

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Jory Strong

Familiar
PLEASURES

ELLORA'S CAVE

Quickies
Autumn Animalia

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Familiar Pleasures

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FAMILIAR PLEASURES

Jory Strong

Chapter One

The snow leopard edged closer to the stream and the man who knelt on its bank combing through the foliage there. Here was easy prey.

A breeze stirred and with it came the scent of a human female who'd been to this place often. The large male cat opened his mouth slightly and let her scent coat his tongue. It intrigued him. Called to him in a way only one other human scent had ever done.

He swiveled his ears, hoping for the sound of her footsteps though he already knew she wasn't nearby. He'd followed her trail earlier but stopped when it became apparent her destination was a village near the base of the mountain. He would hunt her tomorrow, but for now he had surer prey in his sights.

The snow leopard was far from the territory claimed by his kind, the high mountains where snow sometimes yielded to bare rock. It was a place where his smoky gray coat marked with spots and dark gray rosettes provided the perfect camouflage, just as the remoteness provided the solitude his species often required.

The huge male was twice as large as the more common snow leopards, though few ever saw them. Fewer still knew of the existence his particular species, cats large enough to rival a lion.

Despite his size and power, he was at a disadvantage in this land, his beautiful coat a liability. Stealth and timing became everything.

He crept forward. Slowly. One small step at a time. His anticipation built as he became convinced the human was completely absorbed in his task, was unaware of the predator closing the distance between them.

He stilled as the human's attention shifted away from the plants growing on the bank. He hunkered more closely to the ground when the man's gaze scanned the area around him before returning to the foliage.

The snow leopard's muscles bunched. He'd gotten as close to the man as the cluster of trees would allow. Now he calculated the distance. Planned his attack.

* * * * *

Savant Bartholdi looked at the cuttings and roots he'd gathered and smiled in satisfaction. One thing he'd noticed since he and Sunder had come to the witch-lands in search of a woman who would please them both—and yet not object to the pleasure they found in each other—was that the witches didn't over-harvest.

Then again, perhaps that was because as far as he'd been able to tell, other than having familiars, very few of the women he'd encountered were true witches. There were healers, of course, as would be expected in any village. Some were more gifted than others, but few had the ability to combine magic with herb remedies.

He shrugged and spread his harvest to dry. It didn't really matter whether the woman he and Sunder claimed for a wife was a witch or not. He was a warlock and could tend to that part of their lives.

Savant stretched, luxuriating in the feel of the sun's warmth. They could easily have traveled the short distance to the next village but it felt good to stop and rest for a day. To have some time together.

As much as he hated to admit it, Savant was starting to wonder if he and Sunder weren't on a fool's journey. They'd been traveling for six months now with only one purpose in mind. To find a wife they could share. So far there hadn't been a single candidate, though plenty had judged the cut of Savant's clothing and the weight of his coin. Plenty had flirted and been willing to invite him into their beds, hoping for a token afterward that would gain them a wealthy husband or an easier life. But

underneath their calculated offers of passion had been fear and a hint of revulsion as they wondered if the rumors were true, that warlocks loved men as well as women.

It would be a simple matter to use magic to enthrall a woman into accepting two husbands who were also intimate with each other. Savant would rather do without a wife than to use spells to acquire and maintain one.

In the old days, before the magic grew and warlocks became more adept at using it to defend themselves, it wasn't unheard of for them to be attacked and killed primarily because of the rumors over their sexual practices. Now warlocks were welcomed in most villages, at least for short visits, their wards and potions and spells a commodity eagerly sought and bartered for.

Savant glanced around, a slight frisson of worry sliding through him. Sunder had been gone a long time. True, this trip had been harder on Sunder than it had been on him. Sunder was a more solitary creature, preferring their home in the high mountains to travel these days. It hadn't always been so. In fact, it was their love of travel which had brought them together in the first place. A chance encounter at a seaport, though not a romantic one.

Sunder had been shackled and very nearly starved to death. His body rail thin and left out in the blistering sun as cargo to be loaded last.

Their eyes had met across the dock, the sky-blue of Savant's connecting with the green-gray of Sunder's and seeing strength and pride. A determination to survive against all odds.

Savant couldn't have walked away even if it had meant his own life would be forfeit. He'd rescued Sunder, nursed him back to health, never imagining during those long weeks that they would one day be lovers. More than just lovers. Inseparable companions. And now they sought a wife together.

A sense of being watched, of impending attack, distracted Savant from his thoughts. He stood and turned, this time scanning the area and looking for places a predator might be hiding.

* * * * *

The surface of the pond rippled as Aysa Douay threw the wishing stone in. She felt foolish for indulging in a child's pastime on the very day when she was to make her woman's choice. And yet she couldn't stop herself from uttering the words deep in her heart as the stone disappeared into the depths of the icy blue water. "Please let me claim the right familiar."

She knelt and gathered her belongings, a day's worth of food rolled into a single blanket. Whether she was successful or not, she couldn't be gone for long. She was needed at home.

Aysa glanced back at the village where she'd lived since birth. Fear of failure curled in her belly. Her mother and father had given each of their three daughters more of a childhood than most girls were allowed. But since her father's accident, followed by the fire which had destroyed their small house, they'd all been forced to move in with her mother's sister. And though her aunt welcomed them, they were a burden.

It is time to leave childhood behind, Aysa thought. The celebration of the harvest was days away and this had been a season of abundance. Farmers and merchants and craftsmen alike would be full of good cheer and hope, their pockets lined and their cellars well stocked. They'd look ahead into the coming winter and decide it would be nice to have a woman in their home during those long dark months. And because both their coffers and stores were full, they'd seek brides during the festival.

Her fingers went to the base of her throat, reassuring herself that the tiny cloth pouch containing the charm wrought with her own blood in order to gain a familiar was still there. Without it she would have no way to bind a willing familiar to her.

Aysa shivered. Only the most undesirable of men would accept a woman without a familiar. A woman's familiar was a reflection of her value and disposition, an indication of compatibility. Theirs was a hard life, where by law, a man ruled in his home.

A woman was his property, though if the match was good, as it was between her parents, love flourished and grew and brought immense happiness. But if was bad...

She shivered again and wondered why the village men didn't have familiars to aid in judging their character. Then she smiled, remembering her aunt's ribald comments about strutting cocks and crowing roosters when she'd brought the subject up.

From the pine grove at the edge of the valley, a raven called and was answered by another, making Aysa think of the one exception when it came to men and familiars. The warlocks.

Only a handful of them had passed through in the time since Aysa's birth. But they'd all had either a raven or a wolf as a familiar.

She'd been at the age when boys had gone from an annoyance to a fascination the last time a warlock came to their village to barter. Whispered speculation had preceded his visit and fathers had sent their marriage-ready sons on errands so they were gone while the warlock was there.

Aysa and her sisters had made a game of spying on the warlock. They had even snuck into the barn behind the dairyman's house and climbed into the hayloft so they could watch the warlock and the dairyman's eldest daughter fucking.

A tingle went through Aysa's nipples and clit just thinking about the way the warlock's buttocks had flexed as he thrust and grunted and came. Her folds grew swollen remembering how he'd rolled to his back and she'd seen a man's penis for the first time, slick and glistening from sex.

From that moment on she'd fantasized about a dark-haired lover like the warlock. Though everyone knew that no warlock would offer for a wife unless she had a familiar that matched his own.

Aysa had heard it whispered that such a thing was necessary because warlocks preferred men to women. But after the view from the hayloft, she questioned whether the rumors were true. When she had tried to ask her mother, she'd ended up with a mouth full of soap and enough extra chores to keep her "too busy to think on such unwholesome, unnatural things".

Her mother's reaction had only sparked her curiosity about two men together. And she wondered if it was truly unnatural. She'd seen male dogs mount other male dogs. And once she'd seen two colts playing, their cocks dropped and rigid as they reared and pawed and pretended to fight, then mounted each other.

Aysa sighed and pushed thoughts of warlocks away. As far as she could tell, she had no affinity for ravens or wolves.

The taking of a familiar wasn't a thing of trickery, but a searching of the soul. An extension of the self. Or at least it used to be.

More than once Aysa had caught herself wondering if the magic of their lands had faded. Her mother's sister was a true witch, one who read the leaves and created the *familiar* charms, and yet even she wasn't truly linked to her sparrow familiar as the warlocks were said to be linked to their familiars.

Her aunt's sparrow would help find ingredients for potions, would sit on her aunt's shoulder for hours, but they didn't truly converse. Their souls didn't flow back and forth between the two bodies as warlocks supposedly did with their familiars. But perhaps that was only another rumor. Still...Aysa couldn't shake the idea that once upon a time a woman's relationship with her familiar was deeper, stronger.

