

Excerpt from The Princess of Time
By JH Wear

The downtown mall was crowded with idle shoppers and fast-paced workers seeking a quick lunch. Nobel surfed between them, having finished his own lunch early, and now wanted to walk around, capturing sights he hadn't noticed for years.

A few weeks of not drinking had allowed him to surface into life again. He went past clothing stores, a drug store, a kiosk selling jewellery and a flower shop. He breathed in the fragrance and continued his walk. The smell of flowers lingered and followed him. He slowed his walk and suddenly noticed Amersa near his side.

"Hello Nobel." Her voice light as she smiled.

"Hello yourself. Shopping?"

She giggled. "You might say so. How is your walk?"

"Good. Just wanted to stretch my legs. Do you have time for a coffee?"

She smiled. "I have time."

He carried her tea and his coffee to the back of the coffee shop, isolating them from the hum of the mall.

"What do you do for a living Amersa?"

She took a sip of her tea. "I do what I have to do."

"I mean, what kind of work do you do?"

"Living isn't work Nobel. Or at least it shouldn't be." She gave him a smile with her teeth showing.

"I'll have to remember that. I'm going to assume you don't need to work then. Can I ask you where you live?"

She laughed. "You can. I live just moments from here."

Nobel squinted his eyes at her. "You answer in riddles."

"I told you the truth. You're closing your mind to what is possible."

He shook his head and smiled. "Maybe I'm better off letting you ask the questions."

"I believe you don't have to always ask questions to see answers you seek."

"You're a bit of a philosopher Amersa."

"So you are no longer drinking alcohol Nobel? You look much healthier than the last time I saw you."

"Thanks. A friend of mine, Karen, convinced me I had to stop poisoning myself."

"Karen, that was the lady you were speaking to outside the hall where we met?"

"You saw me talking to her?"

Amersa smiled. "I see a lot of things. She's very nice. She also saved your life that night."

"Saved my life?"

"If she hadn't driven you it was unlikely you would have made it home. I do believe you were trying to kill yourself."

Nobel was silent, digesting what she said, knowing it was true.

"So you have given yourself a second chance to do things right. I think you will succeed."

"You do?"

"That's why I decided to see you again. You may be the man I seek."

He felt like a hunter who suddenly realized he could be prey too.

She laughed. "I will go now. Thank you for the tea." She stood, bent down to give him a kiss on his cheek and walked away, leaving him wide eyed.

Nobel woke up early on a Saturday for a change, surprised at how good he felt. He had stopped drinking for more than a month and gradually his body regained its health. He even decided to go to the gym a few times for a workout.

He washed up, made coffee, then considered what he would do; he wasn't used to being up on Saturday mornings. Nobel reached for the phone.

"You sound different."

He laughed. "Maybe because I'm sober."

"Nice change, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Hey Karen, I just wanted to call and say thanks."

"That's alright." She paused. "Nobel, it's what friends do. Help one another in times of need."

"So we're back to being friends now?"

"Yes, friends."

After he hung up he thought about what she said. Friends, not lovers. He could hardly blame her; she didn't want a guy who she had to look after, baby sit. He was just barely a reformed drunk.

He finished the last of the coffee and headed outside for a walk. He had resided, lived wasn't the right word for someone who only ate and slept in his home, for six years and had never walked around the neighbourhood. An elderly woman working to put colourful buds in a flowerbed gave him a hesitant wave, not sure if she recognized him. Nobel smiled and waved back, pleased that he was at least tentatively accepted.

A couple sitting on their porch waved him over; he pasted on his best smile and introduced himself.

"We were curious about the hermit who lived there. Nice that you're finally out and about." The heavyset man shook his hand.

"Care for a glass of ice tea?" The woman was thin and moved with quick, bird like movements.

He refused, though he thought the glass pitcher with lemons and ice looked inviting. "Perhaps another time, I'm going to walk around a bit."

"We'll be here for a while longer. If you change your mind, come join us."

