He let her, but the way his eyes burned told her he wouldn't let her get very far. That was fine by her—she wasn't planning to go far. The dragon remained in his eyes, the burning sparks reminding her of his true nature. That was typical of newly converted shape-shifters, that inability to conceal everything at the time of the full moon. Now she felt even more of a heel for drawing him in, but fuck, she wanted him.

She slid her fingers under her belt but he held up one finger and wagged it from side to side, tsking to remind her that it was his job. Smiling, she loosened the belt ever so slightly and drew her hands away.

The backs of her knees touched the side of the divan bed. It stood crosswise to the door, and since this room was a standard single room—comfortable but hardly spacious—only a foot separated her from her soon-to-be lover. She tumbled back, bouncing when she hit the bed, and opened her legs. Just a little. She'd left the room lit for seduction so he wouldn't be able to see anything but a glimpse of thigh and some shadows in the dim light.

His low growl told her she'd succeeded in turning him on even more. His cock stood at full-mast, hard and darker than the rest of his body, engorged and ready. The tip gleamed with a bead of liquid that, as she watched, slowly trickled down, almost like a tear, streaking across the sensitive skin. She wanted to claim it, but she wanted to watch as well. The drop hung on the flared edge of his cock head and she leaned forward, thirstier than she could remember ever being before.

But he got to her first. He leaned over her, bracketing her body with his arms, brushing his body against hers but not lying on her. His breath heated her cheek then her mouth when she turned her head to receive his kiss.

He dropped a gentle kiss on her lips, lingered to taste and then drew back, slipping his fingers under her robe. Watching her all the while, gazing into her eyes, turning her disrobing into a deeper intimacy, he pulled until the belt came loose. He let it fall and turned his attention to the edges of the garment. He glanced away and it felt as though the temperature in the room dropped.

But when she felt his gaze fall on her bare skin, a flush of instant awareness warmed her right through. She smiled, knowing it was a poor effort, but she needed to show him something of what she felt. She had to keep up her psychic barriers, afraid of how well he was trained or how much he could see. That wouldn't be unusual in a first encounter. He wouldn't suspect anything.

Andros pushed up on to his knees and stared at her. Drank her in, devoured her with his gaze, opening every part of her to his raw inspection. At the same time he probed at her mind, asking her to let him in deeper. The mental connection mattered. Some shape-shifters said it was the most important part of sex, but she couldn't do this, couldn't let him in farther than the superficial outer layer. He might read too much. She felt his surprise, then a spark of anger when he realized she wasn't letting him in.

He growled—caught her hands and urged her to unfold them. Still looking, those startlingly bright blue eyes drinking her in as if she were a glass of cool water.

She gave a wry grin. "I'm not that special." She knew how she looked. Reasonably slim, not model-skinny, with medium breasts and medium curves. Everything medium. Not unattractive, but not particularly memorable, either. For once, that could work in her favor tonight.

"Gorgeous, that's how special you are." He grinned down at her, sharing something she didn't dare stretch her mind out to discover. He nudged her mental barrier again, trying once more for the deeper connection, but she refused to let him in. His smile didn't waver. "How about me? Will I do?"

She sensed a curious tinge of vulnerability, there and gone in an instant. Not every Talent was built like a linebacker. She happened not to like the linebacker type, although if it came with a pleasing personality she wouldn't say no. But Andros worked for her.

“Come here.” She pressed her hands against his chest, then moved them around to grasp him and pull him on top of her. Their mouths joined in a hungry kiss, which morphed into another and then another. He turned her so they lay on their sides, his cock pressed into the soft skin of her stomach, a burning portent of what they were about to do. Faye loved it. They kissed and caressed, each learning the textures and planes of the other’s body. She loved the dip in his waist at the back before it flared out into the smooth curves of his backside, and even more, when she curled her hands around she could touch his balls, faintly furred, hardening, tempting her to slide down his body and taste.

Perhaps he read her desire, or a tension in her muscles alerted him, because he pulled her closer and chuckled. “No you don’t. I won’t survive that.” A frown crossed his features. “Unless—you don’t have protection? We’re fertile at this time of the month, aren’t we?”

That he had to ask made her pause. Definitely new to this. She’d suspected as much from the sheer delight she’d read from him when they flew over the Park, as if he’d never played like that before.

She cupped his cheek, tenderness filling her. “I have protection. Yes, we’re fertile, until tomorrow. Maybe the day after. I’ve heard of that happening.”

He raised a brow. “I haven’t heard of that before. Isn’t the three-day rule inviolate?”

“I guess I’ve been around too long.” She rubbed her foot against his ankle bracelet, the only thing he wore. “You work for STORM?” If she pretended ignorance, then she’d look like a fool. These days STORM was too famous to ignore.

“Yeah.” He gave an embarrassed laugh. “How did you know? I mean we’re not the only secure place in the city. Other places use these bracelets.”

“I saw you,” she said. “On the roof.” She hadn’t, but she’d flown close enough to the STORM building to ensure she found a worker there, one that suited her purpose.

He swallowed. “And you still wanted to play?”

Why? Had his takeoff been clumsy? This guy had one hell of an inferiority complex. Or perhaps working alongside the perfect specimens at STORM had given him one. “Oh yes. I’ve always been a sucker for golden dragons.”

“I’m not the only one at STORM.”

“It was you I wanted.” That was true enough. The trouble was, the more time she spent with him, the more the wanting became personal. Andros wasn’t the means to an end anymore. He was Andros, not her mark. Bad, that was bad. But fighting for control didn’t work anymore. She had to let this powerful urge to fuck him have its way. Then she’d get back to her true purpose tonight. Hopefully.