She stroked the pouch containing the charm one last time, then dropped her hand and forced herself to move away from the wishing pond and toward the mountains. Very few women went beyond the valley in search of their familiars. Most claimed cats or songbirds or small dogs because potential husbands would have no objection to those choices and even the smallest living space and the most meager budget could accommodate such familiars.

She'd heard it said that in remote places where men tended sheep and the animals were allowed to come and go, to enter the family's home as they pleased, then women took ewes as familiars. But she'd never seen such a thing herself.

Her sisters had already used their charms and taken cats for their familiars. The eldest had chosen a calico female with a pleasing personality, while the youngest had

chosen a white cat with green eyes. Worry for her sisters creased Aysa's forehead. She also had affinity for cats, but she'd sworn not to make one her familiar.

Only the most ignorant when it came to the ways of men and women would fail to notice that women with cat familiars were forever pregnant and often poor because of the number of children that needed to be fed and clothed. Aysa would like to have children, but she also worried about her parents and her aunt. She wanted them to be comfortable and never need for food or shelter.

Aysa's fingers curled in the pocket of her dress where the wishing stone had been. Perhaps she should have wished that she could be content to follow the easy path. To claim a songbird as a familiar. Perhaps a gold finch to match her hair or a bluebird to match her eyes.

As quickly as the thought arose, she disregarded it. Something drew her to the mountains. Something told her that her destiny would unfold there.

She moved on, gaining confidence with each step. It was time to leave childhood behind. To take a familiar now and perhaps a husband at the upcoming festival.

Nervousness flickered through her at the thought of going to the marriage bed inexperienced. Most women had been with at least one lover before settling on a husband. But there'd been no opportunity for Aysa to satisfy the curiosity that had been aroused by witnessing the warlock and the dairyman's daughter.

Until a girl took a familiar she was considered a child regardless of her age. Any man caught bedding her was punished severely. Just as a married woman was off limits, the sanctions harsh if she was caught fucking a man not her husband.

Aysa entered the grove of trees and took the narrow path that led into the mountains. She thought of the small, peaceful valley she'd visited only days ago in order to gather some of the plants her aunt used to create the *familiar* charms.

She would go there. Not only did the valley have a stream but there was a shallow cave nearby where she could take shelter for the night.

The decision settled comfortably on Aysa. "Please let me claim the right familiar," she said out loud, repeating the wish she'd cast with the stone.

Somewhere above her, a falcon's sharp call pierced the air. Aysa's heart raced at the sound of it. Excitement surged through her. Surely the falcon's sudden appearance was a sign that her familiar was to be one of the magnificent birds. A sleek hunter that would set her apart from the others, a spirit who could fly free where she was bound by duties and responsibilities.

Her footsteps became lighter as she hurried upward. She was more sure now than ever that she would find what she was seeking in the valley above.

Chapter Two

Savant saw the flash of white as the snow leopard left its hiding place in a charge. He cursed, stumbled in his hurry to get away from the water's edge, but it was too late. The leopard was in the air, its magnificent body stretched out, its razor-sharp claws gleaming in the sunlight.

Savant cursed again as the cat hit him, its weight and speed carrying them both backward and over the bank. There was only time enough to cast a quick spell to shield his landing. And then the erotic, shimmering energy of Sunder washed over Savant and nearly had him coming in his trousers.

"My turn to be on top," Sunder said, his voice a purr.

Savant looked up at the exotic face above his and was momentarily lost in the gray-green eyes which had first captured him so many years ago. He'd thought he might gain a familiar when he rescued the snow leopard on that dock. Instead he had gained so much more. "I need to get undressed," Savant said, the cold water soaking into his clothing but doing nothing to cool the heat raging through him.

Sunder's hips moved and Savant groaned as their cocks rubbed against each other. Sunder's naked, his own shielded by too much fabric. "I need to get undressed," Savant repeated, but couldn't stop himself from spearing his fingers through Sunder's hair and guiding the other man's lips to his, anxious for the feel of Sunder's cat-rough tongue.

"You were lost in your plants again," Sunder growled, licking across the seam of Savant's mouth and making him moan. "You left yourself vulnerable and now I have you at my mercy."

Savant managed a laugh despite the throbbing of his cock. It was an often-played game between them. "I was safe enough. I'm still safe enough."

Sunder licked across the seam of Savant's lips again. "You're easy prey."

“So make a meal of me,” Savant said, parting his lips and meeting Sunder’s tongue with his own as his hips bucked upward, grinding their cocks together.

Sunder grunted and deepened the kiss, his thighs forcing Savant’s apart. His hands reached up and grasped Savant’s wrists before pinning them to the bed of the shallow stream. Wild heat rushed through Sunder. Ferocious and savage. The animal instinct to exert dominance over another male tempered by the human desire to love.

It was not common for his kind to take same-sex lovers. But even nearly dead, Sunder had been drawn to Savant from the first moment he saw him. Savant’s scent had called to him, had coated his leopard’s tongue and stirred a different kind of hunger. That Savant had rescued him in his leopard form, had nursed him back to health, then transported him to a safe place and offered him freedom without knowing what Sunder truly was, had cemented their bond more surely than the blood-spell making them warlock and familiar.

Sunder made a soft sound of contentment. His tongue met Savant’s. Rubbed and stroked and tasted. Twined. The need to dominate was momentarily under control as he enjoyed the slide of his cock against Savant’s soft trousers, enjoyed the way Savant moaned underneath him, met his kisses, yielded.

He wouldn’t be able to play for long. He was too aroused. The edginess he’d felt since first encountering the woman’s scent, the frustration he’d experienced when he’d been unable to follow it to its source had sharpened and made him aggressive.

Sunder’s hips jerked and lust raged through him when the exposed head of his cock glided over Savant’s trousers. He was already so aroused that his foreskin had pulled back in preparation.

Sunder lifted his mouth from Savant’s. “You’ve got too many clothes on,” he said, rolling to the side and standing, then offering his hand to Savant.

Savant took the offered hand though his gaze roamed the body standing above him. The sight of it drove the need higher, made him want to touch every inch, claim every inch with his fingers, his mouth, his tongue.

Sunder had the sleek, muscled agility of the snow leopard, but despite the cat's smoky gray coat, Sunder's skin was deeply tanned, his hair inky black.

They got as far as a moss-covered place on the bank before stopping. Their fingers worked in concert to get Savant's clothing removed. Their breathing became sharp as skin encountered skin, as cocks touched, hard and ready, testicles hanging full and heavy underneath them.

Savant cried out when Sunder's hand captured them both, his tightened fingers creating a channel. Moving up and down. Up and down.

"I won't last," Savant said, his mouth seeking Sunder's, his role already defined by the game they played. Sunder's catching him off guard establishing who would be the more dominant partner, whose will would prevail.

The need for release curled in Savant's belly, moved along his skin like hot kisses. He jerked and groaned, leaked as Sunder's palm reached his cockhead, the firm grip so exquisite that it took every bit of control he had to keep from coating them both with his seed.

His tongue became as submissive as he liked a woman's to be. Begged and pleaded in the wetness of the kiss for Sunder to finish it. To penetrate him and ride him to orgasm.

But Sunder didn't relent. He increased the speed of his strokes as his fingers tightened in Savant's hair, holding him in place, driving them both nearly to the point of no return.

They were both panting when Sunder allowed the kiss to end. Their bodies were slick with sweat.

"You challenged me to make a meal of you," Sunder said, reminding Savant of his earlier rejoinder.

"I'll come if you do."

Sunder freed his own penis but continued to hold Savant's. His grip tightened, became nearly painful. "You don't think I can make you hard again?" he challenged.

The savage intensity in his eyes made Savant wonder if they'd been away from home too long and the leopard was nearing the breaking point at being around humans for so many months. "I get hard just looking at you," Savant said, his hands going to Sunder's chest in a gesture of supplication, brushing over the tight male nipples before moving up to the other man's shoulder. "We can return home and take up the search for a woman another time."

A breeze stirred the air, bringing the woman's subtle scent to Sunder and the snow leopard's aggression with it. The leopard had recognized her for what she would be for them. A mate. And now the man knew as well. But while Sunder was willing to share with another male, the leopard needed to be convinced. It needed assurance that it wouldn't have to battle another dominant male each time it wanted to mount their female.

"After this village, our search will end," Sunder said. He released Savant's penis and stepped into him. Used his hands and the closeness of his body to urge Savant to the ground, then followed, mimicking their earlier positions in the stream, only this time flesh to flesh.

