

KITTEN



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# KITTEN

A novella of homoerotic romance by

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## *Chapter One*

"I know you're there. Who are you?"

The rustling leaves sounded loud to Shaun as he tried to hide further in the bushes. Holding his breath, he flattened himself as close to the ground as possible. When the man who had spoken moved slightly, Shaun scrambled backward. Unable to stop the sound, a low, warning pulse erupted from his throat and he stilled completely.

The man, who had been lying on his back, rolled slowly onto his stomach and peered into the brush. "You *are* a were. I won't hurt you. My name is Ashley." He got up and held out his hand. When Shaun didn't respond, the man named Ashley straightened his back. "Come," he said, using the authoritative inflection of a Master; although in his case, apparently one without a pet to control.

An enraged snarl filled the air but was quickly bitten back as the command almost shocked Shaun into obedience. Crawling forward, he slowly left his hiding place.

"I thought so." For a moment, Ashley stilled, looking Shaun over.

Muscular and sleek, Shaun knew he was a rare find even when only half-shifted, especially with his black-and-white striped fur.

"What is your name? If you know the command, then I know you can speak."

"Shaun." Clad only in a black loincloth, very little of him was covered. With fluid motion, he moved to his hands and knees in front of Ashley.

"You don't belong out here."

Ashley reached out and hummed softly. It was a technique used by Masters to calm their pets. He traced the outline of the tattoo etched into Shaun's skin, just at the nape of his neck. It was a procedure done when a were was captured. Once a Master took possession, the star would take on the form of the Master's initial, signifying ownership. Shaun's tattoo was still that of a perfect star, showing that he was unclaimed. The soft trill brought a visible relaxation to Shaun's tense body, though he tried to fight against the effect. Biting at his lip, his head lowered, allowing Ashley to touch him.

"I won't hurt you," Ashley murmured. "How long have you been free?"

The words might have been meant as some form of comfort, but Shaun didn't take them that way. Lifting his head and raising his chin higher in a defiant manner, he said, "For more than two months. I've lived out here on my own."

"You need proper bedding and a bath," Ashley said matter-of-factly. He picked up a cigarette butt from the grass beside him and stood slowly, pushing the butt into one of his jeans pockets. "Come."

Because he was given no choice in the matter, Shaun hissed angrily; but, nonetheless, he followed slowly behind the man. It would do no good to beg to be left out here. He already knew what a prize he'd be viewed as.

Home was no more than a few minutes away. Ashley was grateful that he'd found a place so far outside of the city, but close enough for work. Five minutes later, he held his front door open, standing to the side to let Shaun go in first. Shaun seemed apprehensive as he stepped past him. Once inside, Ashley watched as Shaun took several deep breaths. Apprehension, it seemed, gave way to curiosity, and Shaun slowly prowled around the perimeter of the room, poking into everything.

Closing the front door and locking it, Ashley smiled. He'd had chances in the past to take in a pet, but he'd never found the right one to replace the emptiness within him. Then this beauty had practically fallen into his life. Ashley wasn't surprised that a part of him was already working out the possibility of keeping Shaun with him, of claiming him.

"Would you like something to drink?" He went into the small kitchen, watching Shaun over the bar.

Pausing as he tried to pry open one of the small jars he'd picked up, Shaun looked over at him with a touch of suspicion. "Water."

"Water it is." Ashley took out two glasses and filled them both with ice cold water from the pitcher in the refrigerator. Then he went into the living room and held out one of the glasses to Shaun. "Drink. I will get your bath ready." With that, Ashley walked out, heading down the short hallway to the bathroom.

As Ashley walked away, Shaun shook his head in confusion, staring at the glass in his hand. Aware he needed a bath, he set the jar down and padded silently behind Ashley as he drank.

Setting his glass on the sink counter, Ashley got down on his knees and started the bathwater. Watching from his position, Shaun hadn't expected Ashley to join him. Chiding himself, he should have realized it, though. A Master expected nothing more than a well-behaved pet at his heel, to show off to his contemporaries, and to be a warm body in his bed. If Shaun had any form of luck, cruelty wouldn't be the order of the day. That's about all he could hope for. After finishing the water, he set the glass on the sink.

When the water was deep enough, Ashley turned it off and stood. As he turned around, he looked surprised to see Shaun in the doorway. "I was going to come tell you that your bath is ready. If you don't mind, I'd like to sit and talk while you bathe. If you wish for me to, I'd be happy to wash your hair." Sitting down on the toilet lid, he made no move to take off his clothes.

Just as a well-trained pet would, Shaun took off the small loin cloth and laid it on the edge of the sink. Stepping into the tub, he sank down into the water. The heat felt damn good as he leaned back against the porcelain edge.

"Why?" Shaking his head, Shaun frowned, repeating his question more fully. "Why would you want to wash my hair?"

Ashley just shrugged. "Why not? It would take a fool to not see that you're beautiful. If you don't wish me to, then I won't."

Even though it was part of his nature to adore being touched and petted, Shaun wasn't sure he wanted this stranger to touch him. Yet controlling his own natural instincts while being petted was an impossible task. Leaning slightly towards Ashley, he drew in a slow breath. The earthy scent reached him, a mixture of sunshine and grass underneath the faint smell of tobacco.

"I don't like strong scents," Ashley said with a smile, "and I hate cologne. The best smells in the world are chocolate, nature, and a man's arousal."

"You don't stink." Small favors to be grateful for. As he looked over Ashley, curiosity began to get the better of Shaun. He actually liked the smell, but the man was too far away to do anything more than catch his scent from the air.

"I should hope not," Ashley chuckled. "I took a shower this morning." He slid off the toilet lid and to the floor, kneeling close to the bathtub. "Is that better?"

As Shaun leaned over slightly and turned his head, Ashley was no more than a few inches away from his face. A small chuffing sound came from him before his nostrils flared with the deep breath he took. Inching slowly forward, he got a bit closer. "Yes, you like chocolate." The scent itself came from the direction of Ashley's hands and made Shaun lower his head as he leaned as far over the edge of the tub as he could. "Sweet."

"I love chocolate," Ashley said rather breathlessly.

A heady, muskier aroma slowly tinged the air. It was one Shaun knew very well: Ashley wanted him. Its influence on Shaun was undeniable, yet he fought it. Drawing back, he reached for the bar of soap and washcloth and began washing.

"Will you let me wash your hair?" Ashley asked softly after a few minutes of silence. "I don't have to get in with you to do it."

Shaun gave him a wary look. As he thought over what Ashley asked, he could see nothing bad behind the request. "If you want." Stretching in the tub, he sank beneath the water to wet his hair before he sat back up. Then he wiped the water from his face and settled to let Ashley wash his hair.

Ashley moved closer and picked up the bottle of shampoo. After pouring a generous amount in his hand, he began working his fingers through Shaun's hair, gently untangling it. "So beautiful," he whispered.

Closing his eyes, the massaging of Ashley's fingers served to relax Shaun very nicely. The tiniest flicker of sound eased from his throat, barely perceptible but there. Small tilts of his head guided Ashley's hands as his own fingers kneaded slightly to the porcelain tub's rim.

Ashley picked up a nearby cup and filled it with water. He slipped his hand beneath Shaun's chin to tilt his head back gently. "Shh," he murmured, smiling. "I'm only rinsing."

A touch of nervousness had returned with the feel of Ashley's hand, but Shaun relaxed, letting Ashley rinse out the shampoo. It was a strange thing for this man to want to do this. Blinking up at Ashley, he saw the smile but didn't return the gesture.

When he finished rinsing the shampoo out, Ashley set the cup down and moved away. "Thank you," he said as he sat on the floor, leaning against the wall. "I haven't done that in..." He closed his eyes as his words trailed off. "For some time," he finished quietly.

"It means something to you?" Shaun was not at all certain what to make of Ashley. Slowly standing, water ran down his body in little rivers, dripping back to the tub. Lifting his hands, he pulled back his hair to wring out the water.

"More than I should probably dwell on," Ashley said. "I used to do it for my lover. He was a were as well, although I loathed the thought of calling him my 'pet.' I'd forgotten how relaxing such simple acts could be. Thank you for allowing me that small pleasure."

The concept of a were as a lover to any mortal was completely alien and unknown to Shaun. They were pets and nothing more at the hands of men and women. Staring at Ashley blankly, Shaun couldn't even grasp the idea. He just took the towel hanging nearby and quickly dried himself as he got out of the tub.

"Are you hungry?" Ashley looked up from where he sat, weariness showing in his pale blue eyes. "I haven't eaten since I left work."

Nodding slightly, Shaun laid the towel down and picked up his loincloth. Refastening it around his hips, it barely covered his groin and left most of his ass showing. Then he ran his fingers through his hair, trying to give it some semblance of order.

Ashley struggled to get up, finally finding a good handhold on the sink counter. As he stood, he eyed Shaun and shook his head. "You can't keep going around like that. Follow me. We look to be about the same size; maybe you can wear something of mine." He walked down the hall to his bedroom and started rummaging through the dresser. A moment later, he pulled out a pair of gray sweatpants and a white T-shirt. "It's not much, but it'll be much more comfortable than that."

As Ashley held out the pants and shirt to him, Shaun just stared at him again. Normal clothing was rarely given to pets. Hesitantly, he reached out and took them. Untying the loincloth, he laid the scrap of material on the dresser before he slipped on the clothes.

"Looks good on you," Ashley said with a smile. As he turned, he doubled over and grabbed the edge of the dresser, hissing through gritted teeth.

The sound of Ashley's pain drew Shaun's attention quickly back to the man. Reaching out, he gripped Ashley's arm, supporting him. "Are you all right?"

Ashley laughed, although there was little humor to it. "Yes, yes. Thank you. Just an old back injury that likes to flare up if I move wrong." Looking up, he gave Shaun a weak smile. "How about that dinner?" With a groan, he righted himself, grasping Shaun's hand briefly in gratitude.

"I can help," Shaun said somewhat hesitantly. Letting go of Ashley, he stood there, uncertain. "In half-form, I have energy to ease pain; I just can't fully heal anyone."

Ashley hesitated for a minute, then nodded. "I suppose it would help if I plan on cooking. What do I need to do?"

"Just take off your shirt and lay down on your stomach on the bed."

Nodding, Ashley turned and pulled his shirt off. Then he stretched out on the bed, pillowing his head on his arms. Deep scars criss-crossed his back, but Shaun said nothing about them. After removing his clothes, Shaun approached the bed slowly. Leaning over, he rested his hands lightly on Ashley's back before slowly rubbing them over his skin. Heat radiated from him, giving his touch an immediate anesthetic effect as he massaged.

"Oh, God," Ashley moaned. "That feels good, Shaun. Really good." Moving his arms up to grip the edge of the mattress, he slowly stretched, the muscles tightening and releasing beneath Shaun's hands. Ashley turned his head to the side and closed his eyes.

"It is easy to relieve pain, but I can't do anything about why you are in pain," Shaun said as the warmth from his touch seeped deeper into Ashley's skin, relaxing the muscles beneath.

"No one can. What's done is done. I tried. I tried to stop them, Shaun. I loved him with everything I was, and they took him from me." Ashley shook his head suddenly. "Thank you; it helped more than you can imagine." He rolled over and smiled, reaching up to stroke Shaun's cheek softly.

With the unexpected touch, Shaun purred. He adored being petted. He tilted his head and rubbed instinctively to Ashley's palm.

"So soft." Ashley cupped Shaun's face in his hand, then slid his hand back over Shaun's head. Shaun's hair was black and white, like his fur, and even though his body was that of a man's, his fur still covered his body. "Kitten."

The deeper rumbling of the purr formed before Shaun could stop it. His innate nature sought and craved the feel of a hand running over him. Sitting at the edge of the bed, he let Ashley touch him. As he closed his eyes, small movements of his head and face nudged those hands, guiding them.

Moving his fingers slowly over the soft fur, Ashley sighed. "Am I insane for wanting this? For wishing I could do this forever?" He moved his hand slowly, brushing the pad of his thumb over Shaun's lips.

Anything Ashley said might as well have been in a foreign language. Shaun wanted nothing more than for that hand to continue petting him. When Ashley's hand neared his lips, his tongue darted out, tasting at the salty flavor of Ashley's skin. The faint rasp of his tongue bathed the length of Ashley's finger as the steady thrum of his purring rose around them. He had to lick; he had to be petted. When Ashley didn't pull his hand away, Shaun proceeded to wash his entire hand. He wanted to curl up near Ashley, just to feel that touch.

"Kitten," Ashley whispered, lifting his other hand. Starting at Shaun's cheek, Ashley stroked his fingers slowly over him, moving down Shaun's neck to his shoulder. "Come," he said softly, gently urging Shaun down to the bed. "Dinner can wait for a bit. This is more important, needed."

The one word spoke deeply to the animal inside Shaun, and was the true nature of the control humans had over his kind. He needed no encouragement and instantly curled against Ashley. Tipping back his head, he exposed his throat, craving that touch. It couldn't stop just yet; he wasn't ready for it to.

Turning on his side to face Shaun, Ashley petted him, his fingers stroking the soft fur of Shaun's throat, then down the middle of his chest. Then he leaned forward just enough to kiss the tip of Shaun's nose.

The flick of Shaun's tail darted sporadically in the air before it curled to Ashley's hip. With the close proximity of Ashley's face, Shaun turned his head to rub his cheek against Ashley's before he quickly began licking it. The arch of his body followed the path of Ashley's hand, never allowing it to stray far from him.

"Sweet Kitten," Ashley murmured, turning his head slightly to brush his lips over Shaun's.

Ashley never stopped petting. His hand slowly moved over Shaun's neck, shoulder, and down his side. Shaun gave him a quick lick before he continued downward to Ashley's jaw. Once satisfied with his taste of Ashley, he stopped giving Ashley a tongue bath and rested his head to Ashley's chest.

"Don't leave me," Ashley said quietly. He rubbed his cheek over Shaun's hair as he curled his fingers to Shaun's hip, petting the fur there.

Shaun remained where he was, content to let Ashley pet him, the soft thread of his purring never stopping as long as he was being petted. As he dozed, an occasional flick of his tail would bat near Ashley's hand. Anything more was beyond him just then.