He nodded. "I'm pleased to have met you." As he said the words he knew he meant it. Nice couple he thought, people he never could have talked to with a hangover.

Behind the homes was a path through the small group of trees and bushes not uprooted to make way for landscaped properties. He knew it led to a school playground after it followed the backyards of the more affluent homes, their gates opening to the bit of token wildlife in the area. The path was made up of small rocks and sand that weaved about the white bark birches, evergreens and various scrubs. As long as he looked forward and not too far to the sides there was an illusion of being in a forest.

The stillness of the air and quick rustle of leaves from startled creatures pleased him, and Noble drank in the air. *God, this is so much better than being drunk.* He actually

found himself light headed, wondering if it was the effect of oxygen coming up from the plants. Suddenly he felt a wash of warmer, humid air cover him.

He stopped, and looked at the trees with their dark wrinkled bark. They looked much larger and different than the ones at the beginning of his walk. It seemed he truly was in a forest, rather than on a pathway only ten feet away from someone's fence. In fact he couldn't even see where the boundaries were. Breathing deep brought forth the forest air, green plants and the scent of flowers.

"Hello Mr. Carter."

He whirled around. "Amersa. What are you doing here?" He stopped breathing, watching her step lightly toward him.

Her pink dress flowed down from her shoulders, the sunlight behind her revealing her form. She smiled shyly as she approached him barefoot. "I came to see you."

Nobel wanted to put his arms around her, finding her erotic and vulnerable. "Me? Why?" His voice came out in a half whisper.

She stopped in front of him, her hand lightly clasping his elbow. "Because you want me Nobel."

He breathed in her perfume. "Why do you think I want you?"

She giggled. "It's obvious Nobel. Do you deny you want me?" She reached up and gave him a quick kiss on his lips. "Come, let's walk."

Nobel took her hand. "I'm a bit confused why you decided to find me. And how did you get here?"

"I told you I'm looking for a man who has honesty, courage and strength. I arrived here the same way you did, by choosing to do so."

He looked ahead, the trees blocking his view of what lay beyond the curve in the path. He felt completely alone with her and stopped to face her. "Why do you answer my questions with a riddle each time?"

Amersa tilted her head and grinned. "You have to learn there's more than one right answer."

Nobel leaned forward and kissed her. Her lips parted under his pressure and her arms wrapped around his neck. He held her, broke off the kiss and then kissed her again.

"Okay, you're right, I do want you." His hand slid up and covered her breast, her nipple erect under his fingers as he pressed against the fabric of her dress.

Amersa slowly pushed his hand down. "Nobel, this isn't the time for this."

"When will it be? My place is close by."

She laughed. "I need to go now. But if you want to have me you will have to prove yourself."

"Prove myself? How?"

"You'll find out." She broke away from him and walked back down the path.

He watched her, memorized by how she moved. She stopped at a curve of the path and turned around.

"By the way, she loves you and understands."

"Who? Sheila?"

"No, Karen. But she's still angry with you."

"Wait." But as he watched she disappeared around a tree. He sighed and heard a sound behind him. He turned to see kids running in the playground. Puzzled, he looked

around; finding the trees suddenly smaller and he could now see the fence that separated the homes and the pathway. Nobel felt he had been transported from a dream.

He returned back to the beginning of the path, feeling hungry and knowing it must be near lunchtime.

“Hey, you’re back already.”

Nobel looked at the couple, still drinking their ice tea. “You’re still here?”

“Of course. It’s only been a few minutes since you left.”

Excerpt from Cry at the Moon
By JH Wear

Prologue

Darren walked around the slowly disintegrating picnic table. The wood was dark where rot had set in and buckled under its own weight. New campgrounds featured tables made of a combination of wood and concrete, but Parkland Campground had the less durable tables and structures. He sighed. Nothing here was worth salvaging and hauling out to another campground; even the wood wasn't worth turning into firewood. *Nothing else to do here but to close up the gate for good.* He looked around and spotted his student helper smoking a cigarette by an open-walled dining room, basically a roof covering four tables and a wood stove. He strolled over to him, watching the crickets jump out of his way in the tall grass, the buzzing noise they made was the only sound he heard under the hot sun.