It wouldn't end this way. The leopard was too close to the surface. But the man desired this intimacy, this reaffirmation of love. Their lips met again, their tongues immediately seeking, finding, communicating caring as well as passion.

For long moments Sunder was able to hold off the need to dominate. But each time he caught a hint of the woman's elusive scent, he had to fight the urge to claw and bite. To dominate beyond what either he or Savant would want.

They'd had rough sex before. But this was different. More dangerous.

"We'll have a wife soon," Sunder said for his benefit as well as Savant's. "She'll take us both in her body at the same time and we'll know an even greater ecstasy."

Savant's buttocks clenched. His thighs widened and his knees bent, tilting his pelvis in a silent invitation. "I'm not sure anything is better than this," he panted against Sunder's lips.

The words and the gesture found the snow leopard and fed some of its hunger. But it needed more in order to be appeased.

With a growl Sunder rose above Savant. Glad that after years of being together they knew each other well. That the games they enjoyed had rules worked out in advance, when neither the leopard nor lust controlled.

Savant rolled to his hands and knees with practiced ease and Sunder's cock jerked in reaction as more pre-cum escaped. He took himself in hand and stroked once, twice, knowing it was dangerous in his heightened state of arousal, but the additional moisture that gathered on the head of penis made the risk worth taking. He stopped when his balls pulled tight against his body and an icy-hot warning rippled along his spine. Sunder gathered the pre-cum on his fingers and worked it into Savant's back entrance.

Savant shuddered as Sunder prepared him. He rocked back, welcoming the pressure in anticipation of the incredible pleasure to come. Moaned when fingers were replaced by a cock.

There was no holding back when Sunder began moving, his cock pistoning in and out. Slowly at first. Each thrust bringing the leopard's need to dominate closer to the surface.

Something was different, but Savant couldn't hold the thought. He couldn't follow it as Sunder glided over a spot deep inside him and the intensity of the pleasure caused Savant's back to hunch and his cock to weep. Made him pant and cry out.

The prey-animal sound tipped Sunder over the edge as it always did. Savant moaned and closed his eyes, breathed deeply of the musky scent that was Sunder and him and leopard combined. He welcomed the feel of Sunder's weight and skin against

his back as Sunder adjusted his position, yielded to the leopard's instinct though it was Sunder's human hand that took Savant's cock.

Sunder's teeth found Savant's shoulder. Went to the place he'd bitten repeatedly over the years, and Savant would have come from that alone if Sunder's fingers hadn't tightened on his cock and kept him from release.

"Please," Savant said, not afraid to beg as he sometimes made Sunder beg. As one day they hoped to make a wife beg.

Sunder's hand moved up and down on Savant's shaft in concert with each thrust. The strokes growing harder and faster as pleasure built to where there was no containing it, no denying it. No holding it back. Release came in a lava-hot wash that coated Savant's belly and chest and filled his anus with liquid fire.

They collapsed onto the moss-covered ground, both of them quiet except for the harsh sounds of their breathing. Both of them content to remain close together, limbs entangled.

"Maybe next time you won't get so lost in your plants," Sunder teased, the leopard completely submerged for the moment.

Savant laughed. "What makes you think I didn't let you take me by surprise?"

Sunder growled in response and pressed a kiss to the bite scar on Savant's shoulder before rolling away and getting to his feet. He once again offered Savant a hand so they could step back into the stream and wash.

Savant studied Sunder for a moment as water splashed and glistened on a body he knew as well as his own. His cock stirred with the possibility of more intimacy and his heart warmed at seeing Sunder relaxed.

Curiosity edged its way into Savant's thoughts, temporarily replacing carnal images and intentions with questions. They'd spoken of a shared wife before, but never when they'd been in the middle of sex. And never before had Sunder seemed so positive about finding one. Even when they'd first set out, Sunder had been braced for failure though the leopard demanded he search for a mate.

“You think our search will end at this village?” Savant asked, wondering now if Sunder had spoken in the heat of passion and had merely been fantasizing about finding a woman.

Sunder lifted his head and met Savant’s gaze. The snow leopard’s presence flickered in Sunder’s eyes like a heartbeat. “We’ll find what we’re looking for here, and then we’ll go home.”

Savant’s eyebrows arched, surprise and hope mingling with amusement. He *was* the warlock after all and he’d seen no signs that their quest was near its end. “You’ve been playing with my crystal ball again?”

Sunder’s laugh was immediate. Masculine. Fully human. “You know better. If I’d been playing with one of your balls, you’d be begging me to handle the other.”

Savant grinned and closed the distance between them. His hand went to Sunder’s cock then slid under to capture the testicles. “So how can you be so sure we’ll find her?”

“Her scent is here.”

The answer startled Savant into freeing Sunder’s sac and stepping back in order to glance around. His thoughts went immediately to a long ago conversation and Sunder’s revelation that he’d chosen to stay with Savant as both familiar and lover because he was drawn to his scent. Because there was rightness to it that left no room for doubt. “She’s been here recently?”

“Yes. She comes from the village near the foot of the mountain and returns there.” Sunder’s gaze met Savant’s again and all humor was gone. “You’ll accept the leopard’s choice?”

“Yes.”

“You’ll use your magic if necessary?”

“If she’s right for us, we won’t need it.” Savant’s head tilted in challenge. “You don’t think we can win her using our natural charm?”

The leopard flickered in Sunder’s gray-green eyes. “I believe we can claim her.”

Savant looked at the position of the sun. "We'll leave at daybreak tomorrow?"

"Yes."

Savant nodded and left the stream. "I'm going to return to the cave since someone has ensured my clothing is too wet to wear."

"Be glad I didn't rip it," Sunder said, following him out of the water, his form wavering for an instant before shifting to the snow leopard's.

I'll be back in a little while, he said, breaking the mind-silence now that he wasn't stalking Savant.

Stay out of trouble.

Sunder made a chuffing sound and padded away.

Chapter Three

The moment Aysa stepped into the hidden valley, she heard the falcon's cry and her confidence soared. This was where she would find her familiar and transition from girl to woman.

She smiled and then laughed out loud, feeling curiously free. Why had she waited so long to do this?

The falcon's cry came again and she scanned the skies and then the cliff faces. Disappointment passed through her when she saw no sign of bird or nest, but she rallied quickly. If she had been willing to accept only what would be easy, then she would have claimed one of the many village cats that greeted her with purrs whenever they saw her.

Aysa straightened her spine and moved into the valley, finally stopping when she got to the place where the stream was at its deepest. It had been a hard climb and she'd been in such a hurry to get here that she'd pushed herself. Now she was hot and sticky and wanted to sink into the cool water.

The familiar meant for her would come. She just needed to be patient. To *believe* it would be so.

Claiming a familiar was different for each woman, but two things remained the same for all. First, a familiar had to willingly accept the magic contained in the charm. And second, as soon as the magic flowed into the familiar there was an easily felt bond which would strengthen and deepen over time.

Aysa glanced around to ensure she was alone before shedding her clothing. She braided her hair and knotted it at the base of her neck so it wouldn't get wet, then stepped into the water, stifling a small yelp at the coolness against her skin. She waded

deeper as she became accustomed to the temperature and stopped toward the center where the height of the stream reached the undersides of her breasts.

Her nipples were tight puckers from the coldness of the water. But even so, they tingled, as did the folds between her legs and the stiff woman's knob that could be a source of such great pleasure.

She closed her eyes and touched her nipples. Tweaking, tugging, pinching as she imagined what it be like to have a man at her breasts instead of her own fingers.

The pouch containing the familiar charm lay lightly against her chest and its presence made her womb flutter in anticipation. Once she gained a familiar, she would be able to take a lover.

One hand slid down in a slow dance over her belly. Even before they'd lost their home and had to move into her aunt's tiny house, it had been nearly impossible to find moments when she could touch herself like this. She was rarely alone and when she was, there were always chores to be done.

Her breath hitched as her fingers reached her clit. She shivered with heat instead of cold.

It felt so good. So good.

She stroked her swollen knob, jerking each time her fingertips slid over the tiny head. Her face grew flushed, her breathing fast and she wished she was on the bank, lying down with the sun's rays kissing her woman's flesh.

The sun's heated kiss became a man's in Aysa's thoughts and a small whimper escaped. The warlock had not touched the dairyman's daughter in such a way, but Aysa had witnessed the courtship of animals and seen both males and females licking and exploring each other's most private places.