## Chapter Two

The smells of steak, shrimp, and mixed vegetables filled the small apartment, and Ashley hummed along to the radio, not paying much attention to the song that was playing. His back wasn't giving him any trouble and he figured he had a certain Kitten to thank for that.

He stopped after flipping the steaks and shrimp over in the pan. Kitten. Good God, he'd already given Shaun a nickname. Chuckling to himself, he started humming again. A few minutes later, Shaun wandered into the kitchen, yawning and stretching.

Ashley smiled. "Good evening," he said as he got out two plates and the silverware. He set two places at the small dining room table before turning back to cooking their dinner. "I hope you got some good sleep. I know I desperately needed that nap."

Shaun nodded. It'd been awhile since he could sleep safely and not be on high alert. He watched as Ashley set the table. At first, he wondered if somebody else was coming over for dinner. Moving towards one of the cabinets, he slid to the floor and sat cross-legged, not too far away from Ashley.

"A guest coming?"

"No. Why?"

Ashley looked down at him, cocking his head to the side. He took the pan from the burner and put the steaks and shrimp on a large serving platter, then surrounded them with the steamed vegetables. Glancing over at the table then back at Ashley, Shaun gave him a confused look. Pets were expected to eat on the floor, and Shaun waited patiently for Ashley to give him a bowl of food. Though the scents of steak and shrimp were mouthwateringly delicious, he didn't expect he'd be given even a morsel of it.

Ashley took the food to the table, then crouched down on the balls of his feet before Shaun. "I do not take pets. Although I do have...unusual tendencies, I will not take a living creature as a pet without consent. Your place is at the table. I would be delighted if you would join me."

"But you have taken me as your pet." As far as Shaun was concerned, there was no other reason Ashley would have let him into his home. He was a were, nothing but a pet to humankind.

Ashley sighed and stood, pulling Shaun to his feet. "No, I have not. I brought you here because I could not bear to see you survive out there. I am a Master, Shaun, but not in the sense of owning a pet. Illian—my former lover—was my sub, my submissive lover. It was something we both consented to. I do not believe in *owning* a pet."

"You brought me to your home because you didn't want to leave me in the woods?"

"Call it a weakness if you will," Ashley said as he steered Shaun to the table. "Now eat. There is plenty here and if you are still hungry when this is gone, I will gladly fix something more for you." Ashley sat down in his own chair and looked at Shaun expectantly.

Bewildered, Shaun paused for a moment beside the chair before finally settling into it. Looking over at Ashley, he wasn't sure if he dare reach for the food or not. "I couldn't hunt in the park because people would have noticed."

Nodding to the plate full of food, Ashley said, "I imagine so. Now eat your fill. There is no reason to fear me, nor should you fear any repercussions for anything. Most people wouldn't allow even a family dog to sleep with them in their bed, yet I often requested Illian sleep however he wished, which was usually half or full-shifted."

Tilting his head, Shaun regarded Ashley with a good bit of curiosity. It was beyond unusual that any Master would give his pet such freedom. Returning his attention to the food set out before them, he carefully transferred one of the steaks and a couple pieces of shrimp to his plate. Unlike most pets, most of whom had been trained from a young age, he knew how to use such things as forks and knives.

"This Illian, he was like me. A cat?"

"No, no. Illian was a wolf in true form. Not a werewolf, who doesn't have a choice; but a shape shifter who chooses to shift back and forth. I rescued him from a pet hunter and fell in love immediately." Ashley's expression turned thoughtful for a moment before he continued. "Someone found out that I treated him as a lover and not a pet. I was reported and they came in while I was at work. I knew the moment it happened, like a stab to my heart. The scars on my back, and thus my back problems, came about as I tried to save him."

Shaun stopped in mid-bite to stare at Ashley in outright shock. When he found his voice, he asked in a whisper, "You risked your life to try to save a shifter?"

"I risked my life for what I believed in, for the one I loved more than life itself. And I would do it over again should the need ever arise."

"You risk much in your beliefs." Shaking his head, Ashley's words were beyond Shaun's comprehension. "I wasn't raised as a pet, but I still know a lot of the ways of human masters."

Shaun's appetite soon got the better of him and he fell silent as he ate. He devoured the steak and few pieces of shrimp before he took more of the shrimp. He wasn't much for vegetables and would only occasionally eat them. Most times he'd turn his nose up at them altogether. His primary weakness, however, was sweets.

"Will you stay with me?"

Looking up from his plate, Shaun blinked at Ashley. Unless he wore the mark of a master, anybody could and would enslave him the moment they saw him. Shaun would lay any amount of gold on the possibility that another wouldn't be as kind as Ashley was proving to be. "I think it's the other way around. Outside that door, I am free game to whatever Master takes me."

Ashley smiled and stood. "Excellent." He went into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. After several seconds of grumbling, he crowed happily. A moment later, he walked up behind Shaun. "Close your eyes and open your mouth, Kitten."

Settling back in the chair, Shaun's stomach felt nicely full for once. Eyeing Ashley with curiosity for a second, he finally closed his eyes and opened his mouth. Ashley brushed the hair from his neck, revealing his tattoo. Just as Ashley slipped the piece of chocolate candy into his mouth, he pressed his lips to the tattoo. The design pulsed and when Ashley pulled away, the star had taken on the shape of the letters A and G.

The luscious flavor of sweet chocolate melted over Shaun's tongue, and he barely felt the stinging pain at the nape of his neck. Yet he was aware Ashley had taken him as his pet, and he was forever branded with Ashley's mark unless Ashley sold him. Something in him rebelled, trying to reject the notion, but he'd already been trained to accept it.

"I wasn't always a pet."

"You are not a pet now," Ashley whispered, turning Shaun's face towards his. "But you are safe." He kissed Shaun softly then, his tongue sliding across Shaun's lips before he pulled away slightly. "I didn't do it because I want a pet. I did it to keep you safe."

Shaun wasn't sure how close he truly wanted Ashley to be, and he didn't yet fully trust in any of this. "I think I understand why you did. It just doesn't make much sense. Most would prefer to own me for themselves or want the gold I could bring them."

"I will not lie to you," Ashley said as stroked his hand over Shaun's hair. "I desire you greatly, but I will not take a lover if he does not want me as well. You are safe here, although if you venture out—or if we venture out together—then it might be prudent to put on the air of you being my pet."

Shaun wanted that touch and his head tipped toward Ashley's hand. The simplest touch made his body long to feel the smooth strokes. "Others will expect you to treat me as they would. There is no way to hide what I am."

"In public, there will be no choice." Ashley slid the fingers of both hands through Shaun's hair.

First Shaun's head nudged to one hand then the other, trying to get the full effect from both. A purr started in his throat, though it died off as he spoke. "If you want to do this, I can only be grateful you are willing to keep me safe."

"I only ask one thing in return," Ashley said. Leaning close, he brushed his lips across Shaun's. "One kiss. Please."

Shaun opened his mouth to speak, but when he felt the touch of Ashley's lips, he remained silent. His tail twitched with a small frenetic burst of nervousness, yet he didn't pull away.

"Kitten." The word was more breathed than said as Ashley brought their mouths together, his tongue sliding over Shaun's lips before slipping into his mouth to taste.

It felt strange to be coaxed into a kiss, but Shaun couldn't help but respond to it. A small sound rose in his throat as Ashley's tongue stroked over his. Tipping his head slightly upward, he pressed their lips more tightly together, the gesture a small sign of acceptance.

"Thank you," Ashley said, pulling away slowly. "Bed? I'll pet you until you're asleep."

That's all Ashley had to say. Blinking up at him, Shaun nodded. He could curl anywhere for hours as long as a petting was part of the offer. This place was already starting to look like heaven.

Taking Shaun's hands in his, Ashley led the way back to the bedroom. The dishes could wait until tomorrow. Saturday was for cleaning. Right now, he had a Kitten to pet.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Shaun watched him with bright curiosity. Ashley could tell Shaun was a bit more comfortable now, rather than apprehensive as he had been before. Not being forced into any of this, or being chained and treated as a normal pet, he knew it would help Shaun to accept himself and his new home.

Shaun stretched out on the bed and quickly curled up on one side, giving Ashley room to climb in. Ashley got into bed and tugged the covers over them as he pulled Shaun to him. Settling on his side to face Shaun, he moved closer, unable to resist the urge to nuzzle the soft fur at the hollow of Shaun's throat. He exhaled softly, loving the way the fur warmed beneath his lips. His right hand stroked over Shaun's side and down to his hip. When Shaun's tail flicked his hand, Ashley reached out and played with it.

Nudging in against him, Shaun seemed very comfortable. His head fell back, eyes closing as Ashley petted him. When Shaun's fingers kneaded gently to Ashley's chest, Ashley gasped and pushed closer, fingers stroking Shaun's tail.

"Kitten."

The flex and clawing of Shaun's nails continued to knead against Ashley as a soft, rippling purr vibrated from the werecat's throat. Ashley kissed Shaun's chest, then started to pull away slightly as he felt himself growing hard again. Shaun looked at him and blinked, a questioning look in his eyes.

"I want you," Ashley groaned. "Want you so bad it hurts." He reached out, just to keep touching, petting. "Won't ever stop petting you, Kitten."

## *Chapter Three*

As had become Shaun's habit over the last few weeks, he sat cross-legged on the couch, waiting for Ashley to come home. His eyes kept drifting between the door and the leash and collar on the nearby small table. He knew the minute Ashley walked in that they were going shopping. In public, Ashley would have to treat him as a normal pet, but he was too excited at the chance to shop to care.

The door opened and Ashley smiled immediately. "Hello, Kitten. I'd hoped to get home sooner." He closed the door, set his keys on the bar, and dropped his bag to the floor. Then he walked over to Shaun and held out a hand to him. "I've been looking forward to our shopping trip. Have you, Kitten?"

Bounding from the couch, Shaun nearly tackled him before the bag hit the floor. "You promised me." A soft purr vibrated from his throat as he rubbed his face to the front of Ashley's shirt.

Laughing, Ashley hugged him tight. "Yes, I did. Are you ready?"

Nudging against Ashley with the hug, Shaun nodded eagerly before tipping his head back slightly for him, ready for the collar.

"Kitten..." The pet name was whispered as Ashley stared at him. "Please...a kiss?"

Nodding slightly, Shaun hummed softly in anticipation as he leaned in towards Ashley.

Ashley smiled just before his mouth covered Shaun's. His tongue slid across his Kitten's lips, then between them. He moaned happily, content enough to drink in his Kitten's taste—rich, sweet, and earthy. Fingers in Shaun's hair, Ashley held on and knew he was caught—hook, line, and sinker. Shaun's fingers curled to the front of his shirt as he nudged closer to Ashley. After allowing them both a few more minutes of indulgence, Ashley pulled away slowly, peppering Shaun's cheek with kisses until he reached his Kitten's ear.

"Shall we?"

Seeming vaguely disappointed when the kiss ended, Shaun's expression quickly changed to one of excitement as he waited for Ashley to put the leash and collar on him. No ordinary leash and collar, the black leather was chased with an intricate silver filigree design. When Ashley had put it on the table the night before, Shaun had studied it at length.

"I don't like this whole collar business," Ashley said as he stepped away to get the collar and leash, "so I decided that, if we're going to use them, they have to mean something." Picking up the collar, he fingered the design absently as he walked back over to Shaun. "I wanted something special, something only for us."

He slid the collar under Shaun's hair and fastened it around his neck, taking great care to make sure it wasn't too tight. "I had this made for you yesterday. I was afraid it wouldn't be done in time for our shopping trip, but there were no orders in front of mine."

The small chain that dangled from the edge of the leather glistened against Shaun's black and white fur. He reached up to touch the collar. "I thought you did. I've never seen anything like it in the pet department of the stores. It's somehow special, but I'm not sure how."

Ashley smiled as he slid his hand through the loop at the end of the chain. "Because it's ours," he said simply. After fastening the leash, he grabbed his keys and opened the door. Once Shaun was out, he closed and locked it. "There are some nice stores just a block from here. Do you like leather?"

"Normally I don't like much when it comes to clothing. It tends to make me uncomfortable."

Nodding, Ashley said, "Okay, we can work with that. I'll take you into the shops and you can find what you like. How does that sound?" He looked over at Shaun and smiled as they stepped out onto the busy sidewalk.

As they walked, people turned their heads and stared. Some looked like they'd seen a god, while

others simply looked envious. Ashley held his head up and smiled proudly, never once letting Shaun fall behind. He made certain they walked together—side by side, Shaun in half-form.

Appearing oblivious to everybody else, Shaun wondered if he could talk Ashley into buying a few things for him. He wouldn't push it, though he really did want another loincloth that covered more than the one he wore. It was about the only thing he could wear in his half-form. Giving Ashley a surreptitious side glance, Shaun found his Master was watching him.

"Are we going to get something to eat, too?"

"We'll do whatever you want, Kitten," Ashley said, smiling. "Are you hungry now?"

Shaun nodded.

"Then eating it is." Ashley stopped in front of a restaurant and perused the menu pages taped to the window. "Do you like Chinese?"

When Shaun nodded again, Ashley opened the door and entered the restaurant. A young woman greeted them, but addressed Ashley. "Is it just you and your pet tonight, sir?"

"Yes, and I would like a private table, please."

"Right this way."

Ashley smiled over at Shaun as they followed the woman to a table behind a partition. It was low to the floor, with a short chair and a pile of silk pillows. Nodding to the pillows, Ashley said, "Sit, Kitten," as he sat on the chair. Looking up at the woman, he continued. "Please just bring us both some water for now."

Shaun settled on the floor near Ashley's leg. The press of his body wedged tightly to Ashley as he glanced up at him. Then his attention was diverted by the glimpse he caught just beyond the edge of the partition. Others were dining and many had their pets in tow as well. All of the weres were kept leashed and close to their owners. None of them were allowed to be in their full animal form in the restaurant.

