

Last Request

By Joe Martelle

Story and characters Jack and Sarah ©2004 by Joe Martelle

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A long, hard day of driving brought him to the secluded lake high in the Cascades in western Washington state. It was a special place the rabbit knew, from what seemed a lifetime ago. He killed the engine and just sat there, thinking.

The light of the full moon streamed in through the windows. He still didn't know why he'd come back out here again after all these years. Sighing to himself, he switched on the overhead light, blinking in the harsh glare. Turning to the seat behind him he retrieved his briefcase. When he opened it, he saw the old, familiar, tintype photo prominently placed there, and the parchment letter she had written to him near the end, stating her last wish in this life.

He picked up the picture and held it lovingly as he looked at it; gods, he looked so young. It was one of those old-fashioned tintype pictures from the state fair, showing himself and Sarah, his dear beloved.

The memories were welling to the surface once again.

"Twenty years, has it really been that long?" he asked himself as he sat there, remembering their life together. Even after all this time, his feelings for her were still so strong. Looking at his reflection in the rear view mirror, he noted the graying fur on his brown muzzle. "Yup, time marches on," he thought.

Glancing at the parchment, he picked it up and re-read it for the thousandth time.

"Beloved Honey Bunny, my time is short, know that this is my dying wish:

*On the night of a full moon, during a planetary alignment,
scatter my ashes in the magical lake where we first entwined our souls,
and I shall be reunited with you once again.*

*I know you don't believe,
but please do this for me, my Honey Bunny,
for I love you with all my soul.*

Your beloved 'Kitsune', Sarah Fox"

Placing the tintype and parchment back in the briefcase, he chided himself once again as he felt his eyes misting over from the memories. Why was he

doing this to himself? Why did he need to go through all of this again, after so long? It was her last wish, though, and he had come to honor that wish, for a promise was a promise, after all.

Looking out at the secluded lake that held such memories, he remembered how they had met in college, fallen in love and planned to spend the rest of their lives together. Fate, it seemed, had had other plans for them.

He reached across the car to the passenger seat. Reverently, he removed the black plastic box sitting on the seat from its protective purple velvet bag.

Stepping out, into the warm air of the star filled summer night, he walked away from the car and headed down, into the tree line. Jack paused after a few steps, and waited for his eyesight to adjust to the moonlight filtering through the trees.

Once he could make things out in the silver glow of the moon and the stars, he continued, making his way toward the lake. Gods, it was just as he remembered it from all those years ago, tranquil and timeless. It was like walking into a Maxfield Parish painting. Just being here again eased the dull ache in his heart.

Perhaps that was the reason why he'd promised to honor her last wish and drive all the way out here in the first place, on the full moon during a planetary alignment, and scatter her ashes in the place where they had first pledged their love. He had always known she was into what she liked to call "The Ancient Mystic Arts," it was one of the things he'd always loved about her.

He paused at the water's edge, remembering that time long ago. He thought of Sarah again, her lithe vulpine form gliding through the water as they'd played in the secluded lake. In his mind's eye he could see her, splashing, out there in the water under the full moon's light, beckoning him to come and join her. Thinking of the time they'd spent together, he remembered all that they'd shared between them.

It'd been more than swimming that they'd done in that secluded lake in the mountains. A small, sad smile crossed his lips as he remembered the first night they'd come out here to go swimming. It had been her idea, ditch class on Friday and spend the weekend together, he thought as he pulled his shirt off. She'd always loved the outdoors so much.

They'd both been a little nervous, a couple of fumbling college kids. It was the first time for both of them, but being there, together, in the wilderness, had made it seem so right.

They'd pledged their love for each other there that night, under the glow of the full moon twenty years ago, the water gently lapping at their feet as they'd lain together on the edge of the lake. She was his magickal 'Kitsune' and he still

felt her loss. Kicking off his shoes, he paused as his hand went for the button on the back of his shorts.

Pausing, his hand hesitated at the last bits of his clothing. He held tightly to the small black plastic box he had kept all this time, as more memories poured through him.

It was only fitting he thought sadly, as he pulled off his shorts and underwear. She would've loved to see him like that, standing there just as he had come into this world, once again, as he returned to their magickal play ground. She had always loved to come to this secluded place.

He walked to the lake's edge and tested its temperature with his foot. It was cool, but inviting, and without any further hesitation, he entered the water, carrying the black plastic box. He took a few steps out, then jumped forward into a shallow dive, plunging into the lake head first.

Coming up for air, he sputtered once. He shivered slightly then relaxed as he adjusted to the coolness of the water. It had been a long time since he'd gone swimming, but the old sensations were familiar to him, and it was comforting.

Going further out, he came to the middle of the small lake and settled there. The water wasn't very deep, in fact it only came up to his chest. It had always been deep enough for playing in, though, for cooling off in the summer's heat and for frolicking in its gentle embrace.

Coming back on this special night was something Jack did to honor the last request of she who was more important to him than life itself.

Jack stood in the center of the lake, under the full moon, opened the box and reverently scattered the last mortal remains of his beloved Sarah in the water around him.

"A promise is a promise, beloved. Here we are once again, full moon and starlight."