"Well, Sergio, that's all she wrote. Nothing worth saving here."

"Sure looks junky. Everything falling apart, grounds unkempt. Might as well as close it, not many people are going to come to a place like this anyway."

"You know, at one time this was a real nice area for people to come to spend the day." He gestured around. "The grounds were in good shape and so were all the tables and buildings. And several pathways took you to kinda of a beach area, or even up to those hills out west. But a few years back they made a new double lane highway, and this road that runs by here suddenly became a secondary road. They also made a new bigger and better campground a few miles from here. Progress, I suppose." He looked around again, as if trying to capture a memory, or bring one up. He stared at the perimeter of the grounds. "Was that the wind that caused those bushes at the edge of the grounds to move?"

"Sergio, look over there. Do you see anything?" Darren pointed to the far side of the grounds.

"What am I supposed to see?"

"Those bushes were shaking, like something was disturbing them. Maybe it was the wind."

"No wind today. Might be a dog or bear. But I don't see nothing."

Darren could perceive no more movement, so he shrugged his shoulders. "Time to go."

The two men walked to the pickup truck parked near the entrance of the grounds, the green vehicle was marked with the provincial park crest on the doors.

"Darren, those bushes are moving now. Whatever it is, it's moving in the same direction as we are."

Darren looked. The bushes were moving slightly. Something was definitely there. Bears were pretty rare in the area, but not unheard of. There were also foxes, deer, coyote, wild dogs and the odd wolf. Any one of those could be the cause of the disturbance, but whatever it was remained hidden by the bushes.

"Let's walk quickly to the truck. Don't run, in case it is a wolf or a bear. That action might cause it to chase us instead."

“Gotcha. I think I saw a glimpse of it. It was black and the size of a big dog.”

“Likely a wolf then, or a wild dog.” Darren was heavier and shorter than the young summer intern, and was having trouble keeping up the pace. He felt the sun’s heat, the trickle of sweat on his brow and heard himself taking deep breaths. “Our truck is near those bushes, so be careful as we get closer. We have some loose tools in the back, like the shovel. Grab it if you see anything suspicious close to the bushes where the truck is.”

As they approached the truck, Sergio stopped and picked up a rock. He hefted it in his hand a couple of times and then proceeded to the truck, slowing down as he neared the bushes that were only a few yards from the pickup. He heard Darren’s heavy breathing as he passed the truck. *Man, Darren’s out of shape*, he thought as he slid past the tailgate. He moved to the passenger door and opened it, casting one more look at the bushes. His heart jumped. He felt frozen in place until he heard Darren yell at him to get inside. Then he leaped inside and slammed the door.

“What did you see?”

“Oh, man! Didn’t you see it?”

“No, the truck blocked my view of the trees. What was it?”

“Ugliest fucking dog I ever saw. And it was big. I could see only part of it, but that was enough. It had these eyes that were just watching me, and I could see some of its teeth. It was big. Bigger than a great dane.” He rolled the window up near to the top despite the heat.

“Probably a wolf.” Darren looked but couldn’t see anything.

“No, I’ve seen wolves before. This was bigger. Much bigger.”

“Well, maybe it was a bear then.” He started the truck and it lurched it toward the park entrance. The park was separated from the road by a ditch, and the entrance was the only way in and out of the campground. He still thought it had to be a wolf; bears were too rare and were unlikely to follow people. *Sergio didn’t see it quite right*. Still, he was glad the driver’s side was on the far side of the bushes.

He parked the truck just past the entrance and the two men cautiously got out, with Sergio still holding on to his rock.