The most common pet was wolf, and there were several in the restaurant, ranging from silver to black. From his position, Shaun could also see at least two cats. One was a panther, and the other a lion. Within the werecat breeds, tigers and lions seemed to be the most common, though any white version of either was a highly rare and prized creature. That alone explained the curious, and rather envious, stares Shaun and Ashley received.

"You are much more beautiful," Ashley said, dropping a soft kiss on the top of Shaun's head. The tender display caught them a few stares and Shaun tried to ignore them. It was uncommon for owners to show tenderness to their pets, but Ashley didn't seem to care.

"What can I get you this evening?" the waitress asked as she set their waters on the table.

"I will have the shrimp lo mein, with steamed rice. My pet will have the shrimp and fish treats." Ashley handed her the menus.

A small, pulsing purr echoed Shaun's approval before he laid his head against Ashley's leg, rubbing his cheek against him. Content for the moment, a bright inquisitive gaze roamed over what he could see. He wasn't the only one looking. The panther was watching him with just as much curiosity.

"Oh, that smells wonderful," Ashley said as the waitress put their food in front of them a few minutes later.

"Anything else I can get you?"

"No, this is quite fine for now. Thank you." After she left, Ashley picked up one of the shrimp from Shaun's bowl and held it in front of Shaun. "Open wide, Kitten," he coaxed teasingly.

Shaun opened his mouth to take the offering of shrimp and licked at Ashley's fingers. After eating the first piece, he mewled softly, begging for more.

Picking up a piece of fish, Ashley rubbed Shaun's lips with it, teasing him as he lifted it up. When Shaun's head was tilted back, mouth open expectantly, Ashley kissed him. Shaun licked Ashley's lips playfully before he lowered his head to snag the piece of fish from Ashley's fingers. When a man moved around the divider and crouched down in front of him, Shaun blinked but didn't say anything.

After studying Shaun for a moment, the man looked over at Ashley. "Exquisite markings on this one. I'd like to offer a le standard gold for him, if you're interested."

Eyes narrowing, Ashley all but growled, "He's not for sale."

The man shook his head. "A pity. I have a white female. You wouldn't consider breeding him, would you? I'll offer a half cut of the sales on the litters. Why don't you think about it?" Digging into his pocket, he pulled out a gold card case and opened it. He took out one of his business cards and placed it on the table in front of Ashley. With a smile, he straightened from his position. Giving one last look at Shaun, the man returned to his own table.

Ashley said nothing; he just glared at the man as he walked away. Then he looked down at Shaun. It was still a considerable sum to breed, but there was just no way he could do it—not to himself, and not to Shaun. He then smiled and picked up another shrimp, feeding it to Shaun before he started on his own dinner. All the while, he kept glaring at anyone who looked their way, his right arm tightening around Shaun's shoulders. He remained quiet for the rest of their meal. He knew this was something they'd have to talk about: his resistance to such things. When he was done, he pushed his dishes away and left the money on the table with the check.

"Are you done, Kitten?"

"I'm done." In a graceful movement of muscle, Shaun stood and moved with Ashley towards the door.

Back outside, away from the others, Ashley let out the breath he hadn't been aware he'd been holding. He stopped walking suddenly and turned, pulling Shaun close for another kiss. This one, however, held a touch of desperation in it as Ashley all but clung to Shaun, not caring what others might think. Shaun's lips molded tightly to his as a soft, rolling purr filled the kiss.

Drawing back, Shaun looked at him questioningly. "Is something wrong, Master?"

Ashley rested his forehead to Shaun's and closed his eyes, breathing in his Kitten's scent. "Just unnerved, Kitten," he said quietly. "I can't stand the thought of sharing you, even if it's only to breed."

"I thought you would want the gold," Shaun sounded relieved.

Ashley remained silent for several seconds, drawing back to look into Shaun's eyes. Then he just smiled. "No amount of money can replace you." Leaving it at that, he took Shaun's hand and led him towards one of the shops a few doors down from the restaurant.

It was market day and the shopping square was filled with people. Before they entered the store, Shaun caught sight of the Institution's center stage sale of werecreatures. If he hadn't escaped them, he'd be one of the ones performing for prospective buyers. Saying nothing, he simply edged closer to Ashley as they walked.

Sliding his arm around Shaun's shoulder, Ashley said, "You are with me now."

"They would have eventually caught me," Shaun whispered as he plastered himself to Ashley's side. Ashley's fingertips brushed the dark tattoo on his neck and a soft, rolling purr vibrated Shaun's throat with the touch.

As soon as they walked into the shop, Ashley pulled him to a corner out of the way. "You're safe now, Kitten. I promise you that." He smiled and kissed Shaun softly. "Now, let's go see what you can find." Turning Shaun around, he steered his Kitten toward the back of the store where the pet supplies were kept.

With a nod, Shaun smiled at him. "I know. I belong to you."

As they wandered the aisles, Shaun nosed around and stopped occasionally to look at something that had caught his interest. When they reached the clothing section, his steps considerably slowed, but he didn't say anything.

Smiling, Ashley leaned closer to whisper in his ear. "Yes, Kitten?"

Shaun quickly gave him a side glance before he shook his head slightly. Swallowing the sigh, Ashley just shook his head. This was going to take a lot of work on both of their parts. He resorted to watching Shaun closely, noting which things his Kitten lingered over.

"Oh. This is a nice one, Kitten." He picked up a soft, velvety black loincloth. Holding it up against Shaun, he smiled. "It looks beautiful. You like it, yes?"

Shaun nodded quickly. "I like it."

"Then we'll get three," Ashley said as he picked up two more. "Is there anything else you wanted to look at?"

Shaun blinked and shook his head. "I was hoping you would buy me one."

Ashley grinned. "I was hoping you would speak up and tell me what you wanted. Guess only time will lead to that." Giving him a kiss, Ashley started for the cashier.

Shaun trotted happily behind Ashley and waited patiently beside him as he paid for the clothing. He wasn't quite yet used to being allowed to say what he wanted. He knew it placed a burden on Ashley to have to read him, but he really didn't understand it any other way.

Once the items were bagged, Shaun walked obediently beside Ashley as they left the store. Not too far away, a woman was inspecting one of the werewolves. The Institute dealer stood beside her as the woman ran her hand over the wolf's soft fur.

"He's very responsive, ma'am. The Institute has certified him as fully trained in a number of arts to be most pleasing to a new Mistress."

As her hand lowered to the wolf's genitals, the were's hips quickly nudged against her. Lowering his eyes, the wolf glanced away as Shaun looked at him. Shaun knew him very well; the were had been trained to perform, and had little to no control over his own responses. Shaun had run from the Institute before they could advance him to that particular training.

"And what are you asking for this one, Shafel?" the woman asked as her fingers lingered over the wolf's cock.

Giving the werewolf one last glance, Shaun smiled at him. He hoped the were's new owner would be as kind as Ashley was to him. Shaun had seen the wolf at the Institute a few times and even knew his first name.

Ashley growled and gripped Shaun's hand tighter. Shaun followed hurriedly behind him, trying to keep up. Not understanding why Ashley was suddenly impatient to get home, Shaun eyed him silently.

The second they stepped into their apartment, Ashley dropped the bag from the store and ran to the bathroom. Seconds later, Shaun heard him throwing up, then the toilet flush. Bewildered, he headed towards the bathroom and hovered in the doorway. Watching Ashley with concern, he finally stepped forward and laid his hand on Ashley's shoulder.

"I'm fine, Kitten," Ashley muttered. He slid a hand up over Shaun's as he wiped his mouth with the hand towel from the counter. "Just a demon from the past I'd never thought I'd see again."

Taking his Master's hand, Shaun pulled Ashley back to his feet. "Somebody bad enough to make you sick?"

"That woman...the one inspecting the wolf." Ashley looked up at him. "She sold Illian to me. She beat him to within an inch of his life on a regular basis."

"I was hoping Kal would be treated nicely. Like you treat me."

Resting his head on Shaun's shoulder, Ashley drew in a shaky breath. "In this city, they don't care," he growled.

"A friend of mine might. I knew him before I went to the Institute. He works with the CPG. He might know somebody who could, maybe, do something?"

Shaun knew there was some kind of movement among the mortals who wanted laws to protect the weres, but the idea had yet to fully catch on. One of his neighbors in his old neighborhood had been an activist, and Shaun had occasionally helped him. He just wasn't sure if Chester could do anything about this.

"CPG?" Ashley blinked in confusion. Then it seemed to dawn on him. "The Creature Protection Grid. Yes! Who is he? We'll get in touch with him about her, whether she buys Kal or not."

"Chester was seriously into it, and I helped him every once in a while before I was taken. He told me some of the enforcers were sympathetic to helping weres. You just had to know which ones. We could go see him tomorrow. I don't think it would bother him that I'm a weretiger."

Ashley nodded. "Then we will do that."

While there was no guarantee Chester could help, it made Shaun feel better to at least try. Sliding his arms around Ashley, he clung to his Master as he nuzzled Ashley's neck.

## *Chapter Four*

Ashley knocked on the nondescript wooden door, then looked over at Shaun. "I sure hope he can help."

Looking around somewhat nervously, Shaun's gaze kept returning to the yard next door before he finally pulled himself together. He'd talked Ashley into getting off work early to do this because he didn't want to chance running into his parents, and for his own reasons he refused to take any form other than fully human right now.

A minute later, a young man opened the door. His dark brown hair stood in peaks at odd angles and he was dressed in an overly large gray T-shirt and jeans. Blinking at Shaun, he looked completely surprised. "Shaun?"

Shaun gave him a hesitant smile. "Hello, Chester. I thought we could talk to you?"

"Damn, Shaun." Grabbing a hold of Shaun's hand, Chester dragged him into the house as he threw a smile at Ashley. "Come on in."

Ashley closed the door and returned Chester's smile, though his own seemed a little more wary. "Hi," he said, extending a hand to Chester. "Ashley."

"Nice to meet you, Ashley." Chester gave Ashley's hand a quick, firm shake before he turned back to Shaun. "I was so fucking pissed off when your parents threw you into the Institute. The Palmers and Mrs. Jenners tried to petition the Institute to get you, but by the time the paperwork cleared, they said you had escaped."

"I didn't know," Shaun said, surprised. "Thanks for trying, Chester. Tell them thank you for me."

"Guess we did come to the right guy." Ashley looked at Shaun. When Chester gave him a curious look, Ashley continued. "Do you know Illa Jacobs? She's a well-known purchaser and breeder of wolves."

Chester shook his head. "Not a name I've come across, but I can check the files to see if there's anything on her. Why?"

"Illa Jacobs sold me my first...pet," Ashley explained. "When he came to me, he was badly beaten, clearly mistreated in some of the worst ways possible. We saw her yesterday, looking to buy another wolf. I fear for any others that might be in her possession."

Chester didn't seem all that surprised. "What's your area?" Moving towards his desk, he opened a file cabinet and began leafing through the folders.

"We're in New Roth, Chester." Shaun answered for Ashley.

Darting a quick look at Ashley, Chester seemed to catch on quickly to the unique relationship since Ashley made no attempt to reprimand Shaun. "Okay, let's see what I got."

As Chester opened one of his folders, he hummed softly for a moment before he said, "You are in luck. Enforcer Narson runs the twenty-seventh district. He has an excellent record for pushing punishment as far as he can. And as far as Illa Jacobs goes..." Trailing off, he closed the folder and went to his computer. After a moment of typing, a status file appeared on his screen.

Reading the text, Chester murmured, "Oh, this is a nice lady. There've been several complaints placed against her. Maybe it's time to match her with Narson and see what comes up."

Moving to stand behind Shaun, Ashley slid his arms around Shaun's waist and rested his chin on his shoulder. Shaun rested his hands against Ashley's and purred softly as he turned his head slightly to look at him.

"It doesn't surprise me in the least to know she has complaints lodged against her." Ashley shrugged. "I'll see her to prison for a very long time if I can."

After clicking a button to print out the report, Chester looked over at Ashley. "I can give you what



the CPG has on her. But I'll warn you, there's nothing Narson can do about the prior complaints. They've already been dismissed by other Enforcers. But if you talk to him, he might tell the Area Commander to forward any more reports with her name on them. He's not going to be able to do anything until somebody files another complaint."

Sighing, he took the paper from the printer and handed it to Ashley. "I can see you're Shaun's owner, and I'm glad to see you're concerned about the situation."

"I don't keep pets," Ashley said as he took the paper. "I claimed Shaun to keep him safe, not to declare ownership. I care greatly for him. Thank you very much."

Chester smiled wryly. "Not many would see it that way, but it's good to hear you know the distinction."

"He does make me happy and keep me safe, Chester."

Nodding to Shaun, Chester smiled at both of them. "I wish you luck taking care of Jacobs."

"Thank you," Ashley said. Kissing Shaun's shoulder, he whispered, "Are you ready to go, Kitten?"

"Can I come see you again, Chester?" Shaun asked uncertainly.

"Sure, any time you want, Shaun. You could always help me stuff envelopes again." Chuckling, he took hold of Shaun's hand, giving it a squeeze before releasing it.

"It was a pleasure meeting you, Chester." Ashley shook Chester's hand again and opened the door. He held it open for Shaun, then closed it behind them. "Well, that went better than I'd expected."

As they left Chester's house, Shaun took hold of Ashley's hand. "I thought he might help. He was always very loud about the CPG."

"Home, Kitten?"

"Sounds like a good idea to me." Shaun only looked in the direction of his old home once before he completely dismissed his old life.

"You okay?" Ashley asked him, nudging Shaun's shoulder gently with his as they walked.

"I'm fine." He gave Ashley a reassuring smile before getting into the car.

The trip home was quick, but quiet. Ashley's thoughts kept wandering back to Illa Jacobs, then to Illian, and finally to Shaun. He'd loved Illian with everything he was, and now, he was headed in the same direction with Shaun. He only wished it was mutual. He wanted the closeness he'd had with Illian; he wanted it with Shaun.

"Home sweet home," he said as he parked the car in front of their apartment building. Giving Shaun a half-smile, he got out.

Shaun led the way to their door. Once inside, Ashley set the keys and papers on the counter and went into the kitchen. It wasn't often he drank, but he needed a drink now. He pulled out a bottle from the cabinet and opened it, pouring a small bit into a glass sitting on the countertop.