A shudder went through her. The place between her thighs ached so desperately that the fingers of her other hand left her breast in order to press into her channel. She wanted them to be a man's cock. Wanted it with a hunger that had been building since

the day she'd witnessed a stallion cover a mare and been old enough to think of what she was seeing in human terms.

Her breath came in pants as she gave herself over to the imaginary lover she'd known for years. Her fingers became his cock, plunging in and out of her slit, striking her clit faster and harder as her body tightened and fought and finally reached that place where only pleasure existed.

* * * * *

The snow leopard crouched in the thickets. Every muscle in his body urged him to leave his cover and pounce on the human female. She was not his kind in this form. On some level he knew it. And yet the scent of her, the small whimpers she made as she played in the water struck at his core. They were not the sounds of prey, but the sounds of a mate ready to be bred.

The heat of her rolled across his tongue and the taste of it made his body ache to cover her, to thrust into her. The leopard desired it but the man wouldn't allow it.

It was forbidden. Dangerous. Even the shapeshifters who paired with others of their kind rarely coupled in their animal forms for fear that the male leopard would lose control and kill the female.

A falcon's cry sounded and the woman looked up. The snow leopard's ear swiveled but he knew they were still alone. With a thought his mind brushed against Savant's and found him still in the shallow cave where they'd made camp.

He could easily summon the warlock but the leopard withheld the woman's presence from him. At the moment it was a delicate dance they engaged in. Man and beast and man. All trying to find a balance.

Once the leopard and Sunder had been almost perfectly integrated. They had existed with the same desires, the same instincts. But since leaving their homeland and traveling among the humans they'd changed so the strengths of one overcame the weaknesses of the other. They'd adapted so thought became as important as action and

reason balanced instinct. All of it made more complicated by the man's love for Savant and the leopard's familiar bond to the warlock.

With a soft chuffing sound the leopard yielded slightly to the part of him named Sunder. The huge cat's body settled more heavily on the ground in a waiting pose instead of a crouching one.

The falcon called again, a shrill sound which brought a smile to the woman's lips. She waded out of the water. Her hand went to the small cloth sack hanging from a piece of leather around her neck.

Curiosity gripped both man and beast. Carnal hunger followed as the water slid away to reveal her naked body and swamp them with the scent of her arousal.

The man rose to the surface of the leopard's body but not close enough to trigger a change in form. They both watched as she opened the cloth pouch and removed something, her eyes never leaving the falcon which flew above the valley.

She placed the object on a smooth flat rock near where her clothing lay then retreated to the water. This time she found a shallow place and sat, as though she was waiting for the falcon to notice her gift.

Magic. The smell of it was distinctive.

Between one breath and the next, both snow leopard and man knew the significance of the female's actions. Between the second breath and the third they were in agreement. They'd been presented with an opportunity that was too good to miss.

* * * * *

Aysa settled in the streambed. Her hand glided on the surface of the water as her eyes tracked the falcon's flight. She was probably being foolish to set the charm out as she'd done, but... As soon as the idea had come to her, she'd felt as if the magic was guiding her actions, just as it had led her here after she'd thrown the wishing stone into the pond.

Excitement and hope burned like twin flames in her heart. Maybe some of the old magic had found a home in her, just as her aunt had once suggested.

The falcon called again and this time the call was answered by another. *A mate?* Aysa wondered, her emotions swooping downward as the falcon altered its course and flew off in the direction of the other bird only to disappear and not return.

Movement drew Aysa's attention back to her immediate surroundings. Her breath caught in her throat when she saw the huge smoky gray cat with the dark gray markings. It was a beautiful, a mystical thing.

For long moments she was transfixed by the sight of it, thought that surely it had to be a sign, a message, its presence a powerful omen. But when she saw the moss give under its weight, capturing its footprints for a few seconds in time, her heart stuttered with fear, then began pounding furiously with the realization that the huge cat was flesh and blood, a deadly predator instead of a vision.

It padded over to the water's edge, so close she could see its gray-green eyes. So close she knew it could hear the wild thunder of her heart and her small pants for breath. A small whimper escaped before she could contain it and Aysa braced herself for the cat's attack.

Its eyes met hers and then it lowered its head and began drinking, its tongue lapping at the water in an almost sensuous way. When it finished, it looked at Aysa then turned and traveled the short distance to her clothing.

The cat made an odd sound, not one she'd ever heard a cat make. It lay down on her clothing, rolled and rubbed as the cats in the village had often done.

The gesture calmed Aysa enough to allow her to think. To wonder if perhaps her affinity for cats would save her from this one.

It was a male. She'd assumed as much because of its size and manner, but as it wallowed, marking her clothing with its scent, she saw its heavy male testicles and knew its sex.

Finally the leopard stilled. He watched her for long moments, his tail flicking in a slow gesture that could mean many things. He was so beautiful that despite the tremors of fear rippling through her, Aysa longed to touch him, to stroke his luxurious fur and bury her face in his ruff.

She knew cats didn't like water, but he was no ordinary cat and she was not so far away or in so deep that he couldn't easily reach her and drag her to the bank. She held completely still as he rose from where he lay on her clothing and came to the edge of the stream again. He inhaled deeply, his eyes never leaving her face. Then he turned and padded to the place where she'd placed the charm in the hopes the falcon would come.

A far deeper fear struck when he took it in his mouth. A terror that had nothing to do with a violent death and everything to do with a horrible future.

"No!" she cried, standing abruptly, no longer concerned about attracting his attention. She scrambled for the bank but before she reached it the charm had disappeared in a swallow.

"No," she whispered, horrified, stunned as she felt the magic unwind and form a connection between her and the exotic cat.

She went to her knees, barely aware of the stream detouring around her as the cat's satisfaction swamped her. He padded over to her and waded into the water to rub against her in an affectionate gesture.

For a moment she was enthralled by the texture of his fur, the powerful muscles hidden underneath, the magnificence of him. For a moment she allowed herself to touch him as she'd wanted to do earlier, to press her cheek to him in wonder. But only for a moment. And then she began crying as the full implications of having such a creature for a familiar overwhelmed her.

Not only would no man take her for a wife, but now she would add to her family's burden rather than ease it. She would become a pariah. Shunned and avoided not only

because she'd taken such a dangerous creature for her familiar—but because she had violated the natural order of things and taken a familiar of the opposite sex.

Chapter Four

Come to the stream. Hurry.

The words contained such a mix of satisfaction and urgency that Savant's gut tightened in reaction. *Why?* he asked, knowing Sunder was still in his leopard form for them to be communicating in this manner.

You'll see.

Savant shook his head as he left the cave and hurried as Sunder had ordered him to do. Most villagers held the mistaken belief that warlocks actually controlled their familiars but Savant had never been so misguided as to even attempt it with the leopard.

The satisfaction along the bond should have warned Savant. It should have prepared him for what he would find. Shock brought him to a standstill when he saw the naked female crying into the leopard's fur. *What have you done?*

The leopard made a chuffing sound and licked its lips. *She sought a familiar and gained me.*

Dismay filled Savant. Uneasiness and something else. Pain.

He'd been prepared to share Sunder's love and body, but the familiar bond...

The large cat tilted its head and it was the leopard that looked out. It was the leopard that saw Savant's pain and measured it against its own to find them equal.

The leopard didn't want to share its female. The leopard's instinct saw other males as threats, not as potential co-mates. But in that moment of perfect understanding, Savant and the leopard reached a silent accord.

Savant waded into the water, finding a small measure of amusement that once again Sunder's actions had resulted in wet clothing. "It's all right," Savant said,

kneeling next to cat and woman, one arm resting on the leopard's back while the other went around a smooth feminine waist. "It's all right," he repeated, pressing his mouth against the blonde crown of hair.

"It's not all right," she said, her voice laced with pain.

For long moments the woman was so lost in her misery that she seemed almost unaware of him. The same could not be said for Savant. He was very much aware of her slick skin and wondrous curves. Of her softness and beauty. Of the way her body molded so perfectly against his.

Eventually she gave a final hiccupping sob and tried to pull away. He let her gain some distance but refused to release her completely.

Their eyes met for the first time and he was immediately lost in the sky-blue color of hers. His heart ached at the embarrassment and sorrow and confusion he read in her. "I'm Savant," he said, wanting to punctuate the greeting with a kiss but opting instead for a gentle inquiry. "And you are?"

"Aysa."

She pulled out of his arms and he let her go this time. Watched with tender amusement as her cheeks and neck flamed with color when she remembered her nakedness.

Aysa escaped to the bank. He followed, feeling like he was in pursuit of a young, shy doe. Frowning when he realized the imagery was the leopard's and not his own.