“Okay, lets put the bar across the gate.” A metal pipe was placed on two posts that marked the side of entrance of the road. The bar was held in place by two bolts that were driven into the posts. Sergio turned the large wrench with one hand and held the rock in the other. Darren stood in the truck’s back holding a spade, watching for any movement in the nearby bushes.

“Done with the bar.” Sergio tossed the wrench into a box, then grabbed the painted sign and hung it from the bar. A screwdriver was used to torque the sign into place. It read, ‘This Park Is Permanently Closed. No Trespassing.’ “Sign is hung.”

“Then let’s get our asses out of here.” He jumped out of the bed and climbed into the cab. Sergio stopped at the passenger door, and looked back into the bushes.

“Hey, you fucking wolf! Catch this!” With a quick motion he threw the rock into the bush, and joined Darren in the truck.

“Did you see it again?”

“I think so. If that was it, then I think I may have hit it.”

The truck motor roared as Darren eased the clutch; the slight slope made it difficult to see oncoming traffic. Not that there was much of that these days, but it always paid to be careful.

“Clear.” Her muttered to himself as he turned onto the old highway.

Thump!

Darren gasped. Something he hadn't seen banged into passenger side. He looked to his right and saw something dark leap up at the window. The glass shattered, sending particles flying into the cab.

“Hit the gas. Let's get out of here. Go now!” Sergio was screaming as he folded on the seat.

Darren pushed hard on the pedal, and the truck surged quickly. But low gear didn't provide high speed, and again he saw the beast at the right side of the truck, running to keep up.

“Shit!” He swerved to try to block the creature, and shifted into second. He heard another thump, this time near the back of the truck. He looked to the right and saw nothing. Glancing into the rear view mirror, he saw something dark dash from the road into the bushes.

“Sergio, you okay?”

Sergio slowly lifted his head. A couple of minor cuts were bleeding from his forehead. “I think so. Did you see what it was?”

Darren had increased his speed to 70 miles an hour. “I don't know what it was. It looked like it was the size of two wolves combined. But whatever it was, it ran back into the bush.”

Sergio was visibly shaken, and didn't stop talking until they reached the new highway. Darren stopped, and got out to look at the truck. Sergio, after some hesitation, got out as well.

“Look at the dent in the door! A broken window, and look here, blood and hair at the wheel well.”

“Wow. Something was awfully mad after I threw that rock at it.”

“Christ. How am I going to explain this to Myers? He's going to have my head. And the bloody paperwork. Damn it! Why did you have to throw that rock?”

“Sorry. I'll own up to what happened. And I'll take the rap.”

Darren looked at the young man. “Thanks. But who's gonna believe a wolf did this? We'll be the laughing stock of the whole provincial park.”

“Maybe we could say it was a Sasquatch.”

“That ridiculous claim would only make things worse. But, here's the plan. We could say we got hit by a deer that was running across the road.”

“Sure. They gotta believe that. What about this black hair smeared on the truck? Deer have brown hair, don't they?”

“We'll just wipe those off the side, and no one will be the wiser.”

Excerpt from The Cat, The Wolf and the Spirit
By JH Wear

Hudson's Bar was noisy as it filled with patrons wanting to take advantage of cold drinks and the chance to socialize. Friday had been hot, with the temperature at the end of the work day still too warm as waves of heat rose from the asphalt roads. The bar was furnished in dark wood and decorative glass windows, trying to imitate a style of the fifties but with very definite modern prices.

Sherri sat with Jenny and Marcia, talking about their day as they watched people filter into different pockets of the big L-shaped bar. The patrons displayed an odd mix of business dress, with some men still wearing a suit and ties to casual wear; some young women used the hot weather as an excuse to put on skimpy attire. They certainly attracted the men in suits and before the night was over some of the men with expensive clothes would collide with the ladies long on exposure.

"So you broke up with Dwayne? I thought you two were getting along fine." Jenny took a sip from her pink-colored drink with a straw.

"We were but there was something missing," she shrugged. "We're still friends but I guess it's time to move on."