"Ashley?"

"Kitten...I'm so sorry..." Ashley knew he wasn't making much sense, but after Shaun's reaction last time, he wasn't sure how to broach the subject now. "I just..." He sighed and took another drink of the bourbon.

Tilting his head, Shaun's expression became curious as he moved closer to Ashley. The playful nudge of his body pushed against Ashley's as Shaun lifted his head for a kiss. A teasing flick of his tongue licked at Ashley's lips and he purred softly.

"Kitten..." Ashley murmured, tongue sliding out to lick Shaun's. "I want you so much..." The second the words were out, he wished he could have taken them back.

Shaun's lips drifted over his cheek before Shaun lowered his head to bury his face against Ashley's neck. Ashley knew it really wasn't a subject Shaun knew how to deal with quite yet. He shivered and let out a ragged sigh.

"Come on, Kitten...let's go lay down, maybe have some petting time."

## *Chapter Five*

After that night, Shaun shifted to full tiger form and remained that way for weeks. During the day, he roamed the neighborhood, playing with the children at the nearby park. Not surprisingly, during this time the reported cases of attempted child kidnappings severely decreased. It seemed a white tiger was an excellent deterrent to the black market engineers who sporadically captured children for illegal genetic experiments. Though the laws were harsh against people who genetically altered mortals into weres to sell on the black market, it was still a thriving business. As a result, neighborhood parents had taken to allowing Shaun to babysit their youngsters in the park while they enjoyed the much-needed peace.

Shaun considered the neighborhood his territory. His range included the entire street and the houses behind his own, as well as the park. Each day, he spent hours learning the rhythm of the small community. Everybody seemed to have their own routine: those who went to work, those who stayed home, the children going to school and coming home. The quiet and noise of the street fluctuated, depending on the time of day, and Shaun became familiar with it all.

In the afternoon, he would return home to find Ashley waiting for him. The scent of dinner being prepared would lure Shaun to the kitchen. Always sitting patiently beside the cupboard, he'd wait for Ashley to feed him.

Late at night, he'd curl beside Ashley in the huge bed. After the appropriately deemed time for petting, Shaun would contently fall asleep. Sometimes he'd wake up in the middle of night and watch Ashley sleep. As the nights passed, he began to relax and soon came to rely on Ashley's presence.

Come morning, he would wake to find Ashley nestled up against his back. It became his habit to wake his Master with a lick to his face. Shaun's life took on a regular schedule, and it went a long way into settling him into accepting Ashley and the life he offered.

As summer began to slowly take on its full strength, the days in the park lengthened as the children spent every free moment of their time playing outside. Lounging on the grass, Shaun was surrounded by kids. Some of them climbed on him, wanting a ride, but most were content to simply pet him. The lazy rumble of his purr constantly sounded as he rested his head on his paws, blinking sleepily.

"How would I know to find you here?"

Raising his head, Shaun chuffed softly as his head stretched forward towards Ashley. Yawning widely, his canines flashed before he licked Ashley's hand. In this form, he had no problem being affectionate; everything else was just a bit harder. Although, as his Master, Ashley had every right to force him to do whatever he wanted.

"Miss you," Ashley whispered as he turned his hand over to stroke the soft fur of Shaun's throat. "Have you eaten today? I had to leave early this morning."

Shaun shook his head. Slowly standing, he gently head-butted one of the three children near him. It was time for them to go home, and he would make sure they got there safely before he went home with Ashley.

Giggling and laughing, the boy and two girls raced ahead across the park, and Shaun playfully gave chase. The long line of his sleek body stretched out to its full length and gracefully balanced with each hit of his paws to the ground. His speed was nowhere near what he was capable of, but then he was only playing.

Ashley stayed where he was, content to watch them until he couldn't see them anymore. Resting his head on his knees, he started to doze off. A low whistle startled him awake and he looked up to see two men standing not far from him, both of them looking quite...interested.

"What's a hot thing like you doin' out here all alone?"

The other one sneered at Ashley, mouth widening in a slow, leering grin. "How about we find out just how hot he really is?"

Ashley's heart jumped into his throat and his muscles tensed, ready to bolt at any second. Then he saw all six hundred pounds of muscle and fury that was Shaun suddenly lunge towards them. The first man had just reached out to grab Ashley when his companion's eyes widened impossibly.

With their attention diverted, Ashley scrambled backward, bumping into a shrub. Both men took off running in the opposite direction of the enormous white tiger running full throttle toward them. When one of them hesitated, Shaun went after him. Ashley was left shaking, almost becoming one with the bush behind him as he watched the men and Shaun dart across four lanes of traffic.

Chaos ensued as several cars swerved in order to avoid hitting the fleeing men and the tiger. The blare of horns and drivers cursing became a jangled noise, yet none actually stopped to see what was happening. The full length of Shaun's body covered the ground easily and he launched at the man's back. Bringing the man swiftly down, Shaun's teeth clamped at the back of his neck. The rest of his body pinned the struggling man against the pavement at the side of the road.

*"Shaun. Stop. Let him go!"*

Ashley's command reached the animalistic fog hazing Shaun's mind. Fighting the urge to tear into the panicked mortal beneath him, Shaun let him go. Roaring out his rage, he let the offender scramble up as he backed off. Without a backward glance, the man ran as Shaun padded down the side of the road towards the crosswalk. Ashley jumped to his feet and ran, dropping to his knees when he reached Shaun and throwing his arms around Shaun's neck.

"Thank you. Thank you so much, Kitten."

The rapid-fire flick of Shaun's tail betrayed the agitation still quivering through him. He didn't know why his Master had been afraid, but it had been because of those two men. His instinct to protect his Master was a force that couldn't be overridden by anything else. With Ashley's affectionate nuzzling, Shaun gently butted against him. The initial reaction slowly began to fade with Ashley's influence on him, and Shaun calmed considerably. A soft purr rumbled from his chest as he turned his head, lavishing his own form of kisses to Ashley's face.

"Come on, love," Ashley said, standing. "We need to make a stop at the police station to report what happened."

Tilting his head, Shaun stared up at Ashley, blinking before he obediently stood. Circling behind Ashley, he came up against the side of his Master's leg, nudging against him. Smiling down at him, Ashley stroked a hand over his head, petting the silky black and white fur.

"You're so beautiful," Ashley whispered as they walked. "A prayer answered."

Shaun stayed close to Ashley as they made their way from the park to the police station. Several appreciative stares from others followed them, but Shaun paid no attention to any of them. When they approached the station, Shaun waited for Ashley to open the door. No one seemed disturbed by the presence of a tiger in their precinct. Werewolves were too common of a sight.

Ashley spent several minutes talking to various people, giving his statements and reports on what had happened in the park. He described the two men to the police, and when he finished he turned back to Shaun.

"It's done. Let the police take care of it. Shall we head home?"

Settled on his stomach, Shaun lifted his head. Blinking lazily, he ambled to his feet and led the way back down the corridor and to the exit. The walk home was quiet and easy, Ashley's hand never leaving Shaun's head. When they got home, Ashley locked the door behind them. Then he slid straight down the door, taking in a long, ragged breath. Turning to face him, Shaun nudged against his Master. He wanted more petting. Rubbing his muzzle against Ashley's chest, his soft purr was the only sound between them.

"Sometimes I wish I was a werecat," Ashley said as he slid his hands over Shaun's head and back. "Maybe then I could be more to you than what I am." Closing his eyes, he let his head fall back and allowed himself to remember, just for a moment, what it felt like to touch someone. It had been entirely too long, that much was certain.

Unable to speak in full cat form, Shaun sat back on his haunches. A tingle of electricity raced in the

air around him as he slowly shifted. The mass of his body decreased and the larger bulk of his muscle contracted, becoming smaller and streamlined. His muzzle retracted, forming the smoother lines of a human face as his paws became hands and feet. Shaun sat cross-legged in front of Ashley, watching him quietly.

"You don't want to be like me."

Ashley opened his eyes. After a moment of silence, he finally spoke. "I have my reasons to want just that. I want to be something more to you than what I am, and because I'm human, that will never change."

Motioning helplessly with his hand, Shaun gestured to himself. He was in half-form, fur still covering his entire body. Even in full mortal form, he wouldn't be mistaken for anything but what he was.

"I wasn't always like this. Right before my eighteenth birthday, I shifted. Until then I was normal, or at least I thought I was normal. Two days after I shifted for the first time, my parents sold me to be trained as a pet. That was six months ago. I spent my eighteenth birthday in the training institution. I was supposed to graduate from school, not be trained to a collar and leash. I don't know who I am anymore; I just want everything to be back the way it was." A half sob silenced Shaun, and it took a moment for him to continue. "I ran away from them"

Ashley reached out with one of his hands, cupping Shaun's face tenderly. "I don't want a pet. I want a companion. Your safety is the only thing that prompted me to claim you, Shaun. As far as I'm concerned, your soul, your life, your heart—they are all yours. I want to help. I want you to know that you are special."

Needing the comfort of Ashley's touch, Shaun nuzzled his Master's hand. "I don't know who I am. They tell me who I am, but I don't know the truth anymore. I don't want to be this way, but I can't help it."

Ashley scooted closer, settling on his knees in front of Shaun, and tilted Shaun's head up to see his eyes. "What do you need from me, Shaun? I'm not asking what you think you need. I'm asking what *do* you need. You are not at the institute; you are with me. You are beautiful, more beautiful than you think, and I want so much for you to see that."

Blinking back tears, Shaun stared at him. He'd never really thought about what he might need. Even in the short time he'd spent in the institute, Shaun's sense of self had been skewered. "I want to stay here with you. I'm happy here."

"Your place is here. With me," Ashley whispered. He pressed a soft kiss to Shaun's lips, then pulled him close.

Confusion warred with a mixture of pain in Shaun and he curled up against Ashley. "Will you always keep me?"

"How could I not?" Ashley murmured against Shaun's hair. "I've fallen in love with you."

Lifting his head, Shaun gave him an inquisitive look. "You have? Why?"

Ashley smiled and brushed the backs of his fingers over one of Shaun's cheeks. "Because of who you are, Shaun. You are the most beautiful being I've ever seen, and I'm beyond honored to have you here with me." Ashley slid his thumb slowly over Shaun's bottom lip. For a moment, nothing existed but those amber eyes staring back into his own.

Shaun smiled and a contented purr rose in his throat. "I can love you, too, you know." Shaun pressed a soft kiss to the ball of his thumb.

"Then I am doubly blessed." Ashley leaned down to kiss him softly, whispering his pet name of 'Kitten' on Shaun's lips.

Purr deepening, the tip of Shaun's tongue began tasting Ashley's mouth, slipping deeper inside. Shaun's initiative in making the kiss more momentarily shocked Ashley. The purrs and the touch of Shaun's tongue, however, served to wash that away. Ashley opened to him, letting Shaun do what he wished. Although he gave Shaun's tongue a few teasing licks, he wanted this be what his Kitten would make it. He whispered 'Kitten' into Shaun's mouth, the name escaping in a soft moan.

Shaun playfully nipped at Ashley's lower lip before continuing his exploration of Ashley's mouth. Ending the kiss, Shaun's head dipped down towards Ashley's throat, lavishing a series of kisses, licks and nips over his skin.

"Love you, Kitten," Ashley whispered. "I love you so much." Unable to stop the soft moans escaping

him, he simply tipped his head back, letting Shaun explore. And if Ashley had to sneak away for a bit of private time later, then so be it.

Pulling back slowly, Shaun smiled at him. "What's for dinner anyway? I'm starving."

Ashley chuckled and kissed Shaun's nose. "What would you like, Kitten?"

"Steak?" Shaun grinned. "And chocolate?"

"Mm," Ashley hummed, "I can do steak. And I bought some new chocolates yesterday, dark chocolate truffles with milk chocolate centers." He kissed Shaun's forehead and shifted, standing them both up.

Scrambling from Ashley's lap, Shaun made a quick detour to his bedroom. He needed to at least put on his loincloth. Once it was fastened in place, he hurriedly headed out to the kitchen to join his Master. The promise of a new treat was more than enough of a lure.

Catching him in the hallway, Ashley smiled devilishly. "Close your eyes and open your mouth, Kitten."

A sudden flare of his nostrils tried to catch a hint of whatever Ashley had in his hand. Smiling briefly, Shaun closed his eyes and opened his mouth. Ashley's mouth covered his then, tongue sliding a piece of sweet chocolate into Shaun's mouth.

"Enjoy," Ashley whispered.

The taste of the chocolate drew an instant mewling sound of enjoyment from Shaun. His Master gave him a home, safety, and love, and spoiled him outrageously. Resting his hands against Ashley's chest, his nails kneaded into the fabric of Ashley's shirt. Wanting to share the chocolate, he kissed Ashley back. Ashley's fingers slid through his hair, holding him close as they kissed. When Ashley pulled slowly away, he rubbed his nose along Shaun's.

"Help me cook dinner?"

"I know how to cook." Letting go of his shirt, Shaun turned his head, giving Ashley's cheek a quick lick.

"Good. You get started, and I'll meet you there in a few minutes." Ashley gave him a quick wink before heading for the bathroom.

Shaun sidestepped Ashley to continue down the hall into the kitchen. Busying himself, he got the steaks out of the refrigerator and set them on the counter. Knowing Ashley liked vegetables, he hunted through the crisper and brought out the vegetables to make him a salad. He might even be enticed into eating a bite or two, but it was a big maybe.

## *Chapter Six*

With Shaun busy, Ashley took the chance and took off his clothes, dropping them into the hamper by the sink counter. He draped a towel over the toilet seat lid and sat down, leaning his head back against the shelving above the toilet. His strokes started slow, leisurely pulls from the base to the tip of his cock, his other hand rolling and tugging his balls. As the pleasure built, images of Shaun flashed through Ashley's mind, his imagination feeding him sounds of Shaun breathing and panting, coming as Ashley filled him. That was all it took.

Barely biting back a moan, Ashley came, heat pouring over his hand. "Kitten..."