"You were crying," Savant prompted, wanting to draw her into conversation, his chest tightening when new tears sprang to the corner of her eyes.

Without thought he took her in his arms again. Only this time his mouth sought hers in an offer of comfort. His tongue pressed against the seam of her lips and she yielded, accepted his gentle exploration of her mouth and melted against him.

She was confused and frightened, upset. On some level he knew he was taking advantage, using the chaos of her emotions against her. And yet he couldn't stop

himself. She was so soft and fragile. Her feminine curves a perfect balance to both his and Sunder's masculinity.

Savant deepened the kiss. He ate hungrily at her lips as his hands roamed her body freely. Explored her.

There was no turning back. The leopard had claimed her and he had agreed earlier to accept its choice. Now it was a matter of seducing her, of getting her to accept them completely.

She whimpered into Savant's mouth and he gentled his kiss, stroked her naked spine. He touched the sides of her breasts before cupping her hips. Held her to him, pelvis to pelvis, as his kiss became a blatant imitation of what he wanted to do to her with his cock.

She clung to him helplessly and he envisioned taking her to the ground. Fucking her by the side of the stream as he and Sunder had done earlier. But as quickly as the thought arose, his conscience intruded and he reluctantly ended the kiss. Savant forced his mouth away from Aysa's but couldn't force himself to release her completely.

The leopard had taken a position nearby on the bank. Its relaxed pose told Savant that it didn't intend to interfere.

Aysa caught the direction of his gaze and half-turned in his arms, making Savant groan when her naked body rubbed against his trouser-covered cock in a repeat of what had happened with Sunder earlier.

Once again you're wearing too many clothes, Sunder said, his thoughts in line with Savant's as they so often were.

Aysa stiffened in Savant's arms and he cursed silently, wondering if her newly formed familiar bond with the leopard had allowed her to hear Sunder's comment. He relaxed when she said, "You're not afraid of him?"

"Isn't he your familiar?" Savant asked, deflecting her question. Pride and hope filled him as he thought back on the scene he'd come upon. True, her tears had brought

him up short, but she had been clinging to the leopard and that could only be a reflection of her inner strength and courage.

She trembled and pressed her cheek to his chest, her whispered "yes" barely audible. He stroked her back, nearly shivering himself with the desire he felt for her.

He had been with women before but not in the years since he and Sunder became lovers. Since that time he had rarely allowed himself to think about what it was like to slide in and out of a woman's slick channel. He'd been afraid that the familiar bond would reveal his thoughts and Sunder would be hurt.

Sunder had never shown any interest in a woman, had never lain with one. Until the subject of a wife and mate came up, Savant thought Sunder had no interest in coupling with females. Now he knew otherwise. The leopard had been waiting for a woman who smelled right, whose scent made it want to mount her.

Savant rubbed his cheek against Aysa's hair and felt a surprising contentedness despite the battle yet to be waged for her heart and her acceptance. "Are you from the village at the base of the mountain?" he asked though he already knew the answer.

"Yes."

"Do you need to return tonight?"

Her arms tightened around his waist. "I...I don't know what I'm going to do." A deep shuddering breath raked through her and she looked up into his face.

Savant's heart wept at the misery he saw there. He brushed a kiss against her forehead. "Our camp is just a short distance away. Come back with me. I'll make you some tea and we can talk about what's troubling you."

Embarrassment washed over her face. "Someone else is here?" She extricated herself from his arms and gathered her clothes, nearly sent Savant to his knees when she bent over and he glimpsed her folds and slit.

Savant glanced at the leopard. "Sunder is not at camp right now."

Aysa hurriedly dressed. She still felt nearly overwhelmed by what had transpired with the huge cat, but Savant's presence was comforting.

While he'd been holding her, stroking her skin, she'd managed to forget the grimness of her fate. Desire had curled in her cunt in response to his touch. And the hard line of his cock pressed against her belly had restored her confidence. Then when he'd so casually spoken of the dangerous cat as being her familiar, a small spark of hope flared to life in her heart.

He was a stranger to this area. His accent and dress told her that much. Maybe the women of his village took familiars that were more exotic than barn cats and songbirds.

"I'd like some tea," she said, very aware of the huge cat padding next to her as she went to Savant's side and they began walking.

The cat was so beautiful that she couldn't resist the urge to place her hand on his luxurious fur. She should be terrified of him. And yet even without touching him, she could feel the familiar bond between them and knew he would never harm her.

It was different than she'd expected. More than she'd been led to believe it would be. It was almost as if the cat's emotions rumbled through her in a contented purr. The sensation so strong that she found herself kneading his fur.

"There's where we've made camp," Savant said as the shallow cave came into sight.

Contentment turned to purring anticipation, rippling through Aysa's belly and making her clit stand erect. It felt almost as if a rough tongue licked her most private places.

She released the cat's fur in reaction, confused and embarrassed by the heat that was both her own and not her own. She glanced sideways at the cat and shivered, wondered if this was the reason familiars were *always* female.

They climbed onto the narrow path that led the short distance to the cave. Just as they got to the entranceway, the cat made the strange chuffing sound and she looked back to find he'd settled himself below them, as if guarding the path.

“Good idea,” Savant said. “It’ll be a lot safer if the leopard is not in the cave with us, at least not right now.”

Aysa’s attention swung back to Savant. She had the oddest sense his words weren’t for her alone, but excitement over learning more about the huge cat chased the thought away. “Is that what he’s called? A leopard? You’ve seen them before?”

“Not often, and never as big as this one. He’s actually called a snow leopard.” Savant smiled and she felt it all the way down to her toes. “The specimen you’ve claimed as your familiar is a truly amazing creature.”

She returned his smile and thought the man standing in front of her was a truly amazing creature as well, not only for his dark good looks but for his calm acceptance of the huge cat he’d found her with. “I didn’t choose the leopard,” Aysa admitted. “I left the charm out for a falcon and he came to me instead.”

Savant took her hand in his. “Is that why you were crying?”

She nodded and for an instant the earlier fear and horror at what the future held tried to return and smother her. She squeezed Savant’s hand and drew strength from it.

Hope burned away the darkness of her worries. Her womb fluttered as her gaze traveled over him and settled on the fierce erection that strained the front of his soft leather trousers. Maybe everything would be all right. Maybe Savant was to be hers as well. Maybe...

A raven’s call interrupted her thoughts. She glanced to where several had perched in nearby trees, then turned to step fully into the cave.

Her breath caught in her throat when she saw the bedding, two piles of blankets placed so they were a single large mat. He’d said he traveled with a male companion and now the sleeping arrangements said they were also lovers.

Aysa’s heart resumed its wild thunder in her ears. Pain stabbed through her chest at the death of her newborn hope. Part of her already believed the magic had brought them together. Even now she felt the leopard urging her to brush against Savant, to rub against him as a cat does one it favors. “You’re a warlock.”

The raven called again, as if answering for Savant, and Aysa assumed the bird must be his familiar. She didn't pull away when he cupped her face in his hand and drew her attention to him. "Are you frightened of me now?" he asked, surprising her with his question, with the uncertainty and vulnerability she saw in his eyes.

"No." The answer came easily, quickly, and with sudden insight she saw his life in another light. Imagined the fear and suspicion that greeted him whenever he entered a village, that would now greet her because of the presence of the male leopard at her side. She realized how hard it must be for Savant to walk into village after village and know each time he did so that the people who lived there were frightened by both the magic he wielded and the fear he would seduce their sons. That they bartered with him because they needed his skills but would never truly welcome or befriend him. No wonder warlocks took male lovers. She had yet to return to her village but she could already feel the mantle of loneliness settling over her.

Aysa rubbed her cheek against his palm and felt more than just comfort. The attraction she'd experienced earlier was still there even if there could be no future with him. He was a warlock and everyone knew that a warlock required a wife with a familiar that matched his own.

"No, I'm not frightened of you. I'm...I'm glad for your company."

An unexpected tear escaped and she tried to pull away, not wanting him to see them as she attempted to regain her control. Savant closed the distance between them. One arm going around her waist while the other caressed her cheek. "It will be all right."

"Do you know a spell to break a familiar bond?" Aysa asked, her stomach lurching as the words passed her lips.

"Do you really wish for such a thing?"

Aysa closed her eyes. Fear for the future, worry about her family, they demanded she say yes. But deep inside her she sensed the leopard's presence, felt as though he held his breath and waited to see if she'd take away the bond he'd been searching for.

In her mind's eye she saw his beauty. His sleek lines and predator's body. His strength and prowess. He was a survivor, as she would be.

"No," she said. "No. I don't wish to break the bond."