Marcia shook her head, "You go through boyfriends like Jenny goes through shoes."

"I happen to like shoes, that's all." She stuck out her foot from the barstool. "I got these on sale, aren't they great?"

Sherri looked at the yellow sandal. "Not bad but I like shoes with a heel on them."

Marcia laughed. "Yeah, you and those heels; as if you needed any help with your height."

She suddenly waved. "Here they are."

The girls all stared at the two men winding their way between tables and people. Both were dressed casually, wearing jeans and the tan-colored shirts of park employees.

Eric and Mike sat down at the table. As the introductions concluded the waitress came up to take their orders.

Mike frowned. "What kind of beer do you have here?"

Nicky rolled her eyes. Hudson's served more than ten different kinds of beer on tap and another dozen in bottles. "Two types, bottle or draft." She laughed, "Jerk."

"Then I better have my regular."

Nicky nodded, "One Keith's and a Rickard's Red for you?" She pointed at Eric.

"You got it." Eric gave her a smile as she sauntered away. "It's nice she remembers what we order."

"Big mystery there." Marcia shook her head. "Let's see, you tip her like money will be gone tomorrow. Think there might be a clue there?"

"Ah, we just tip her because she's friendly."

"Friendly to you guys maybe. You sit and she shows up just like that. We girls had to wait ten minutes before she even looked our way. Little tramp."

Eric raised his eyebrows. "Rather nasty."

"Trust me, she's not wearing that top, short skirt and shoes for comfort."

Eric held up his hands palm forward. "Okay, I can see I'm not going to win any argument here."

“You never do.”

Eric took a big drink of his beer. “You can drive a man to drink.”

They ordered snack food and more drinks, with Marcia complaining again how much better the service was now that the men had arrived.

“Honestly, she can be a good waitress but only if men are around. I’ll bet she doesn’t have many girlfriends. She focuses too much on wanting to please a man.”

“You’re still yapping about that? Lord you’d think you never dressed to try to interest a guy. Nicky is alright, the short skirt is just part of the uniform the girls have to wear here.” Eric grabbed another nacho chip and plunged it into the salsa sauce.

“Oh right, the uniform also includes wearing a shirt a size too small with a push up bra. Get real. And her putting a hand on your shoulder every time she’s at the table is just normal table serving. As far as me dressing up to interest a guy, forget it. I dress for myself and not some testosterone laden cowboy.” Marcia shook her head. “You’re so clueless about women.”

Eric laughed, “And you’re too easy to tease. Relax, I know what Nicky is all about. I was just pushing your buttons, sorry.”

Sherri heard Marcia sigh inwardly. Marcia had told her how Eric had done something similar to her a couple weeks ago, commenting on how long hair looked so good on women. Marcia had started to tell him long hair was great for some women who had the time to care for it but short hair could be just as attractive when she noticed he wasn’t able to contain his grin any longer and started to laugh. She had glowered at him, crossing her arms, but couldn’t stay mad at him. She ended up laughing with him after punching him in the shoulder.

Sherri watched and listened to the conversation at the table but her attention kept being drawn back to Eric. There was something about him that both drew her and repelled her. She threw her glances quickly so her stares weren’t obvious to the others. She noticed Mike was giving her and Jenny a definite once over, not trying to hide his interest too much. Sherri thought he was likely to attract a few women with his eyes; they looked like he was in the mood for romance. Eric on the other hand had cool eyes, with a serious look to them that spoke of business before pleasure. Not much romance there but he did look like he was fit under his shirt.

* * * *

Sherri found Eric more interesting; obviously he had a sense of humor and appeared to be fairly smart. There was still something bothering her about him; maybe he just reminded her of someone else.

Mike was different. He was good looking, had an easy smile and spoke easily to the people around him, maybe too easy. With his attitude he wouldn’t have much trouble introducing himself to most of the women in the bar and his easygoing manner would carry him the rest of the way. But he was almost too easy going and polite for Sherri. She wanted a man who had stronger personality, not concerned that he pleased everybody. Eric seemed to be more this type, certainly he wasn’t easily intimidated by anyone, but he was turning on some warning signals in her that she wasn’t going to ignore.