\* \* \* \*

After unwrapping the steaks and turning on the stove, Shaun set the steaks to frying as he cut up the salad. As he reached for the bowl to put everything together, he suddenly stilled, aware of the rippling thoughts reaching him. He could feel the odd vibration from his Master and knew what was happening. Understanding Ashley had his own needs, he had to smile at the thought of what Ashley was doing. The sensation warmed through him. It was a part of being loved.

Ashley sidled up behind him a few minutes later, dropping a soft kiss to his shoulder while reaching around to steal a sliver of carrot from the salad Shaun was preparing. "Mm, very good, Kitten. Maybe one of these days I'll be able to coax you into eating a vegetable or two," he teased.

Making a face at Ashley's comment, Shaun said, "I'm not that fond of vegetables." He caught the scent of spent sex on Ashley, but didn't say anything. He tried not to draw in the odor, but it was next to impossible. A soft sound escaped his throat as he busied himself slicing the rest of the carrot and cucumber.

"Are you okay, Kitten?" Ashley turned him slowly around, hands sliding up his arms. As Ashley looked at Shaun, realization seemed to set in his eyes. "Kitten," Ashley whispered, a smile flitting across his lips.

Shaun wanted to lick Ashley and learn him, learn what his Master smelled like, tasted like. Yet, he knew it might be misunderstood. "I'm okay," he said quietly, meeting Ashley's gaze.

Running his fingers through Shaun's hair, Ashley smiled. "I will never pressure you into anything. You know that, right? But you are welcome to do whatever you wish, whenever you wish. I will not take things farther. You are in control."

Tilting his head, Shaun relished the feel of Ashley's hand in his hair. Closing his eyes, he focused for a second on the familiar tinge of Ashley's closeness and the musky undertone surrounding him.

"I know enough about you to know you wouldn't. It isn't that. I just don't want to make anything worse on you." He understood Ashley had his needs, and he really didn't want to make the situation any harder on him.

"Oh, Kitten." Ashley pulled him close, nuzzling Shaun's cheek before whispering in his ear. "You could never make anything worse on me. You are the only one who fuels my fantasies. When I pleasure myself, it is you I think about. Your needs are just as important, if not more so, than my own as far as I'm concerned."

Shaun wanted and needed to be close to his Master. Everything he craved was at Ashley's hand. The solid foundation of safety, security, and love were everything to him. It kept his fear and uncertainty in the future at bay.

"Master." A soft, lilting purr came from him, the word woven in the melody as he licked Ashley's cheek softly.

"Love you, Kitten," Ashley murmured. His head turned just enough to catch Shaun's tongue and lick

it. "If exploration and taste are what you want, then I am at your mercy." He stroked his fingers over the back of Shaun's neck.

As much as he wanted to, they still had dinner to take care of, and from the smell of the steaks, they were nearly done. Still, Shaun took a bit of advantage as a soft growl spoke to Ashley before his arms snaked around Ashley's neck. His darting tongue followed the slow withdrawal of Ashley's and slid into his Master's mouth.

Ashley hummed softly. When the steaks started to sizzle, however, he broke the kiss with a chuckle. "Damn. Guess that's our cue that it's dinnertime."

Shaun had managed to become pleasantly occupied and he rumbled his disappointment when Ashley drew back. "You go ahead and dish out the steaks." Turning back around, Shaun picked up the salad and the silverware, and carried them to the table.

Ashley set their plates on the table and pulled his chair closer to Shaun's. "Let me feed you. Please?"

Once he'd gotten their drinks, Shaun settled in the chair. Eyeing Ashley, he wasn't surprised at all by the request. It had become a fairly normal thing for them. Nodding in answer, he rested an elbow on the table as he leaned in closer to Ashley.

After cutting a bite-sized piece from Shaun's steak, Ashley picked it up with his fingers and lifted it to Shaun's lips. "Open for me, Kitten."

Shaun's eyes remained steadily on his Master as he opened his mouth obediently. With a smile, Ashley placed the steak on his tongue, letting his fingers brush Shaun's lips as he pulled his hand away.

"Sweet Kitten."

Somehow it just tasted better from Ashley's hand, and when he took the next piece of meat, Shaun drew Ashley's hand back to his lips to lick the juice from Ashley's fingers.

Biting at his lip, Ashley groaned. The next bite he cut was for himself and he smiled as he ate it. "Very good, Kitten," he said, a look of complete rapture on his face.

Shaun preened slightly. "I've always liked to cook."

"I'll remember that. Let you cook more often."

When dinner was done, they cleaned the table and dishes in a companionable silence. Now in a playful mood, Shaun nudged against Ashley while his Master tried to do the dishes. He occasionally swatted Ashley with his tail as he waited for Ashley to finish washing up. He even tried to get Ashley's attention with a series of playful vocalizations as he prowled the perimeter of the kitchen several times. Each time, he returned to stand beside Ashley at the sink.

Having finished with the dishes, Ashley glanced over at Shaun, giving him a wide smile. "Does my Kitten want to play?"

Shaun glanced between Ashley and the front door. "Can we go for a walk?"

Tossing the towel onto the counter, Ashley chuckled. "Certainly." He grabbed his keys and stuck them in his pocket. Taking Shaun's hand, he walked out of the apartment. As soon as the door was locked, he let go of Shaun. "Catch me if you can, Kitten." With that, he took off toward the park.

Shaun gave his Master a sporting chance and didn't take off after him right away. An alert gaze tracked Ashley just before Shaun broke into a lazy run. Others were out and about, taking their own pets for an early evening walk. Shaun just wanted to play and didn't let Ashley get too far away from him.

As he closed in on Ashley, he veered off to the side, disappearing behind a group of trees. He slowed and silently prowled, coming up behind Ashley. Without a sound, he carefully crouched not too far from his Master and started slinking through the grass. Raising his head slightly, he took in a deep breath. The next instant, he was on Ashley, the twisting force of his body sending them both rolling as he entangled himself against his Master.

Ashley's breath left him in a rush and he spent several minutes laughing too hard to catch it again. When he finally managed to control it, he flopped back onto the grass, his arms sliding around the sleek body of the half-shifted werecat above him. Looking up into Shaun's eyes, he couldn't help but smile. Shaun happily bathed his face as long fingers kneaded into Ashley's shoulders, purring and rumbling. Laughter took over and Ashley rolled them over suddenly, planting a quick kiss to Shaun's nose before scrambling to his feet. He backed away slowly, grinning and taunting Shaun.

"Oh, Kitten..."

Moving slowly, he headed along the south side of the park. The area was surrounded by trees, creating a small cul-de-sac. He might as well have had a ball of yarn or a juicy steak, pulling it along.

Springing up, Shaun slowly advanced on Ashley. The sleek, graceful step was reminiscent of a stalking cat. His tail gave an impatient twitch as more distance grew between them.

"Here, Kitten..." Ashley darted to the right, slipping behind a clump of bushes and weaving his way through them. He whistled to Shaun, still using the sing-song tone he did when he'd called Shaun's name. "Come find me, Kitten." Too busy watching, Ashley spun around at the last minute, colliding with Shaun. The motion sent Ashley sprawling backward onto the ground, laughing. "You're good."

Grinning with his own self-satisfied air, Shaun dropped to his hands and knees and quickly crawled over Ashley. His hands and legs kept Ashley pinned so he couldn't escape this time as Shaun lavished him with kisses and licks. Starting at Ashley's face, Shaun's head dipped to continue beneath Ashley's chin and to the line of his throat. Chuckling, Ashley stretched beneath Shaun's weight, tilting his head back to expose more skin. With words beyond him, all he could do was make soft sounds of appreciation, letting his Kitten know just how proud and happy he was. Nuzzling in against his throat, the throaty sounds from Shaun deepened. Then Shaun lifted his head.

"I caught you twice. Should I let you catch me?" The grin on Shaun's lips was impish and just as teasing as his words.

Ashley managed to pull his arms free at least and pulled Shaun down for a kiss. "Run, Kitten," he whispered.

Instead of running, however, the thrum of Shaun's purr softened as his lips molded to Ashley's. Humming softly into Shaun's mouth, Ashley slid his arms around his Kitten's neck, holding him close, petting. He opened for Shaun, letting him explore as he petted, stroking his fingers through Shaun's hair. Spreading his legs, he let Shaun settle between them comfortably. Okay, so maybe he wasn't quite ready to move either.

Odd, how their bodies seemed to fit perfectly together. Ashley's petting drew a constant purr from Shaun, the rhythm rising and falling in slow waves. Shaun explored every inch of his mouth and it was several long moments before he stopped. Pulling back slightly, Shaun stared down at him. How Ashley could lose himself in those eyes. He smiled softly, moving his hand down just enough to slide his fingers slowly along Shaun's jaw.

"You are everything to me," he whispered.

"You are my Master."

Cupping Shaun's face, Ashley pulled him back down, wanting another kiss. He could kiss Shaun until the end of time, just relishing the way his Kitten's lips felt on his, the raspy surface of Shaun's tongue as it slid over his own. He could drown himself in the purrs that slipped into his mouth, those sweet sounds that let him know his Kitten was happy.

"Love you, Kitten. Now run. There's chocolate waiting for good Kittens who get their exercise," Ashley teased, winking at Shaun.

"Do I get an extra piece if you catch me quickly?"

Before Ashley could answer, Shaun scrambled off of him and darted toward the river. Closing his eyes, Ashley allowed his mind to settle a bit more. He could feel Shaun—anywhere the werecat went. He opened his eyes and followed the thread connecting them, the invisible—but very real—tendrils of energy radiating from the tattoo on Shaun's neck. Its twin echoed somewhere deep within Ashley, within his heart and deeper still, in his soul. It was something Ashley had willingly let happen to him.

He emerged from the trees and started for the river, knowing that's where he would find his Kitten. He moved slowly, slinking in between the trees and the bushes, taking his time. He could feel Shaun, knew his Kitten was near. The closer he got to Shaun, the stronger the pull became.

Shaun gained a bit of distance from Ashley before his Master decided to follow after him. Ducking behind a downed tree, he waited patiently. He didn't dare lift his head to get a clear view since it would give away his position. Curling in a small depression between the bottom of the tree and the ground, Shaun rested his chin on his hands.



A moment later, Ashley's body covered his, and his Master nuzzled the soft skin just behind his left ear. Shaun had thought it would take some time for Ashley to find him since he was pretty well hidden. The initial surprise faded as he stretched slightly beneath the weight of his Master's body. The soft, lilting purr returned and Shaun tilted his head enough to give Ashley easy access to him.

"You found me."

"I did," Ashley murmured.

The more Ashley played with him, and the longer time they spent together, the more accustomed Shaun grew to moments like this, when even the faintest hint of arousal felt completely natural.

"Can we go home?"

"Yes."

Ashley gave him a last nip and got up, holding out a hand for him. Slipping an arm around Shaun's waist, Ashley pulled him close as they walked, his head resting easy on Shaun's shoulder. Night had already fallen and only a few people were out on the streets. Through the open windows of the houses they passed, the everyday sounds reached Shaun. Everything was normal and peaceful, and the soft breeze carried the fragrance of nearby blooming flowers.

"I vote for movies and curling up on the couch." Ashley looked up at Shaun and smiled. "Don't suppose my Kitten would object to snuggling?"

Giving him an 'are you kidding me?' side glance, Shaun said, "I'll race you home." With a sudden burst of speed, he sprinted off down the street and around the corner towards their home.

## Chapter Seven

Before Ashley had a chance to open his mouth, Shaun neared their building. Shaking his head and laughing, Ashley just took his time, almost too tired after their park excursion to even think about racing now. When he reached the front door, he swatted Shaun's butt and stuck his tongue out at his Kitten before unlocking the door. The flick of Shaun's tail caught him in the face in retaliation before they walked into the house. Heading straight for the kitchen, Shaun got some snacks for them, then came back into the living room.

Picking a hair out of his mouth, Ashley closed the door and locked it. He stripped as he made his way to the living room, leaving a trail of clothes behind him. Pausing in front of the entertainment center, he wondered what movie to put on.

"What do you want to see, Kitten?"

"A good scary movie."

"Scary, as in 'you climbing into my lap' scary?" Ashley asked him, giving him a smile and a wink. "Or scary, as in 'making you look over your shoulder for the next two nights' scary?"

"Looking over my shoulder sounds good."

"*Candyman*."

Pulling a DVD case out of its place, Ashley put the disc into the player and grabbed the remote. Picking up the quilt on the back of the chair, he settled down on the couch, covering them both before snuggling tightly against Shaun. After several minutes of squirming, he got back up, turned around, and untied Shaun's loincloth.

"You're wearing too many clothes, Kitten."

After the small piece of material was gone, Shaun settled back against him. Keeping the bowl of snacks nearby, he offered Ashley some. Ashley shook his head, just happy to get close, to touch. He slid an arm around Shaun's waist, holding him as he started the movie.

When the bowl was nearly empty, Shaun leaned over to put it down on the end table. Shifting position, he stretched over Ashley's lap. After resting his head against Ashley's thigh, he returned to watching the movie. When it got good, he jumped slightly. With the movements, Ashley lost track of the movie, his attention more diverted to Shaun's position. He hadn't been hard a few minutes ago. But now he was fighting to get his mind off of his Kitten and his cock. With every small move from Shaun, Ashley ran his hand over his Kitten, feeling the movements of the muscles just beneath the flesh.

Shifting and sliding, Ashley managed to slip out from under Shaun and stretched out behind him, leaving Shaun to nestle back against him. He kept a tight hold on Shaun, petting and stroking, his hand wandering idly over Shaun's side, his hip, his thigh.

Turning his head slightly, Shaun smiled up at him as the cozy warmth surrounded them both. The movie forgotten, Ashley leaned forward and kissed Shaun softly. He licked Shaun's lips, fingers curling to his Kitten's hips to keep him still. The slightest movement on Shaun's part and the moan lodged in Ashley's throat would slip free.

Shaun's lips parted and with a slight shift of his body, Ashley deepened the kiss, moaning softly into Shaun's mouth. He wanted to touch—God, he wanted to touch—but he kept his hand where it was, almost fused to Shaun's hip in an effort to keep from moving lower.