He kissed her then kissed her some more. When they were both breathing a lot heavier, he shoved back the lock of blond hair that hung over his face. “So where are the condoms? Or do you want us to play hide and seek?” Those hands he’d used to caress her became instruments of torment when they curled around the base of her ribs and applied just the right amount of pressure to tickle mercilessly.

Giggling like a teenager, she pulled away. “No hide and seek. They’re right here.” She leaned over him, loving the way he immediately took advantage of her position and licked her breast, making her sigh as ripples of pleasure unfurled through her whole body. She fumbled more than she had to getting the condoms, especially when he sucked a diamond-hard nipple into his mouth and then caressed it with his tongue. “Oh God.” Fuck, he had a talented tongue. He curled it around her and sucked her deeper. Her body pulsed in time with his pulls, every part of her responding to his caresses, especially when he grabbed her ass and pulled her close.

His cock left a damp kiss on her stomach when she drew away. He dragged her back. “You do it.” His eyes gleamed, tempting and coaxing her to do exactly what she wanted to do anyway.

She sat up, straddled his thighs and captured his cock in one hand, stroking it, persuading it to harden even more. Though she doubted that was possible, it was fun to try. He made a small sound and his muscles tightened. He groaned. “Do it now. Now!”

More liquid seeped from the tip. Reaching out to him with her psi, she picked up his urgency, his need for her. She wouldn’t get any if she didn’t quit teasing, and she definitely wanted some. The thought briefly crossed her mind that she could have done this, given him head or just caressed him to orgasm. But she wanted more, needed it with a frantic desperation she’d never felt before. The evidence of her desperation was dampening the tops of his thighs where she straddled him. She slid along his hair-roughened leg, trying to relieve her sense of urgency, to take the edge off. It didn’t work.

She rolled the condom over his cock with efficiency rather than sensuality. “It’s like riding a bike,” she remarked, taking the edge off her own need.

Andros opened his eyes wider. “Pardon me?”

“Putting on protection. I haven’t done this for a while.”

“Sex or protection?”

“Either.” She responded automatically, openly, but in the next moment, she could have bitten her tongue. She found him too easy to talk with.

Biting her lip, she lifted to position her body over his cock. The exchange had taken more than the edge off for her. But not for him, it seemed.

He grabbed her thighs, stopping her from lowering onto him and lifted his gaze to hers. Slowly. Very slowly, perusing every inch of her body before he met her eyes. “You are so gorgeous. I’m a lucky man tonight.” He paused and his gaze sharpened. “Are you still okay?”

Had he picked up on her doubt? That shouldn’t have been possible. She’d loaded the front of her mind with what she wanted him to read, and added her arousal, which she hadn’t preloaded. Everything else she kept locked away. No one had broken that barrier before. Had she somehow become complacent?

Shit, she was jumpy. Of course not. He’d read her body language. If he was converted, he’d be naturally better at that. It was one of the ways mortals made up for their lack of psi. Oh, they had psi, especially simple communication skills, but they didn’t know it. Conditioning, evolution or both had locked the ability down tight, and it took a Sorcerer or a lot of training to unlock it.

Andros would have felt the way her muscles tensed, that was all. So she smiled. “Sure. More than okay. Let’s do this.” She lowered her voice to a sexy purr. He didn’t take his hands from her but helped her to descend, hissing when her body touched the tip of his cock. A shame they had to use the sheath. She yearned to feel him bare. Not that she could.

He laughed shakily. “Not completely a shame. I might have come just touching you if I didn’t have protection on. Inside. I want inside.”

His urgency drove her desire on. He slipped inside her and she sighed in relief, but when she wanted to plunge, take him right in, he held her back. “Let me feel it. Every little bit.”

She gasped and took him in. She sank down and kept going, but couldn’t keep it nice and slow. She wanted him with a recklessness that sent waves of shock through her. Her head went back and she groaned low in her throat. Leaning forward to rest her hands on either side of him, she moved. And heard his corresponding groan.

“Oh that feels so fucking good,” he said, so low she could hardly catch the words. They resonated in her mind, the low vibrations sending her higher. Enjoying every bit of this, far more than she should, she opened her eyes.

Amazing, he looked so good. Those remarkable eyes half-closed, she could still see the glitter of sapphire as he studied her, watched her riding him. Her breasts swayed in a sinuous rhythm and if she leaned forward, her nipples touched him with every stroke, grazing his chest. He lifted his arms from her thighs and grasped her hips, supporting her while she moved and raising his buttocks to meet her every downward plunge. His mouth partly open, he swept his tongue out over his lower lip. When he tugged her down, she went, unable to resist the temptation of his luscious mouth. The lower lip was slightly fuller than the upper and she licked it before joining her mouth to his for a kiss as deep, as hard as their combined movements.

Leaning forward brought his cock into contact with a spot deep inside her. With her body so open to his, touching his, her knees forward, he could go deep, deeper than she usually felt. Or maybe this was just the magic of Andros.

Stop it, stupid. But more and more the temptation hovered—to forget her plan and just spend the night here with him, enjoying him and seeing what else they could achieve together.

Waves of sensation flowed through her, deeper with every downward push of her body. *Let go*, he urged her, mind to mind.

The connection drove her to rise above the peak and soar. The waves turned into a flood and her body clenched around him. With a wordless cry, she experienced every pulse and shared her ecstasy with him, unthinkingly opening to pour the feeling into him.

It turned the tide, forced him over and she felt his orgasm like she had her own. For a bare instant they merged and together they cried out into each other’s mouths, into their hearts and souls.

Faye wrenched her senses back to reality, a sense of doom clouding her ecstasy. She could only hope he hadn’t realized she’d dropped her barriers.

End of Chapter One

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