The evening drew to a close and they paid their bill. Mike insisted that he and Eric should pick up the tab because they drank and ate more than the women. Marcia and the others objected, wanting to pay for their share. A compromise was made where the ladies paid for one of their drinks each and the men split the rest of the tab.

Marcia looked at the money on the table. “Another big tip I see. Little Miss Wiggle will be pleased.”

Eric shrugged, “She gave good service despite your attitude.”

Marcia turned and walked ahead of him muttering, “Whatever.”

Sherri caught a small smile on Eric’s lips and wondered if he always teased her like that. Marcia certainly seemed to rise to the bait each time.

Sherri reached her red Mazda, opening the sunroof before backing out of the parking spot. In the rear view mirror she saw Eric standing, watching across the lot. She followed his gaze and saw Marcia climb into her own car. Sherri looked back at Eric and saw he had turned his attention now to where Jenny was walking to her car. ‘A little protective but a nice change from some of these other guys. Not many guys care if you get to your car safely.’ She took one more quick look at Eric, wondering what it was about him that was troubling her.

Sherri paced her living room wondering what to do. She felt the need to go out again in the park. The urge was strong but she also felt the fear of what might be out there, wondering if her adversary was waiting for her. The wolf had her rattled. It hadn’t attacked her but she saw in its eyes the hunger it felt, saw the power it possessed. Now its influence was extending to her own home, preventing her from doing what she wanted.

She went upstairs into the bathroom and turned on the water to fill the tub, deciding a hot bath may help her relax and make the right decision. As the water filled the white soaker tub she undressed, dropping her clothes on the floor.

Under the hot soapy water her body began to relax and her mind drifted to a half asleep state. She pictured herself running among the trees in the park, the moon shining bright above her. This was true freedom for her, she felt strong and secure in the forest. She slid her hands up over her stomach, washing her breasts with the warm water and then back down again. She repeated the actions again and felt the smooth texture of skin and fur.

Sherri’s eyes opened and she stared at her body, looking at the dark grey fur that was covering her skin in patches. For a moment she was horrified but that emotion gave way to a decision; if her body wanted to be a cat she was willing to let it happen.

She jumped out of the tub, water streaming from her body, and headed out of the bathroom. She walked on her toes, her legs contorting to a new shape as she made her way downstairs. She hurried, not wanting to slow down the transformation. It was the first time she was fully awake when the change began and she could feel different parts of her body changing shape. She staggered into the kitchen, catching a partial reflection of herself in the patio doors; a human face attached to a half-human, half-cat body. Her fingers ended in claws now but she was able to open the door and drop to the floor, watching her body change in the reflection of the door.

This time she felt the warmth in her loins and a strong need for a male companion. Her human mind began to fade into the background, cursing the time of the month.

The panther ran outside the house and in a single bound cleared the six-foot high fence. She raced toward the footpath then stepped at the side to hide in the bushes, using all her senses to check if anything was nearby. Satisfied she was alone she began to slowly move among the bushes, not sure where she wanted to go yet. The cat moved in a large circle and began to make steady progress between the trees and bushes, going to a part she didn't normally visit.

The cat kept moving steadily and silently, prowling through the under bush. Slowly she determined where she wanted to go, a destination where she hadn't traveled before. She traveled along the riverbank, keeping her senses alert for any different sights, sounds or smells. The sky was getting darker, the last glow from the setting sun disappearing and leaving the sky with only a half moon and stars to light up the forest. The cat's eyes still didn't have trouble seeing through the thick mangle of trees and bush and finally came to a small rise where she could look around her. The night was quiet save for the chirping of insects and the odd bird, but the gentle wind blew a familiar scent to her.