Shaun made a soft noise and twisted, exposing himself to Ashley. Unwilling to rush this, Ashley kept the focus on their kiss, his tongue playing with Shaun's. He slid his hand over Shaun's belly, then down to trace the crease where Shaun's hip met his pelvis, just barely skirting everything else. He wanted Shaun to want to this. Shaun's muscles tensed and the slight rise of his hips pushed up to the touch.

He could never deny his Kitten for long. Ashley pulled from the kiss and kept his eyes locked with Shaun's as he slid a single fingertip down the line of Shaun's cock. He wanted to see Shaun come, wanted to see pleasure etched across his Kitten's face as Shaun cried out to him. Lowering his head, Ashley licked at the nape of Shaun's neck, tracing the outline of the tattoo with the tip of his tongue.

The heat of an electrical strike rushed through them both the instant Ashley's tongue touched Shaun's tattoo. Shaun's legs parted further as his hips rose again. He cried out softly as he reached for Ashley's shoulder. Licks turned to nibbles and Ashley curled his fingers around the shaft of Shaun's cock, rolling his thumb over the head, slicking it with the drops leaking from the tip. With the connection wide open between them, he poured every ounce of love into the movement of his lips and teeth on Shaun's neck as he stroked him.

*I know you can hear me. Let yourself go. Come for me, Kitten.*

Head shaking wildly, Shaun rolled onto his back, legs wrapping around Ashley's, pulling him on top. For a brief moment, Ashley was almost too stunned to react. The tip of his cock brushed across Shaun's entrance and every rocking motion of Shaun's hips nearly drove him out of his mind. The pros and cons of what he was so close to doing weighed heavily on him, and the insistent movements, the pleading sounds, served to make his indecision worse. Just before giving in, he shifted, sliding his cock up alongside Shaun's. Wrapping his fist around both of their cocks, he rose up slightly on his other arm and stared down at Shaun.

"Come on, Kitten," he urged as he started to stroke them both. "Come for me. Let me feel you..."

Golden eyes stared into Ashley's, begging him as Shaun writhed beneath him. Fingers curled tightly around Ashley's arms, Shaun whimpered, the sound desperate. Knowing he had no choice now, Ashley caught Shaun's mouth in a kiss before letting go. With a shift of his hips, his cock pressed to Shaun's hole and he reached blindly into the coffee table drawer for the small bottle of lube he kept there. He slicked himself quickly, then pushed.

The powerful muscles in Shaun's legs kept Ashley locked to his Kitten even through the pain he knew Shaun was feeling. Ashley knew nothing could stop the connection between them now. Panting heavily, the rock of Shaun's hips demanded Ashley take him. Although he fought like hell to gain some sort of control, Ashley found that he really had none now. Even if he just stayed still, Shaun would continue to ride him until they both came. But he couldn't stay still; he wanted to feel, wanted to give Shaun everything he could. Sliding a hand between them, he started stroking Shaun again.

"Kitten," he groaned. "So tight. Hot." Dear God, Shaun was tight as fuck. The notion hit Ashley then, like a ton of bricks. Shaun was a virgin. "Oh. Fuck..."

Pulling out, he had only a second to catch his breath before he plunged back in, mouth coming down on Shaun's as he started driving into him in deep but easy strokes. With every push of his hips, his hand mirrored the movement on Shaun's cock.

The heated friction inside Shaun's body kept him strained to each thrust. Tension increased in more lightning strikes, rippling along his nerves, and he couldn't hold back from it. A deep tremor raced through him, driving him nearly off the couch as his body internally exploded. A harsh sound tore from his throat, crying out Ashley's name as he came. Barely seconds later, his release filled Ashley's hand. In his mind, barriers fully collapsed, leaving him totally open and vulnerable to Ashley. A flare of energy warmed through him in waves as he gave into them—as he gave into Ashley.

"Shaun!"

Several hard thrusts drove Ashley deeper inside him. Ashley jerked against him, filling Shaun with his release. Breathing heavy and ragged, Ashley released him to slide both arms tight around him. Shaun could not refuse to answer his Master. Lifting his head, he nuzzled in against Ashley's throat as he held to him, feeling Ashley's need for closeness. The slow, soothing pulse of a purr rumbled as he nuzzled his Master's skin. Ashley pulled out slowly and rolled onto his side, pulling Shaun with him.

"I love you," Ashley whispered.

Shaun felt so tired. He murmured as his body nestled against his Master. More than likely they'd be sleeping on the couch because he really couldn't move. He hurt all over, but it didn't matter.

## *Chapter Eight*

Once dinner was finished, Ashley stood and cleared the table. When he returned, he held a box in his right hand and took one of Shaun's hands in his other. "Come, Kitten. I have a special treat for you."

Curiosity got the better of him, and a bright, inquisitive look followed Ashley. Taking hold of his hand, Shaun asked, "A special treat?"

"A very special treat," Ashley said as he led him into the living room. "I bought it just for you." Once Shaun was seated on the couch, Ashley undressed and curled up beside him, turned just enough to face him. He opened the box, but held the lid so that Shaun could not see the contents. "Close your eyes and open your mouth, Kitten."

Shaun's tail twitched in anticipation, batting at Ashley's hand. He wanted to see what Ashley had for him. Closing his eyes, he opened his mouth for Ashley.

"This," Ashley said, "is for you." He placed the small piece of hard chocolate on Shaun's tongue.

As Shaun closed his mouth, the rich chocolate taste began to melt on his tongue. A hint of spices subtly flavored the taste, drawing an appreciative purr from him. Oh, he liked this, and he wanted to share it. He opened his eyes and leaned towards Ashley, the tip of his tongue darting out as his gaze rose to Ashley's.

Popping another piece in his own mouth, Ashley pulled Shaun close, feeding him the chocolate as they kissed. The candy melted on their tongues, flavoring the kiss with chocolate, cinnamon and ginger.

"I wonder," Ashley murmured, "what would happen if I just bathed in this stuff."

Thinking he would never stop licking Ashley if he did, Shaun couldn't answer him. His tongue darted over Ashley's, taking more of the taste, now flavored with Ashley. A deep purr rumbled as he moved, trying to get close enough to his Master to satisfy his own craving.

Ashley laughed into the kiss and leaned back, letting the box slide to the floor. Then he pulled away from the kiss and stroked chocolate-coated fingers over Shaun's lips before rubbing them over his own neck, head tilting back as his robe fell open to his waist.

A bright eyed gaze watched him intently. Licking at his lips, Shaun drew in a deep breath and wallowed in the familiar sweet scent of his Master. The additional mixture of chocolate and spices heightened everything as his eyes followed each of Ashley's actions. He homed in immediately on Ashley's throat and followed the path of chocolate on his Master's skin.

"I need to find this stuff in syrup form." Ashley reached down and Shaun could hear him fumbling with the box. Then Ashley began drawing designs on his own chest, leaving a trail for Shaun to follow as he pleased.

Shaun grabbed for Ashley's hand and licked the chocolate from his Master's fingers before he attended to Ashley's chest. Once the chocolate was gone, he continued on, loving the underlying taste of Ashley beneath the chocolate. Every now and then, little sounds escaped Ashley—small gasps and moans, Shaun's pet name whispered on a breath.

The faint roughness of Shaun's tongue slowly scraped over Ashley's flesh, covering every bare inch of his Master's chest. His awareness was sharp and he caught the lingering taste of a slow simmering arousal in the chemicals in Ashley's skin. He wanted the taste, to learn Ashley's flavor, to always recognize even the minutest signals of his Master in the air.

Just as he had learned Ashley's scent, the differences in his Master's moods needed to be tasted and absorbed. It was a part of what tied them together. The pulsing note of Shaun's purring rose and fell, and he reached Ashley's hand. Curling around it, his nails flexed into his Master's skin as Shaun shifted slightly, lowering his head. The strong scent of the clear drops leaking from Ashley's cock drew his

attention. With the first touch of his tongue to the tip of his Master's cock, Shaun purred.

"Kitten." Ashley held onto his hand, their fingers twining together tightly.

Shaun could feel the slow tremor slide through his Master, just the barest ripple of pleasure. Slowly, his tongue circled the head of Ashley's shaft before probing at the small slit, taking the drops. It was an intoxicating flavor, and Shaun closed his mouth around the head.

"Oh. Kitten. So hot." Ashley squeezed Shaun's hand, his hips rocking slowly as he shivered and moaned. "My sweet Kitten."

This was just the beginning. By the time Shaun was through, he'd know every inch of Ashley's body. He took in the rigid flesh, sucking gently on it. A low growl vibrated his throat as he began to establish his territory. Ashley was his Master. *His Master*. Nobody else's. The glide of his lips, teeth and tongue repeatedly slid over Ashley's cock, rapidly increasing in speed and strength. Now he wanted Ashley's acknowledgement of the territory he'd set.

"Kitten. Oh, God, don't stop." Ashley petted Shaun's head, stroking over his hair, his shoulders, caressing every inch of Shaun that he could reach. "My Kitten. *My Kitten*, and I am yours." With that, he came, heat pouring into Shaun's mouth as Ashley chanted 'my Kitten.'

As he held Ashley in his mouth, Shaun swallowed his Master's release. The saltiness was flavored by the unique chemical traces marking who Ashley was. When the last of the tremors faded from Ashley's body, Shaun released him. Lifting his head, he looked down at his Master, letting a low growl rumble deep.

"My Master."

"All yours, Kitten, in every way possible." Ashley reached out and pulled Shaun down on top of him for a slow, sweet kiss. "My Kitten," he murmured on Shaun's lips, "and I am your Master. Always."

Part of the fierceness faded when Shaun gained the answer he wanted. Now he was more than happy to nestle in against Ashley, returning the soft kiss. The lingering taste of Ashley in his mouth was shared in the slow stroke of his tongue over Ashley's.

"Bedtime, Kitten. Petting time."

\* \* \* \*

Shaun heard the loud knock at the door. Pausing in the middle of his lunch, he got up to answer it. Before he reached it, another loud banging rattled the door. Opening the door, Shaun saw two men in suits and one in a white lab coat with a gun trained on him.

"Shaun Taylor?"

Recognizing the gun as a tranquilizer dart, Shaun stood frozen in the doorway. "Yeah."

"We're here to place you under detainment at the Institute. You need to come with us."

Shaun didn't resist when a hand grabbed his arm and pulled him out of the house. After one of the men shut the door behind them, they escorted him to the car. Aware of the gun on him, Shaun remained extremely passive, letting them shove him into the car. He tried to bite back the small sound trying to escape his throat. Scared half to death, Shaun wasn't fully sure was what happening.

Staring at the back of the driver's head, Shaun tried to keep himself calm. Minutes ticked by and nobody said a word to him. Looking briefly out the window Shaun saw the outside world going on as normal. They were in the business district and businessmen were returning to their offices from their lunch hour. Shaun sat in the car, becoming more and more terrified.

He knew Ashley worked not too far away and could barely still the urge to break out of the car to get to him. Even if he managed to get free, these men would hunt him down. When he saw the imposing façade of the Institute building coming closer, the fearful sound slipped free. He didn't want to go back there.

The large metal gates opened and the car continued along the drive up to the building. Shaun could see Dr. Longmuir waiting on the portico beside one of the columns. He hated that doctor. The few times Shaun had dealt with him, the patronizing tone and behavior of the good doctor always raised his hackles.

When the car stopped, Dr. Longmuir walked down the steps and opened the back door of the car. Smiling in a patently false way at Shaun, he held out his hand. "Hello, Shaun."

Staring at the doctor, then the hand, Shaun got out of the car without any help. When Dr. Longmuir

motioned Shaun up the stairs, he turned to address the other men. "I'll handle him from here. Dr. Stanton wants you three in his office."

Shaun ignored all four of them and headed up the steps and into the Institute. The entrance was an airy, luxuriously appointed space that led to a series of equally well-decorated offices. Dominated by a five tier crystal chandelier, the two story lobby had been painted in hues of blue and cream. But deeper into the Institute the décor took on a depressing aura of grays and yellows. Nobody but the staff and inmates saw the Institute farther than its front offices.

Several comfortably upholstered chairs had been placed in front of the reception desk and quite a few buyers were already waiting. Every last one of them stared at Shaun when he walked past, and Shaun could hear the sound of whispers following him. When Dr. Longmuir caught up to Shaun, one of the men stood and intercepted the doctor.

"When will he be available, Longmuir?"

Before Shaun lowered his gaze, he saw the blatant lust and avarice staring at him from the man. His heart pounding, Shaun refused to show any signs of fear in front of either of them. It would be against the law to offer to sell him to anyone since Ashley already owned him. Yet there were those in the Institute who would try, and Shaun knew it.

"Sorry, Webster, this were is only here for testing. He already has an owner." The words cut short the conversation and Dr. Longmuir grabbed Shaun's arm, pulling him towards his office.

Ignoring the other man, Shaun kept pace with the doctor and entered his office. Shutting the door behind them, Dr. Longmuir motioned to the chair in front of his desk, then walked around to sit in his own seat. Shaun sat carefully down and watched the doctor, waiting for him to speak.

"You're here because you attacked a mortal in Lower Roth Park, Shaun. Because of the report your owner filed with the police, we can't outright destroy you. It does seem you may have had cause for the attack. But that aside, you still need to be tested. If we find any of your training has been bypassed, you will still be destroyed. Do you understand everything I've told you?"

The words struck a deeper fear in Shaun's heart, but he answered calmly, "Yes, Dr. Longmuir."

"Good." Opening one of the folders on his desk, the doctor continued, "You're scheduled for testing tomorrow afternoon. In the meantime, and afterwards, you will receive advanced training as well. I will be working with you personally during the testing and training. If I'm not satisfied with your progress in training, you will be retained until I am." Looking back up, he added, "Escape will do you no good this time. If you escape you will be hunted down and destroyed when found."

Not even blinking, Shaun nodded his head. "Will I be able to see my Master?"

"Not until everything is completed. If the testing and training prove satisfactory, you will be returned to your master. It really depends on you, Shaun. The fewer problems you give us, the better your grade will be. Now show me your mark."