Savant's mouth covered hers. His tongue traced the seam of her lips and she opened for him.

The kiss started out as one of comfort. It rapidly became so much more. She whimpered as his hands retraced her body as they'd done by the stream. She wanted to be as naked now as she had been then.

Thoughts of his male companion tried to interfere, but almost as though he was reading her mind Savant's lips and tongue and fingers keep her from pulling away, from retreating. She'd hungered for a man's touch for so long, had been curious for so long that it was hard to battle both her own desires and his.

His cock was a rigid, insistent pressure against her belly and she wanted to touch it, explore it, to know what it felt like to have it pressed inside her. She wanted him to thrust in and out of her as that long ago warlock had done to the dairyman's daughter.

"Savant," she whispered when his kiss ended.

"Say it again," he said, his voice like fingers stroking her wet, swollen folds.

She struggled to think. To remember what he'd called his companion and it came to her along with the sense that it was the leopard's memory and not her own. "What about Sunder?"

"He'll join us when the time is right."

Savant kissed her again before she could truly make sense of his words. His tongue twined with hers, battled with hers as his fingers made quick work of the ties keeping her dress in place. It fell to her feet and she cried into his mouth when his hands covered her breasts, when his fingers took possession of her nipples.

He was her dream lover made flesh. His touch real where the other had only been imagined.

Moisture flooded her channel. Arousal soaked her underwear and filled the air with its scent.

Savant groaned and nearly ripped the scrap of material in his haste to bare her to his touch. He'd been aroused since first coming upon her naked in the water with the leopard. But each moment in her presence, each glimpse of her courage as she accepted what Sunder's bond would mean to her, drove the lust higher.

His body barely felt as if it belonged to him. His cock throbbled like a second heartbeat. The pulse beating in his shaft sending waves of nearly painful need through his balls.

He was starved for the touch and taste and feel of a woman's body underneath his own. Not just any woman—but Aysa. The familiar bond with Sunder made it impossible for Savant to want any other but the woman in his arms.

He hadn't doubted the leopard's ability to know its mate, but the leopard's needs weren't entirely the same as a man's. Until this moment, he hadn't realized how worried he was about his promise to accept the cat's choice.

Aysa's courage and beauty, her strength and acceptance had set that worry aside. "Aysa," he groaned, leaving her mouth in order to trail kisses to her ear as he crowded her, forced her to step backward until they got to the sleeping mats.

He sank to his knees, driven there by the need to bury his face between her thighs and taste her woman's flesh. She jerked in his arms with the first foray of his tongue along her slit and over her clit. He moaned and freed his cock from the confines of his pants. She was a sweet, wet heaven that he never wanted to leave.

"Savant," she cried out and he knew he would never grow tired of hearing her call his name as he pleased her.

Her knees buckled and he eased her to the mats, his face never lifting from the slick folds that held him entranced. His hands gripped her thighs to press them open, to leave her completely exposed so that everything was his to claim.

Savant feasted on her as thoroughly as the leopard would feast on a doe it had taken down in the forest. He licked and sucked and wallowed. His hunger was like a living thing and only when she screamed and thrashed in release did he realize how completely the leopard had moved through the familiar bond.

This was the leopard's price for letting Savant be the first to mount Aysa physically. He would have her body before Sunder did, but it was the leopard that had claimed her first – with the familiar bond and with pleasure.

Savant struggled out of his clothing. Was already panting when he crawled up Aysa's body, kissing and biting and licking his way to her breasts. "Beautiful," he growled before latching on to a pink nipple and sucking.

Exquisite sensation and pounding heat poured through Aysa. "Savant," she whimpered, her fingers twining in his dark hair as she ground her feverish pussy and clit against his muscled abdomen.

In her wildest dreams she'd never thought it would be like this between a man and a woman. She ached despite the pleasure that had erupted in a scream only moments ago. "Savant," she begged, craving the feel of him suckling even as her channel spasmed and her cunt lips became almost painfully swollen, flowering open so her arousal flowed freely, coating her inner thighs and sliding over her back entrance. She ached with the need to have him push into her slit and possess her completely. To share the final mystery with her.

He moaned against skin. His teeth on her nipple blurred the line between pain and pleasure.

Her hands tightened in his hair, her message unclear even to her as she warred with the urge to pull his mouth to hers or hold it to her breast.

Savant clamped down tighter on her nipple, lashed it with his tongue until she was once again writhing desperately underneath him, rubbing her mound and clit against his belly as she pleaded, whimpered. Her words were incoherent but their meaning easily understood.

Only when she was sobbing, completely lost in what he was doing to her did Savant relent and settle between her thighs, his face above hers, his voice a harsh pant as he said, "Put me inside you."

Chapter Five

Aysa reached for him then, touched his male organ for the first time. She wanted to explore, to stroke up and down the amazingly soft skin, but it was too late for that.

“Put me in you,” he commanded again, his cock jerking and straining in her hand.

She placed him at her entrance. Coated the head of him with her slick arousal.

He grunted and pushed. Slid through her fingers and into her tight channel.

She shivered. Loving the feel of him there.

Her fingers had been a pale imitation of what a man’s organ felt like. She knew that now.

Aysa arched and whimpered. She released her grasp on his penis so her hands could go to his shoulders. Her legs wrapped around his waist, trapping him, driving him deeper into her.

Savant’s buttocks clenched as he fought the need to rut on her wildly. She was so tight, so wet, so responsive. “Don’t,” he said when her fingernails lightly scoured his back. The feel of them nearly stripped away his control.

He was knowledgeable enough with the customs of the witch-lands to know she would have remained a virgin until she gained a familiar. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You won’t.” Her legs tightened around his waist. Her pelvis tilted. “Please, Savant. I need you.”

With a groan he covered her lips with his, tried to take her gently. Slowly. But her channel was like a hungry mouth sucking on him. Claiming him. Begging for him to fill her completely. To give her everything.

He swallowed her whimpers and reveled in the way she clung to him, yielded to him, responded in honest passion and not because she hoped to gain a warlock’s service

in exchange for the use of her body. *Aysa*. It became a chant as his hips pistoned. She became his entire reality as his control slipped with each thrust. As the need grew wilder, more demanding with each slide of heated flesh into wet folds.

Their breathing became ragged and their skin slick as they touched, rubbed, two bodies so closely melded they become one. Her orgasm triggered his own, the release so fierce it left him pumping into her even after he'd spent his seed.

Savant knew the moment Sunder shifted from leopard to man. Felt him drawing closer as he climbed the distance to the cave.

Animal hunger filled the small space as Sunder stepped inside. He was naked from the change. His cock was already rigid, his desire to claim *Aysa* no less fierce than the leopard's.

Savant reluctantly rolled to his side, leaving *Aysa* exposed though her eyes remained closed. "This is Sunder," he said, fearing it was too soon to expect her to accept another lover, fearing that she'd recoil even at the thought of it, but there was no way to delay the inevitable moment of truth.

Aysa scrambled to a sitting position and grabbed Savant's shirt to cover herself. Shock coursed through her—not only at the sight of Sunder standing naked above her, but at the sheer exotic beauty of him. He was dark-haired and deeply tanned as Savant was, but his eyes...they reminded her of the leopard's.

Thinking about the leopard opened the familiar link. The cat was close by. Closer than where she'd left him. She felt his willingness to come if she called. She felt his desire to brush against her, to curl around her—protective and possessive at the same time.

Dark undercurrents swirled between the male leopard and her. It was a sensual awareness that pooled the blood in her labia and made her cunt lips grow flushed and hot.

Sunder's nostrils flared as though scenting her arousal. He squatted in front of her and captured her with his eyes. "Beautiful," he said, his voice a purring growl that

lapped at her pussy and made her whimper. He reached for the shirt and easily pulled it from her resisting fingers.

“You can run, but your leopard won’t help you,” he said, and something in his voice warned he would welcome a chase.

“I won’t run,” Aysa heard herself saying above the wild race of her heart. The look in his eyes was every bit as dangerous and predatory as the big cat’s.

Sunder tossed the shirt aside and licked his lips. His gaze roamed her body, devoured her as it halted at her breasts then dropped to her wet folds.

She tried to close her legs but he stopped her, his hands dark against her creamy skin. “No,” he said, sliding his hands up her thighs until they framed her cunt.

Aysa could barely breathe. Could barely think. She felt bespelled and yet she knew it was the power of lust that held her enthralled and not warlock magic.

She’d seen male cats gather around a female in heat. She had witnessed them fighting for the privilege of mating and watched as one after another, the strongest of them had mounted while the weakest were driven away or left to hover in the shadows. She’d wondered...but she’d never thought such a thing might happen between men and women as well.