Her tail twitched, and as she took in a deeper lungful of air to examine the scent again she bared her teeth. The scent of the white wolf. It was unlikely the wolf could know of her presence since it was upwind from her so she cautiously made her way toward it.

The cat could feel the human mind urging her to be careful, worried about a confrontation but the cat wanted to know more about the wolf, the one creature that threatened her domination of the river valley. With slow deliberation she stalked the wolf.

She found the white wolf as he stood at the edge of a gravelled parking lot. The lone vehicle in the lot was a dark green pick-up truck with a canopy attached to the back. The tailgate was open.

The cat watched as the wolf trotted to the truck, then lightly leaped to the tailgate and stood on it as it looked around. Satisfied it was alone the wolf crawled into the back of the truck.

The panther waited in the shadows for several minutes then raced across the parking lot, her padded paws not making a sound on the gravel. When she reached the truck she listened to sounds of the wolf rolling inside. Her tail swaying back and forth she quietly jumped and landed on the tailgate. She peered inside the truck's bed. The white wolf was gone.

In its place was a man on his back, the last of the wolf's features disappearing from his face. The human mind in the cat was more assertive now, insisting the cat not harm the human. The cat entered the cab and examined the man more closely, taking in the long tanned body. The cat's human mind was observing something else about the man. One, the face she recognized and two, the erection he had as he slowly woke up from his transformation. It appeared his hormones were strong like hers were after the transformation.

The cat still wasn't sure of how to consider him; was it an enemy or not? The human mind wasn't going to let her attack but she placed one paw on his chest and another on his stomach with her claws slightly extended as he became aware of her. He didn't move, one arm was above his head and the other by his side. She stared into his eyes and he returned the look, not looking afraid though his breathing was deep. She snarled at him, trying to assert her superiority.

He still didn't look worried. Then he spoke in a whisper, "I don't think you're going to hurt me but I'd appreciate it if you got off me."

A minute passed and the cat stepped back, looking at his body for any sign of attack while the human mind absorbed the sight of his physique, muscles and his still stiff erection. He slowly moved his hand to cover himself. The panther looked around in the small confined cab, noticing a shovel and a toolbox at the front. At the side was a pair of running shoes, a T-shirt and a pair of jeans. She decided she didn't want to spend any more time in the confined area of the cab and turned back to stand on the tailgate to observe him. Slowly he rolled toward his clothes, pulling on his shirt and then his jeans. The cat opened her mouth wide again to utter a final snarl then jumped to the ground, running to the edge of the parking lot before turning around to look at the truck.

The man stood by the truck and watched her. He called out, "Give me a call sometime, maybe we can go for a coffee." Slowly he pulled on his shoes and walked to the front of the truck. A minute later the truck backed up and disappeared from the lot.

Troubled by his demeanour the cat turned back into the forest and headed home, the human mind not slumbering on the journey home.

The panther arrived home, leaping over the fence and slowly padding into the still open patio door. There she paused, noticing the floor was still wet from the remains of the interrupted bath. The cat sniffed the air for any possible intruder but found everything normal. She rested on the floor and waited for the transformation to begin.

Sherri pulled the plug in the bathtub, watching the water drain out as she considered this situation. That he was the white wolf was a bit of a shock. She wasn't even aware before that there were people that could transform into animals other than cats. She knew of only two other people that transformed into cats and they both lived far away across the continent and so she knew transformations were extremely rare. What she also found surprising was that she had met him recently and she was curious about the coincidence. Then her mind drifted to the vision of his naked body and she wondered what he was like as a lover. "Physical. I'll bet he's physical, maybe even a little rough." She sighed. "I don't need to be thinking those thoughts."

She went to her bedroom and sat on top of the covers, using a remote to turn on the TV. She switched to an old movie that she hoped would relax her mind enough so she could sleep.