Shaun knew better than to argue with the order. Bowing his head, he pulled the hair off the back of neck and turned in the seat to show it to the doctor. Taking a small knife and swab from the tray on his desk, Dr. Longmuir stood and moved to stand behind Shaun.

The cool, wet sensation of the swab was followed by the pressure of the blade to his skin, and Shaun didn't dare even move. A second later a flash of pain ran through Shaun with the cut of the knife.

"Very good, Shaun. The mark is authentic."

Grabbing a small piece of gauze from his desk, the doctor pressed it to the cut. "Hold it there until you stop bleeding."

\* \* \* \*

"Kitten?" Ashley closed the front door behind him and set his keys down. Something wasn't right; he could feel it in his bones. "Shaun?"

He went from room to room and when he didn't find Shaun, he picked up his keys and ran out the door. He made it to the police station in record time and paid no attention to anyone as he strode up to the officer behind the desk.

"I need to file a Missing Pet Report."

"Yes, sir. Name of your pet?"

Ashley watched as the officer pulled out a form. "Shaun Taylor, rare white tiger."

The officer's look set Ashley even more on edge. "Just a minute." The man stood and walked around the corner to poke his head into an office. A moment later, another officer came out.

"Mr. Winters?"

"Yes?"

"Hi, I'm Detective Shields. If you please..." The detective motioned toward his office.

Once inside, Ashley found he couldn't sit. He paced back and forth as the detective remained in that cool, calm, collected police demeanor.

"Mr. Winters, Shaun Taylor was picked up by the Institute for attacking a human."

Ashley had to sit down then; he was going to throw up. "What?"

The detective gave him a weak smile. "I'm sorry, Mr. Winters. This is out of our hands."

Nodding, Ashley said, "I know. I know. When can I see him? When can he come home?"

"I can give you the number, but I'm afraid there's not much else I can do." The detective reached into a drawer in his desk. "However, there is one thing..." He pulled out a swab kit. "If Shaun is fully under your control, this will be the deciding factor in whether he lives or dies."

"I know."

When the detective stepped up to him, Ashley opened his mouth. The test was quick, a tiny bit of skin and saliva collected on the end of the wooden stick. It would be used to synthesize a chemical to test Shaun's reactions, to make sure he was firmly under Ashley's control. All he could think about was the terror his kitten was in.

By the time he got home, Ashley was shaking. He knew the cops did what they had to do, but even knowing that didn't quite help. Detective Shields had been sympathetic, but there was nothing he could do. Ashley went into the kitchen, needing something to drink, to put out the raging fire inside him. The more he thought about it all, however, the worse it got. He threw his water glass into the dining room wall. In fact, he'd just left it there, too pissed to care. They'd taken his Kitten. Knowing how lost and scared Shaun would be didn't help matters at all. Unable to sleep in his bed, Ashley ended up stretching out on the couch, staring up at the ceiling. Minutes became hours, and he still hadn't moved. The silence was deafening.

\* \* \* \*

"Shaun, while your loyalty to your master is admirable, you will have many masters over your lifetime."

Shaun remained huddled in the corner of the room, sitting on the floor the whole time his trainer, Amelia, talked to him. Eric, the other trainer, continued where Amelia left off.

"Shaun, you are required to pass the advanced training, and the longer you take to cooperate the longer you will be in here."

Shifting to his hands and knees, Shaun crawled out of the corner towards them. The last time he'd escaped the Institute before they had begun advanced training on him. This time he didn't have that luxury, not if he wanted to go home to his master. All Shaun wanted to do was return to Ashley. The cold, sterile environment of the Institute had already started wearing down his spirit. Uncertain if he would be returned to his master, Shaun lived with the constant terror he would be forced to stay here, and even his nightmares echoed the very same fear.

"Very good, Shaun." Eric settled back in his armchair and motioned the were to come to him. Reluctantly Shaun moved closer to him before he stilled, kneeling obediently between Eric's legs.

"You are expected to serve us both, no matter what we ask you to do, Shaun. Whether the order is for our physical comfort or sexual needs, it is your place to provide what we demand of you. When I touch you again, you are not to pull away. The next time you do, we will end the session and disregard all of your previous training since yesterday. You will return here tomorrow morning and begin your training all over again." After Eric finished instructing Shaun, a slight gesture of his hand had Shaun straightening his position so Eric and Amelia could access him more easily.

The threat was a very real one. Shaun knew they would, without hesitation, stop their training and put him back to square one. When Eric's hand began stroking over the side of his neck, Shaun didn't move

at all. All around the room, others were being trained as well, but Shaun had to remain focused on Eric and Amelia no matter what else was going on. Amelia's hand reached out, feeding Shaun a small treat as his reward for good behavior. When she smiled gently at him, Shaun carefully licked her fingers clean.

Several buyers had been allowed into the room to test the performance of the weres with their own marketability tests. Shaun had watched other weres undergo the examination the day before, but he hadn't been expected to participate. However, today it would be required of him. Though he wasn't to be sold after he left the Institute, the belief was that sometime in his lifetime he would be, and probably several times.

Amelia's hand lowered to the front of Shaun's chest, her nails parting his fur when they scratched lightly over him. "You really are a beautiful animal, Shaun. I have no doubt you will fill your proper place just as you should. You know what is expected when you are examined by the buyers, and your natural instinct will be to react. Don't try to control it or hold back. It will count against you if any of the buyers see that."

Yesterday he had let Amelia pet him and finally allowed her to touch him wherever she chose. Today Eric had been brought in to train him as well, and at first he had fought that, but now, he let Eric touch him also. Even when the trainer's hand moved slowly lower towards his genitals, Shaun didn't try to break free.

When a finger tip brushed against his cock, Shaun closed his eyes and bit at his lower lip. Every instinct wanted to get closer to the hands on him, yet Shaun wanted to fight against it.

"Shaun." Amelia's warning tone got his attention immediately and he quickly opened his eyes. Her hand lifted to his hair, fisting in the strands and forced his face closer to hers. At the same moment Eric's fingers circled his cock, rubbing his thumb firmly over the slit. A soft mewl rose in Shaun's throat before his hips jerked hard against Eric's hand.

Without a sound said, Shaun knew what Amelia expected from her expression and his lips parted obediently for her. Aroused by the movement of Eric's hand, Shaun began to thrust against Eric's fist, and Amelia's tongue caressed inside his mouth. After a long moment both of them pulled back, leaving Shaun panting.

"Very good, Shaun." This time Eric fed him one of the shrimp treats, then patted him lightly on the head.

"Amelia, Shaun is next." One of the buyers walked over to them and handed the trainer a form to sign.

While Amelia signed the paper, Eric stood up. "Come on, Shaun. It's time for your examination."

Shaun nodded and moved to stand. For a moment, he tried to focus on Amelia and Eric and not on the strangers standing not too far away from them. He knew their hands would soon be on him and they would use him however they felt. He couldn't protest. He couldn't fight them. He had no choice but to allow them to do what they wished and give them the reaction they wanted.

Slowly facing them, he saw every pair of eyes on him. Two studied him with a casual detachment, but the third one frightened him. Several inches taller, Shaun had to look up at the man as he approached the group. A cruel twist of a smile hovered over the man's lips and he blatantly stared at Shaun, black eyes cold; fascinatingly handsome except for the fact that something more sinister obscured the pleasing lines of his face and body. The dark gaze flicked appraisingly over Shaun's body. When the man turned to look at the woman standing next to him, a veil of black hair momentarily obscured his features. Shaun couldn't even relax when the buyer stopped watching him. Something in his eyes had echoed down to a well of instinctive fear deep inside Shaun, something to be very frightened of.

A heavy hand landed on Shaun's shoulder, forcing him forward, and Shaun had no choice but to face the threat head on.

\* \* \* \*

Strapped to the table, Shaun mewled piteously. It had only been two days, but he missed his Master and wanted nothing more than to go home. Already he hurt from the myriad of tests they had performed on him and he still remained tied to the table, waiting for another round. The needles, prodding, and man handling weren't at an end yet. He'd been left alone in the room, unable to move because of the body wrap



holding him captive and Shaun could do nothing but turn his head. Staring at the ceiling, the sound in his throat rose and tears streamed from the corner of his eyes, wetting his fur. Shifting to human form was a punishable offense at the Institute.

When Dr. Longmuir entered, he moved to the table and began to examine Shaun with a clinical detachment.

"Please, can I go home, Dr. Longmuir?" Shaun couldn't help his whimper and the desperate need for the safety and security of his own home. The overwhelming longing for his master remained paramount in Shaun's mind.

The doctor ignored him and continued with the examination, fitting the strong straps to Shaun's limbs and making sure he was properly restrained before he began unwrapping him. Methodically he inserted small wires into Shaun's skin at various places over his body. The stinging pain made Shaun squirm against the table, but he couldn't escape the stabs of the wires. Closing his eyes tightly, more tears squeezed out from beneath the closed lids and he whispered hoarsely, "Please, I want to go home."

His request remained unanswered as Dr. Longmuir continued with his work. Finally after several long moments of affixing the wires to the skin beneath the fur, the doctor turned away and moved to the large machine dominating the entire wall of the room. Settling on a stool at the small desk next to the machine, he opened the folder and began recording his notes. "Subject: Shaun Taylor. I will begin the Demar Field test on a level of 120<sup>th</sup> sub par."

Pausing, he reached over and turned on the machine. Shaun gasped with the electric current shooting through him, then bit at his lower lip. Inside his mind, he tried to escape this place and what was happening. It didn't hurt, but it didn't feel comfortable, and Shaun knew it was only the beginning.

"Reaction noted, level 120 successfully found. Lowering the point scale point seven-three." After twisting one of the knobs, Dr. Longmuir said, "Shaun, turn your head to the left."

Shaun could feel a low burning sensation to the nape of his neck over his mark. Obediently he turned his head away from the doctor. Standing and moving back to the table, Dr. Longmuir's fingers rubbed over Shaun's fur against the grain to examine the skin beneath.

"Connection to the ownership mark observed in the red inflammation surrounding it. Change resonance to zero-three-two." As the doctor spoke, he flipped a switch on the console and Shaun felt a sharper stab of pain at the back of his neck. He clawed at the table beneath him, long talons making a hideous sound against the metal.

"Blue *nemmain*s surround the mark bleeding through to the surface skin. No sign of any alteration to the neural responses."

As Shaun lay there in pain, a woman entered the room and approached the doctor. "Dr. Longmuir, here is the synthesized scent you requested." Pausing, she set the small vial on the pad by his hand, then turned to look over Shaun. "This is the one that escaped?"

"Yes. Increasing output to peak level par point eight."

Opening his eyes, Shaun looked up at her just as the current increased through his body. His body began to convulse and the other two peered intently at the black lines appearing on a nearby screen. Every part of his body felt like it was on fire, leaving Shaun desperately trying not to scream.

"See this line, Althea?" One finger traced over the upper line while Dr. Longmuir talked. "Completely unbroken. The neural lines haven't been bypassed, which is a very lucky thing for our subject. You can see it fully by his visible reaction to increasing the level to even the lowest denominator of zero one."

After twisting the knob slightly, they both stared at Shaun, watching him writhe against the table. Shaun's mind barely stayed in one piece to comprehend the physical sensation before it flooded him completely, tearing him apart. The feeling came from every part of his body, and the agony of it rushed through him relentlessly. A scream tore at his throat, but he couldn't escape it.

"Have you seen Dr. Raynor's report? He suggests bypassing the point scale to get the same accurate reading from the ownership signature. It would save on the amount of time needed for testing and lower the cost substantially." Althea spoke casually, watching the doctor finishing his report.

Shaun caught the tale end of their conversation when the flood of energy slowed in his body. It left

every part of him aching, but at least the mindless pain was gone.

Dr. Longmuir shrugged slightly before he completely shut off the machine. "The few test trials we've run indicate too much mental damage occurs in the subjects. Not even training can fix the problem in three out of ten cases. I've not yet seen any figures to indicate if the savings in cost is greater than the lost revenue."

With a nod, he dismissed her to continue his testing. Aware and fully comprehending of what they talked about, Shaun didn't even move a muscle, not even when the doctor slowly approached him again. Without saying a word, Dr. Longmuir opened the vial in his hand and stuck it under Shaun's nose.

The minute Shaun caught the overwhelming scent of his master; a whimper escaped him, then quickly became a sharper pulse of need when his body reacted fully. His erect cock leaked as he tried to hump at the air. Instinct reacted instantly in Shaun, leaving him heavily panting.

The doctor observed Shaun's actions for several long moments before he spoke. "A brief introduction of the synthesized scent has induced immediate arousal in the subject, indicative of level five bonding with Ashley Winters."

Uncapping the vial again, Dr. Longmuir held it beneath Shaun's nose until Shaun had taken several breaths of it. Even tied down, Shaun's body strained from the table in frenetic movements. He could smell his master and need and longing coalesced inside him, making his body shudder repeatedly with the orgasm rocking through him. Shaun couldn't control the reaction and it left him crying out for his Master.

"Definite formation of the level eight bond noted in the subject. Control has been firmly established and confirmed by my observations. There have been no abnormalities seen within the neural or physical connection to Shaun's master."

Exhausted, Shaun closed his eyes tightly and more tears wet his fur. Beyond humiliated and still in physical pain, he did his best to attempt to stop the rising sobs. He badly wanted the safety and reassurance of his Master and refused to open his eyes because all he would see was the reality of where he was.

\* \* \* \*

Two days later, Ashley finally received a call from Detective Shields, letting him know the Institute was satisfied with the results of their testing. He could pick Shaun up from the police station later that afternoon. Barely making it through the rest of the day, he ended up going to the park to keep himself calm.

Right before four o'clock, he headed toward the precinct. Just before walking into the police station, he fought like hell to push away the screaming voice in his head. Then he opened the door.

As usual, the station was busy, everyone going on with their usual day-to-day routines. No one batted an eye when Ashley walked up to the desk. A few minutes later, he was led to a guarded room. Through the small window in the metal door, he could see Shaun. The guard let him in after confirmation of who he was. Ashley all but glared at the man as the door was closed behind him, leaving only himself and Shaun in the small detainment room.