“Let us give you pleasure,” Savant said as he rose from where he’d been lying and moved to kneel behind her, his front pressed to her back. “Let us both make love to you.”

Aysa’s breath caught in her throat. Heat flared through her breasts and cunt when Savant’s fingers found her nipples. A small moan escaped when Sunder’s thumb brushed her slick lower lips before gliding over the tiny exposed head of her clit.

She leaned forward and Sunder met her halfway. He touched his mouth to hers, his tongue to hers. She’d thought it would be a savage claiming. Instead it was a gentle greeting, a soft exploration at odds with the coiled tension, the fierce need radiating off him.

He became more aggressive when her hands slid down his chest. He growled when she stroked his belly.

Curiosity and the wild rush of newly discovered feminine power guided Aysa's fingers to his cock. There'd been no time to explore with Savant, no chance except for when she had placed him at her entrance.

She shivered when she reached Sunder's rigid penis. Drew away from his mouth so she could look down as she measured his length and width, skimmed over his velvet softness before cupping and weighing his testicles.

He was the perfect match for Savant.

She continued to hold Sunder's heavy sac in one hand as the fingers of the other encircled his penis. It pulsed against her palm, the reaction making her glance at his face.

Erotic fear edged through her at his feral expression.

Sunder growled, a low sound of warning he knew was barely human. His lips pulled back in a silent snarl as he fought the leopard for control.

He'd intended to go slow. To take her gently. But the leopard remained too close to the surface and it needed more. It needed to bury its cock in a female's wet heat.

As if sensing the battle between man and beast, Savant used his hands to urge Aysa to lean forward, his voice persuasive, commanding as he whispered, "Taste him. Put him in your mouth."

Her gaze flashed to Sunder's and his fingers went to her hair, released the casual knot she'd made of it before going into the stream. Savant's joined his, undoing the braid even as Sunder guided her mouth to his straining cock.

It jerked and leaked at the first touch of her tongue, her lips. A growl escaped from Sunder, this one an equal mix of man and leopard.

She explored his heated, rigid flesh as thoroughly with her mouth as she'd done moments before with her fingers. She licked and sucked along its length as she

continued to fondle his heavy testicles. Her unbound hair added to Sunder's torment as it brushed against his thighs.

He held himself tightly under control. Concentrated only on the feel of her lips and tongue, the small sighs of pleasure that escaped from Aysa as he coaxed her to take the exposed head of his penis into her mouth and begin sucking. Her touch was gentle, tentative, so different from Savant's.

He loved Savant and would forever crave the other man's hands and mouth on his cock, but this... A softer growl escaped as Aysa took more of him, took him deeper.

Sunder's buttocks clenched and his hips pumped. Fire raced up his spine, rippled along the leopard's backbone so that inside him it arched like a male mating his female.

With each shallow thrust into Aysa's mouth, each rub of cock against tongue and slick inner walls, the large cat became more satisfied. Accepted this as the homage due it and relinquished control to the man.

Sunder's eyes met Savant's and their earlier conversation passed between them, unspoken but there anyway. *We'll have a wife soon. She'll take us both in her body at the same time and we'll know an even greater ecstasy.*

Savant moved away for a moment to get a potion he'd created. One that would help prepare Aysa for what was to come.

Sunder's attention returned to the woman on her knees before him. His hands went to her neck and shoulders, stroked her smooth skin as he began whispering words of praise. As he told her how much she pleased him.

Aysa devoured Sunder's words. She soaked in his praise and found she craved his approval.

He was Savant's lover. And now he was hers.

She moaned when Savant's hand pressed between her legs. He cupped her mound and rubbed back and forth, collected her arousal, stroking her clit as he did so. She didn't resist when Sunder urged one of her hands away from his cock and guided it to

the cave floor as one of his took its place, holding his organ so she could continue to suck.

Savant eased her into a different position, forced some of her weight onto the one hand so her buttocks were in the air, her knees spread, her cunt exposed, open, available. He played in her folds, his fingers slid into her channel in the same rhythm as she sucked on Sunder's cock.

Aysa lost herself in pure sensation. Revelled in the sounds the men were making and in the way they made her feel utterly feminine, utterly desirable, utterly wanted.

Something in each of them called to her and she didn't allow herself to think of the future. Either hers or theirs. All that mattered was the here and now, this moment of giving and sharing.

She jerked when Savant's fingers left her slit and traveled to her dark entrance, played there with forbidden touches. But Sunder's cock thrusting in and out of her mouth prevented her from protesting, questioning. And all too soon she was pressing back into Savant, shivering as a second finger joined the first, and then a third, burning her as they stretched her.

She clutched at Sunder when he drew his penis from her mouth. But his hand on her hair kept her from leaning forward and recapturing the hard male organ.

He laughed, a husky masculine sound of satisfaction that drew her gaze to his face. "Another time I'll let you swallow my seed, little cat, but not now."

Desire uncurled in her belly at the name he'd given her. It made her see herself as a silky light-colored feline in the throes of first heat.

Aysa's cunt spasmed in reaction. She imagined lowering herself to her elbows and widening her thighs, inviting the males around her to investigate her scent, her wetness, her swollen folds.

Embarrassment rose to her cheeks and she wondered if it was her own affinity for cats that made her feel so wanton, or if it was the leopard familiar she'd gained. She

ducked her head but Sunder's hand cupped her face and forced her gaze back to his. "I have yet to mate with you but already you please me in so many ways."

She turned her head slightly and pressed a kiss into the palm of his hand. She didn't understand why his approval mattered so much. Why she already felt as though there was a connection between them. Maybe it was because he was exotic and beautiful, deadly, like the leopard. Maybe it was because he was Savant's lover as well. It didn't matter. She wanted him. She wanted them both.

Aysa didn't hesitate when Sunder settled on the bedding. She didn't wait for him to command her to put his cock inside her as Savant had done.

She crawled up Sunder's body and guided him home. Cried out as his thick shaft filled her channel.

Chapter Six

Desire coursed through Sunder. Need unlike any he'd ever experienced. His fingers tangled in Aysa's hair and drew her mouth to his.

He could taste himself on her. Could taste the kisses she'd shared with Savant.

He could smell the rightness of her even in his human form.

The leopard was content for the moment. Happy just to be held tightly in its mate's slick, tight sheath. It would insist on more later. On biting Aysa as it covered her while she crouched on her hands and knees.

It would push the limits by rising to press against Sunder's skin. By threatening to take its true form as it fucked its mate hard and fast and with little mercy.

The leopard would need to exert its dominance over her. Would need the taste of her blood and the feel of her yielding submissively beneath him.

But for now it was the man's needs that would be met and Sunder groaned into Aysa's mouth. Very nearly came as Savant's cock worked itself into her back entrance and stroked against his own.

"Relax," he heard Savant say to Aysa, and the command made Sunder aware of how she trembled between them.

He rubbed his tongue against hers to draw her attention away from the cocks that were piercing her, stretching her, perhaps even hurting her.

When some of the tension left her body he slid his hands to her breasts. Cupped and fondled them for the first time. The feel of her tight nipples against his palms made him want to suck and lave and bite. Had him wishing he'd touched and tasted every inch of her skin before settling onto his back and letting her mount him.

Aysa moaned as Sunder's kiss became ravenous. She responded with equal hunger. Used him as her anchor, her fingers tangling in his hair.

The fierce hunger built as Savant's cock pressed deeper and deeper. As it rubbed against Sunder's in the slick wetness of her body. Pumped in and out, the movement driving her clit against Sunder's flesh.

It felt so good to be taken like this. To be surrounded, caught between two straining masculine bodies.

She cried out when Sunder's fingers tightened on her nipples. Felt herself drawing closer to that golden place Savant had already taken her.

They were fucking her but they were also fucking each other.

But what they took, they also gave.

It was darkly erotic, forbidden. And yet the feel of their cocks deep inside her, rubbing, pressing, bathing in her arousal as they enjoyed each other felt so right. The way they kissed and bit and fondled her, made her a part of their love, touched the deepest places in her soul and filled her heart with hope.

She gave herself completely. Welcomed the ecstasy as their thrusts came harder and faster. As pain and pleasure blended and nothing mattered but the sounds of flesh slapping against flesh, of masculine shouts and the hot wash of their seed filling her.

They lay together on their sides for long moments afterward, content to snuggle as hands glided over sweat-slick skin. As lips touched in gentle kisses.

Savant was the first to speak, to suggest a trip back to the stream for a bath. Sunder and Aysa agreed and they rose to their feet and left the shallow cave.