In the calmness of the secluded spot, he found himself at ease. Closing his eyes he relaxed into the gentle feel of the water surrounding him, just letting his thoughts drift. He floated like that for several minutes, lost in his thoughts, remembering his lost love, until a sound pulled him back to the present.

It was a splash in the water near him, and opening his eyes, he saw the unmistakable and hauntingly familiar form of the vixen he'd known and lost so long ago.

"Hello Jack, beautiful moon out. I am so glad that you come back for another swim," she said as she smiled at him, shaking the water out of her hair.

"Sarah?" he asked, his voice questioning the reality of her standing there before him, looking as if she just stepped out of the tintype photograph back in

his car.

“But how...how can you be here? I, I just...?” Even as he said it, he’d known that he’d somehow hoped, beyond all rational thought, to meet her here tonight.

“Shhh, Jack,” she replied quietly. “Don’t question it, just enjoy it...okay? Remember my promise, planetary alignment and the full moon?”

With that she playfully swam away, circling around him. She brushed her tail along his legs as she went behind him, and he shivered lightly as the touch renewed old memories and rekindled old feelings.

She stopped in front of him again, and looked at him silently, her eyes sparkling in the starlight. She was closer than before, oh so close, and he looked upon her with bated breath.

“Is she was really here?” he asked himself. She was close enough to touch. He held back though, pausing uncertainly, with all those memories flooding through him.

Looking at her in utter amazement, his gaze wandered from her eyes, which were softly calling to him, to the gentle smile she wore upon her lips, and continued down. He hadn’t realized it before now, but she was standing in front of him completely unclothed, “skyclad” she used to call it.

She’d appeared in the water just as he had, without anything on that could get in the way of the feel of the water. His pulse raced as he stared at her in disbelief, feeling the dull ache of her loss within him easing.

She smiled at him, seeing his eyes admiring her. “Yes, Jack, I’ve come back to you tonight, just as I told you I would. You remember the first time we were up here, don’t you?”

As he nodded, she bridged the gap between them, wrapping her arms around him and pressing her body solidly against his. Her body was warm against the slight coolness of the water, just as he’d remembered. He held her close, pulling her tightly against him to feel her presence once again.

Their muzzles found each other then, their mouths joining in a series of kisses. He kissed her gently at first, as he pressed against her warmth, his hands traveling up and down her back, navigating the length of her spine. He found her tail and caressed the base of it underwater.

She responded in turn, pressing against him, and he shivered as he felt her touch upon him. He lost himself in her embrace, their kisses deepening, closing his eyes as he melted into her presence. It wasn’t until she slowly eased off on the kisses that he realized the true depth of his feelings. She planted one last gentle touch of her lips on his before pulling away slightly and looking upon

him. As he gazed upon her, looking into the liquid depths of her eyes, he felt his vision blurring.

She saw his tears and a warm and comforting smile flowed across her muzzle. "Oh my honey bunny, it feels so nice seeing you again," she said softly. "Thank you for coming back here to visit our special place and honoring my last request. Is that a bit of gray I see creeping into that muzzle of yours?"

"Oh Gods Sarah, I've missed you so much," he whispered, feeling his eyes beginning to sting once again. Her face showed her concern, and holding him, she gently licked away a salty tear as it flowed down his cheek.

"I know, honey bunny...I know, I didn't want to leave you, but..." she replied. Pausing, her eyes brimming with emotion, she looked at him, then continued, "Let's just share our time together."

Smiling broadly, she motioned to the shore, her eyes sparkling with expectation. He followed her lead, walking slowly through the water with her towards the shore of the lake, hands and hearts intertwined once more.

When they reached the shore, they fell to the soft grassy earth at the lake's edge. They lay there together silently, until Jack got up and quickly built a fire, just as he'd done on that first night so long ago.

Running his hands through the old familiar expanses of her lush red fur, he sighed deeply. He felt her fingers playing with the lighter tan hairs of his chest fur as she snuggled against his body, sending sparks of excitement dancing along his skin. It was just as he'd remembered it. After being away for so long, it felt like coming home.

Afterward, lying back in the grass, he held her close, "You know, Kitsu, I always thought you were nuts, with all your talk of planets and crystals and auras..."

"But I was right about this though, wasn't I?" Sarah teased.

Grinning, Jack nodded and kissed her on the nose

They talked long into the night, sharing their love. But all too soon it seemed, Sarah sensed that their time was drawing to a close. Glancing to the east and seeing the sun about to break the horizon, Sarah turned to her beloved Jack. Placing her paw in his chest, a look of profound sadness crossed her face as she looked down at him.

"It's time for me to go, honey bunny. Please, try to find some happiness in this life, and never forget that I love you and will be waiting for you on the other side."

Jack felt her words like a knife in his heart, "NO! Sarah, please..."

She hushed him with a soft touch on his muzzle, playfully licked his nose, then rose gracefully to her feet before stepping away from him.

Facing the east, Sarah held her arms before her as she performed the adoration to the morning sun, just as he remembered it, and quietly faded away before his eyes.

He longed to hold onto her, to keep her here with him, but he knew that it was impossible. The spell was broken. She was gone, evaporating like tendrils of fog in the first light of day.

A slight shiver ran through him. She was gone; he was alone once more. But, this time, he knew she would be there, waiting for him...

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