In the morning she woke up with the TV still playing. Sherri went to the kitchen and fumbled with the coffee machine as she yawned. She thought again about him, recalling his body and his erection. When he woke up he did try to cover himself up and acted slightly embarrassed about it. Then she recalled him shouting out to give him a call sometime. She wondered how she could contact him without revealing too much about herself. She assumed he still didn't know her name or what she looked like. She thought about how she might contact him. For now she would try to avoid meeting the white wolf when she was a cat.

Excerpt from Fallen Angel
By JH Wear

Carl Thieson turned his Ford Escort down highway 12, the small motor protesting as he accelerated along the open stretch during late evening hours. The fall weather had turned cold during the day as the wind picked up, baring the trees of their dead leaves. Carl slid the heater control up higher, feeling a chill from under the dash. Normally the six foot, two hundred pound Carl didn't have a problem with keeping warm but tonight he was wearing only a Roman Gladiator's costume. The short white uniform with fake metal pleats fell just short of his knees while the top revealed half of his chest and back.

Still, the dark-haired Carl normally would have handled the chill well enough; he certainly had enough hair on his chest and legs to suggest he might be impervious to the cold. But tonight as he headed to a Halloween party at the Haunted Lake Golf Course he had an ominous feeling; one that arose from a nightmare he had last night. The details were lost as the dream evaporated in the morning light, though an image of vacant eyes remained as a hangover throughout the day.

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The clubhouse was an old two-story brick and stone building protected from the elements by a cluster of elms that stretched their naked limbs like arms and fingers towards the sky. Carl parked his Escort in the parking lot and let out a deep breath of air. He turned off the ignition but the motor refused to die easily, shuddering to a stop.

Carl took his silver-painted wood sword and walked to the clubhouse, his sandals making a scrapping noise on the gravel as he made his way to the front entrance. He could hear the music and people's voices through the curtained windows and watched the silhouettes of angels and demons dancing in the light.

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The party got much louder as he walked through the lobby and into the main banquet room. The room was already full of costumed guests, laughing and drinking. In lieu of modern music, the DJ was spinning from old standbys appropriate to Halloween. Painted faces and masks hid the features of most of the guests, but some like him merely wore costumes. Despite some excellent efforts to hide faces he recognized several of the partiers. He talked to several vampires, both male and female, and then to two angels as he quickly consumed several drinks to calm his nerves.

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One of the angels he conversed with had her costume torn in several places, with her wings damaged and her halo askew.

Sonya explained, "I'm a fallen angel." Her black wavy hair and dark makeup led credence to the fallen angel concept, along with her hourglass figure.

"I wouldn't mind catching you if you did fall."

She punched him on the shoulder. "Yeah, you should be so lucky."

He laughed. "I can hope, can't I?"

"Maybe you'll have better luck with my sister, she's also dressed as a fallen angel but she was even more devious about it than I was."

"I can hardly wait to meet her then."

She grinned at him, looking at his costume up and down. "Hey, are you wearing

anything underneath that Roman thing? Going commando?"

"There's only one way you're going to find out Sonya."

She held the end of his sword for a few seconds. "Talk to you later; careful with that weapon of yours."

He watched her retreating back; then with his fourth bottle of beer in his hand talked to Matt and Josie, who were dressed as Batman and Catwoman.

"Nice costumes you two."

"Thanks." Josie pointed at a girl walking by. "Did you see that? She's wearing only body paint on her top."

Carl had noticed. He wasn't sure what the small-breasted woman was supposed to be but she was definitely getting a lot of attention. Her boyfriend, dressed as a werewolf was following her close behind.

"She's something to see."

"And there's another girl using body paint as well, lots of sparkles and black paint. I wish I had thought of that; that would have made this Catwoman costume more interesting."

Carl looked at the stitched black shiny vinyl and wondered how much more interesting things could get on the slim blonde. "You look good the way you are."

"Thanks. I like your costume too. It looks a lot cooler than this non-breathable plastic I'm wearing." She took a drink of her rum and coke. "By the way this girl in a devil costume was looking for you. We saw her somewhere by the windows about five minutes ago. Really, really good costume."