She could sense the leopard's presence but he was well hidden and she couldn't see him. She tried to summon him and felt him stir as if rising from a crouch. Yet he didn't come.

It surprised and puzzled her. Worried her. If the leopard was seen by someone from the village and killed before she could make it known that he belonged to her... Aysa's

heart began thundering. Death often came to a woman who'd lost her familiar. If a hunter saw the leopard, or a herdsman who feared for his animals...

Panic beat in her chest like a falcon's wings. In the village familiars stayed close. In fact, they were rarely out of sight.

To knowingly harm a woman's familiar was a crime with harsh penalties. But to do so accidentally...

"Your leopard is nearby," Sunder said, pulling her to him so her back was against his chest. "He is safe from harm. Close your eyes and feel the truth of it."

She did as Sunder commanded and the warmth from his body soaked into her along with a sense of peace and contentment. Her heartbeat slowed in reaction. Her panic subsided.

The leopard touched her through the familiar bond, seemed almost to pass through her in a sensuous brush of fur and heat. He was nearby. He would come to her later, when it was safer, when the men had finished mounting her. He would be too dangerous until then.

The weight of their connection settled in her cunt, making it clench and weep. The impressions were so strong they were almost words and yet Aysa had never heard of such a thing with a familiar.

She shivered as the leopard's presence rose from where it had pooled. Desire clawed through her pussy and remained even after the familiar bond weakened as if the huge cat had padded away.

"You'll come for me now, little cat," Sunder said, his voice almost a purr as he bent her over so that her hands were braced against a ledge.

She ached where the leopard's spirit had touched. Needed to be covered and taken from behind. Wanted to feel Sunder's teeth gripping her, biting her so that she would bear his mark just as Savant did.

Aysa screamed when Sunder's cock filled her in a single stroke. She kept screaming as he thrust. The sounds escaping her throat were like those of a cat being bred but she couldn't hold them back and didn't want to. They fed the hunger, made Sunder a wild, feral lover. And when his teeth clamped down on her shoulder, her sheath spasmed so violently that darkness rushed toward her in the wake of an explosive wave of pleasure.

Her eyelids fluttered open as cool water slowly encased her lower body. She smiled when she became aware of hard male thighs under her buttocks, a masculine chest against her back, an arm around her waist.

Savant chuckled softly in her ear and said, "Sunder is going to be impossible to live with from now on." And as if in agreement, a raven called from a nearby tree.

Aysa's gaze went to Sunder who lounged a short distance away, his elbows keeping his chest and head above water while the rest of him was submerged. He smiled in satisfaction and despite everything she'd done with them, a touch of color slid into her cheeks.

The sight of it had him laughing and moving to join them. He cupped her face and brushed his thumb over her heated skin before kissing her and saying, "When Savant and I set out to find wife, we never thought to encounter a female like you, little cat. I will never forget this day."

Pain rushed in where only a second before there had been happiness. Tears threatened and Aysa held herself completely still, not daring even to breathe for fear it would end in a sob.

She had put off thinking about the future. Would have gladly put it off even longer. But now she was faced with it. Her gaze went to the tree where the raven sat.

If they were seeking a wife, then it would not be her. It would be a woman with a raven familiar to match Savant's.

She would never forget this day either. Nor would she regret it or ruin it with a display of misery.

She tried to slip from Savant's lap and put some distance between them but his arm tightened at her waist and prevented her escape. As if sensing her emotional retreat, Sunder crowded closer, straddled Savant's legs so that his chest touched hers.

"Please," she said, intending to ask them to release her but the request lodged in her throat and what came out was only the single whispered word.

The leopard stalked down the bond. Agitated.

She had the fleeting sensation it would pounce if she began struggling, though a hasty search of the area around her revealed no sign of the cat.

"What's wrong?" Savant asked and the concern in his voice nearly undid her.

"I..." She swallowed hard against the pain in her chest as she realized that she'd secretly allowed herself to dream of a future with Savant and Sunder. "I should return home. I'm needed there." Or at least she had been. The leopard familiar would make her a burden to her family. It would mean that she would eventually have to leave the village. But at least for today, her aunt's home and her family would be her sanctuary.

"We will go with you," Savant said. "Sunder and I had thought to take you home with us as soon as possible, but we will stay long enough to ensure that your family's needs are met and that you won't worry about their well-being." He kissed the place on her shoulder where Sunder had bitten. "Our home is high in the mountains, Aysa. It will not be possible to return here often."

Confusion filled Aysa. It flooded in along with the return of hope. She licked her lips, suddenly nervous, suddenly afraid to put her wish into words. "You want to take me home with you? But what about your desire for a wife? I...I don't think I could share either of you with another woman."

Tension flowed away from Savant and Sunder. Both of them smiled with masculine satisfaction, but it was Savant who nuzzled her hair and said. "There will be no other woman, Aysa. How could you think we would want anyone other than you for our wife?"

"But what about your raven?"

“My what?”

She pointed to the bird still perched in a nearby tree. “Your familiar. Warlocks always take wives whose familiars match their own.”

Her statement was greeted with amused laughter. Savant said, “Not everything said about warlocks is true. But in this case, you and I share a very special familiar.”

“He belongs to you?” Aysa wriggled free so she could stand and look down at Savant. No wonder he’d known that the huge cat was a snow leopard. “He’s yours? Did you tell him to bind himself to me?”

“He did that on his own, but I agree with his choice.”

She glanced at Sunder who gave her a self-satisfied smile. “Run, little cat, and learn the truth.”

Shock rippled through her. Disbelief.

There were tales of men who changed into animals. But they were just stories to be told around the winter fire. And yet...looking into Sunder’s exotic face with its gray-green eyes...

Aysa turned and ran. Not in fear, but in wonder, in anticipation.

She got as far as the bank before the leopard took her down, its attack coming from the side so she landed on her back, the impact muted by a warlock’s spell. For a moment she was held under the leopard’s body. Felt its luxurious fur pressed to her skin. And then the unbearable pleasure she’d come to associate with Sunder shimmered through her and it was a man who held her to the ground and not the leopard.

“Spread your legs, little cat.”

She glanced to the side and saw Savant kneeling there, his cock full, his face taut with desire.

“Only if Savant joins us,” Aysa said, her cunt flooding as she thought of Savant taking Sunder as Sunder took her.

The men exchanged a heated glance. It was Savant who said, "Your wish is our command."

Aysa laughed and teased. "Always?"

"If you can form a sentence while in our arms," Savant said, leaning forward and taking her nipple in his mouth. Blending pain and pleasure together as he knew she enjoyed.

Sunder joined Savant at her breasts, captured her other nipple and began suckling, his pulls fierce and urgent.

Aysa arched as fire streaked from her nipples to her clit. She moaned and rubbed herself against Sunder's rigid flesh. Tilted her pelvis and tried to entice him to penetrate her as they played at her breast.

He resisted until she was writhing, begging, pleading.

"What do you want now?" Savant asked, leaving her nipple in order to take her mouth in a long wet kiss.

"Anything. Everything. As long as it's with the two of you."

Masculine chuckles met her answer. They deepened when she whimpered in loss as Sunder lifted himself off her.

"You can have what you want in a moment, little cat, but first I need this," he said, repositioning himself to feast on her cunt.

Savant took advantage of Sunder's preoccupation with her lower lips. He recaptured her mouth and thrust his tongue against hers in the same instant Sunder's invaded her channel.

Aysa had been so overwhelmed by emotion and desire earlier that she hadn't noticed before, but she screamed into Savant's mouth at the exquisite torture Sunder's cat-rough tongue inflicted. She bucked and cried and fought—both to escape the pleasure and to gain it. But in the end it found her, shimmered over her and left her boneless with satisfaction.

Savant moved and Sunder reclaimed her mouth, shared the taste of her release with her. He used his thighs to open her unresisting ones and Aysa readily welcomed his cock as he pushed it deep into her channel.

Her hands slid around to Sunder's buttocks and spread his cheeks. Heat flashed through her. Total acceptance. Desire unparalleled as inch by inch Savant forged into the man who was also their shared familiar.

Aysa's heart swelled with happiness as she looked into their faces. Her body knew only pleasure as the dance toward ecstasy began and they gave themselves up to the ancient rhythms. To the soul-deep completion that could only be found when they were together.

About the Author

Jory has been writing since childhood and has never outgrown being a daydreamer. When she's not hunched over her computer, lost in the muse and conjuring up new heroes and heroines, she can usually be found reading, riding her horses, or hiking with her dogs.

Jory welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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