"Kitten," he said, holding his arms open.

Shaun sprang from his chair and ran to him. His Kitten didn't say anything, just clung to him for dear life. Burying his face against Ashley's chest, Shaun kneaded his nails into Ashley's shirt. Before Ashley could say anything, the door opened. Then he was leading Shaun out of the station, his own mood finally settling to something resembling calm.

"Home, Kitten," he said after several minutes of walking. He never stopped petting.

It seemed Shaun couldn't get enough of the touch of Ashley's hand. He'd been scared the whole time. The institute testing had included reinforced training to insure his programming remained intact. They'd released him only after they'd been satisfied he hadn't bypassed his training and was sufficiently controlled by his Master. Every step he took nudged him up against Ashley's side.

As soon as they were home, Ashley locked the deadbolt on the front door, then pulled Shaun straight into the bedroom. He stopped beside the bed and undressed them both as quickly as possible. But instead of getting in bed, he began looking Shaun over, as if searching for any sign of physical harm.

Cupping Shaun's face gently in his hands, Ashley whispered, "I love you. More than life itself. You

know that, right?"

"I'm just a pet, Master." Parts of Shaun's mind were confused; the reinforced Institute training had caused its own havoc. Humans could, in a matter of minutes, make his entire world fall apart. "They can take me away whenever they want, just because I defended you. I just wanted to come home."

"What have they done to you, Kitten?" Without another word, Ashley pulled Shaun into a kiss.

Shaun didn't cry. He'd cried almost nonstop at the institute, but he melted into Ashley, opening to his kiss. He badly needed reassurance everything was all right now. He'd blamed himself for being taken away, but he couldn't help the instinct to protect Ashley. Nestling as close as he could physically get, Shaun damn near tried to crawl into Ashley's skin.

Without breaking the kiss, Ashley got them both on the bed, him on his back as he held Shaun tightly against him. What started out as reassurance in the kiss, quickly turned to desperation as Ashley locked his legs and arms around Shaun's body.

As Shaun stretched against the feel of his Master, a small shudder ran through him. Pets weren't allowed to initiate sexual overtures, nor were they allowed to want what Shaun wanted. The ache ran through him with the arch of Ashley's body clinging to him, but he could do nothing about it. Remaining docile in the position, the press of his lips tightened to Ashley's as his tongue stroked quickly around his Master's.

Gasping into Shaun's mouth, Ashley rocked against him. "Please," Ashley begged, tugging Shaun closer. "I need you. So much. Show me I haven't lost you, Shaun."

Even as Shaun struggled with the notion of equality between them, he had to fight against his own indoctrination of who he was. Lifting his head, he stared down at Ashley, confused. His body wanted something his mind told him he couldn't have. It was something that normally would never have come into question between a Master and a pet. The determined rock of Ashley's body drew an instinctive nudge of his own hips, something Shaun couldn't stop.

Reaching for the bedside table, Ashley got a hold on the small bottle of lube. Keeping his eyes on Shaun's, he popped the cap on the bottle and somehow managed to pour some of the slick gel into his palm.

"I need you, Shaun," Ashley whispered. He slid his hand between them and wrapped his fingers around Shaun's cock, slicking it as he stroked. "In me..."

The feel of Ashley's hand sliding over his cock and his words only emphasized the urge already awoken in Shaun. A small jerk of his hips followed the expert manipulation of the hand on him as a low sound escaped him. He slid his hand down to take hold of Ashley's hip as the shift of his own body pushed his cock in against Ashley. Whether or not he was supposed to, he had to; his body wanted it.

"Yes. Now. Please, Shaun..." Positioning Shaun's cock against his hole, all it took was a lift of Ashley's hips. His body arched, Shaun's name on his lips as Ashley impaled himself slowly.

Unused to this, Shaun's movements were crude, but he drove deeply into Ashley out of pure instinct to feel the heat around himself. Then he was hit with the more urgent need and he responded without real thought, thrusting forcefully into Ashley's body. His nails kept Ashley pinned where he wanted him, not allowing any other motion but to react to his thrusts. Hands finally settling on Shaun's arms, Ashley met every hard thrust, lifting his hips as his fingers dug into Shaun's biceps.

"Harder," Ashley panted, eyes locked onto Shaun's. "I won't break." Gripping tightly to Shaun's arms, Ashley jerked his hips up, crying out and shaking as the move drove Shaun deeper. "Yes!"

Given permission, Shaun didn't hold back. The powerful force of his thrusts jolted Ashley's body with every movement. A low growl began in his throat, the vibration rising in tone to a snarl as the movement of his hips quickened. With one hard shove, his body froze for an instant before violent shudders overtook him. He'd never felt anything like this, to be enveloped in the tight heat as his mind reeled with the strength of his release.

Ashley screamed his name, back bowing. Heat spread between them and for several minutes, Ashley stared wide-eyed at Shaun, body trembling.

Shaun stared down at Ashley. To know he had done this to his Master was an empowering feeling. He drank in the sight and sound as he held to Ashley. The hard press of his hips kept him buried deeply in

Ashley, his body refusing to relinquish him just yet.

"Shaun," Ashley whispered, moving his hand up to brush his fingers over Shaun's lips. "I am yours—body, heart, mind, and soul."

Not understanding all of it himself, Shaun just smiled down at Ashley. Raising his hand, the tip of his fingers grazed gently over the line of his Master's face.

## Chapter Nine

For several weeks, something had been troubling Shaun, yet he didn't say anything. The thoughts intruding in his mind were unwelcome. They had no part in any of what he had. He felt content in his home and in the relationship with his Master. Yet a part of what he couldn't have surfaced, and over the weeks became more frequent to his mind.

Sitting on the bank near the river, he drew his knees up, resting his chin on them. The sun had begun to set and the nearby park was quieting down. Kids were returning to their homes for dinner. Ashley had to work late, but he would be home soon.

"Kitten?" Settling behind him, Ashley slid his arms around Shaun's middle as he rested his chin on Shaun's shoulder. "Shaun. What's wrong?"

A soft purr rumbled with Ashley's closeness. "Nothing," Shaun said, turning his head just enough to lick Ashley's cheek.

Closing his eyes, Ashley smiled. "Something's been on your mind. I can feel it even when you don't say anything." Shifting to the side slightly, he looked at Shaun, smoothing a swath of white hair back, tucking it behind Shaun's ear just as a strand of black fell forward. "I was hoping you'd come to me about whatever is on your mind."

Shaun wasn't surprised Ashley had caught on to the occasional disquiet of his thoughts, and he sighed quietly. "It's just something I'm not supposed to think about, is all. It's not really important."

Brow wrinkling, Ashley slipped a finger beneath Shaun's chin, tilting his head upward. "It's important to me, Shaun. Please tell me."

Twisting to reach Ashley, Shaun moved to his knees and slid his arms around Ashley's neck. "I'm happy with everything you give me." He hesitated then, afraid Ashley would either be shocked or angry. "You know, don't you? That you make me very happy."

"I know that," Ashley said, "but I also know when there's something on your mind. What is it, Shaun?"

"You'll be upset with me if I tell you." Lowering his eyes away from Ashley, Shaun looked over his Master's shoulder.

Turning his head back, Ashley looked into his eyes for a moment before speaking. "I love you, more than I think you understand, Shaun. Nothing will ever change that."

"You're my Master." Shaun had to swallow before he could continue. "I'm not supposed to want what I do." He lifted his hand to Ashley's face and touched the smooth, warm skin. An answering current ran through him, one of need and love. "I can't be human with you."

Ashley blinked. "Oh. Oh, Shaun." Cupping Shaun's face in his hands, Ashley held Shaun's gaze steadily. "I want you, in whatever form I can have you; but to be completely honest, I would love nothing more than to feel the man. I want to touch and taste and feel you as a human. I want to feel you surrounding me; I want to feel you inside me. Please."

Shaun stared at him in shock, not quite comprehending the words. He nudged his Master's hand, rubbing to its warmth as a source of comfort. It slowly dawned on him that Ashley seemed in no way angry and he began to relax. "You want me as human?"

"I want *you*. Human is preferable, although I'm certainly not opposed to you being half-shifted. But I would love nothing more than to play as two men. There's so much to explore, so much we still have to learn about each other: likes, dislikes, specific kinks. I'm not the exactly the most conventional person in the world, if you haven't noticed. God knows you haven't seen my toy collection."

Tilting his head, Shaun studied Ashley. He had no clue what his Master was talking about; he was

just very happy Ashley hadn't gotten angry at him. "You know I'm not allowed to be human with you, but I want to be."

Ashley chuckled and shook his head. "Shaun, in our home, you are allowed to do and be whatever you want. I'd keep it that way outside of our home, but unfortunately society would not take kindly to such things." He smiled slowly then and gave Shaun a wink. "Just imagine, Shaun. Your body held open by a plug as we go shopping, every move causing the toy to shift, keeping you on the edge and never letting you over it."

A shiver ran through Shaun as he remained intent on Ashley's voice and words. His eyes widened slightly. Shifting, he got slightly closer to Ashley, almost ending up in his Master's lap. "I know it is against the Institution, so it has to stay between us." After giving some thought to what Ashley said, he added, "I think I would really like that."

"Mm...and imagine what it would feel like to suck my cock while I fuck you with a toy." Sliding his arms back around Shaun's waist, Ashley pulled him the rest of the way onto his lap, rocking his hips up just enough to let Shaun feel his arousal. "And that's only the beginning of what we could do. There are so many possibilities to explore with toys, and even our hands."

Just the thought made Shaun squirm. A soft growl escaped his throat before he could stop it. He could almost feel what it could be like to have his Master do that to him. "I want you to do that."

Ashley pulled him in for a kiss, licking at Shaun's lips before sliding his tongue inside. With a slight shift of his body, he rolled Shaun onto his back, then hovered over him. Without breaking the kiss, he slid his hand down to press on Shaun's jeans just over his ass.

"Imagine me holding you," Ashley murmured on his lips, "right in the palm of my hand. Your body closing tight around my wrist, my hand buried inside you, making you insane with need."

With words alone, Ashley made Shaun's body tighten and he squirmed beneath his Master. Raising his head slightly, he opened to the teasing of Ashley's tongue. Small pulses of sound betrayed the arousal his Master brought out in him. "Please, Master, please." He wrapped his legs around Ashley, trying to keep Ashley pinned in position as his hips rocked against him.

"Say my name." Ashley moved down to Shaun's neck, licking and marking his skin.

Shaun turned his head toward Ashley, nuzzling against his Master's throat as he whispered, "I need you, Ashley."

Groaning, Ashley lifted his head and stared down into his eyes. "Home. Now. Otherwise, I'm going to give park goers one hell of a show."

Though they were shielded from most casual chance viewers, if they made too much of a noise, somebody would probably investigate. Reluctantly, Shaun let go of Ashley but couldn't resist one last grinding rock of his hips. It sent a sharp reminder through him of his own need, and how only Ashley could satisfy him. As Ashley moved off of him, Shaun stood and grabbed for his Master's hand. He wasn't about to let Ashley get too far away. Ashley hurried them home.

"Bedroom," Ashley said as he locked the front door. "Get naked and on the bed."

Obediently, Shaun went into the bedroom and stripped. He crawled onto the bed and remained on his hands and knees, watching as Ashley came in and went straight to the closet. A thrill of anticipation ran through him and Shaun could barely still it.

After pulling the plastic bin out of the closet, Ashley undressed and grinned at Shaun. "Ready?" He lifted the cover of the bin and stepped back, giving Shaun full view of the contents.

Leaning over, Shaun got a good eyeful. His eyes widened before he looked over at Ashley. Some of the things he recognized: the collar, whip and rope; the rest he could only imagine what uses his Master would have for them. Small glints of metal in the light had him curious and Shaun shifted closer, trying to nose around in the box.

"To say the least, I'm kinky," Ashley said. He crouched down beside the bin and started rummaging through it, setting on the bed a small plug, a fake cock, and a small, unlabeled container. When he was done, he closed the bin and crawled onto the bed, kneeling behind Shaun. "I want the man, Shaun. All of him."

Looking between the objects and Ashley, Shaun had to smile. Yes, his Master was very kinky. As

Ashley came up behind him, Shaun looked back at him over his shoulder as the air hummed with the vibration of electricity as his half-form receded in a matter of seconds, leaving him completely human, except for his white and black striped hair.

"Beautiful," Ashley whispered, sliding his hands down Shaun's spine. "My God. Even your skin is soft." When he reached Shaun's ass, Ashley kneaded the round buttocks before spreading them open. "Fuck."

Just the idea of Ashley doing this to him in his human form was enough to make Shaun's body tighten. A soft hiss of breath escaped him with the sudden probe of Ashley's tongue into him. His head fell forward as he closed his eyes, moaning softly. He pressed slightly backward as his fingers kneaded into the covers.

Ashley pulled back just enough to lick around the outside, sucked lightly on the wrinkled skin, then plunged back in, sliding a finger alongside his tongue. Curling it forward, he kept licking as he stroked his fingertip over Shaun's gland. Shaun ground back, feeling the double penetration of tongue and finger. Moaning softly, his words wrapped to the sound.

"It feels good, Ashley."

He didn't want Ashley to ever stop. He wanted Ashley to do anything and everything he wanted to him. He couldn't reach his Master so his fingers began to knead into the material of the covers as an outlet.

Ashley used his other hand to reach for the dildo and the small container. Popping the top off the container, he had to pull away to slick up the toy. He withdrew his fingers from Shaun and coated the dildo in the white grease. Then he pressed the head, which was a bit bigger in width than his own cock, to Shaun's hole and pushed it slowly inside.

"Oh, fuck, yes."

When he felt the internal stretch to accommodate the toy, Shaun whimpered softly. His Master's name became a hiss of breath. "Ashley." Raising his head, he tried to look over his shoulder at Ashley as his body shifted backward onto the toy. He wanted so badly for his Master to fuck him with it and to know his Master watched it all.

"So fucking good, Shaun."

Ashley pushed the toy deeper, then pulled it out. Setting up a slow, easy rhythm, he began fucking Shaun with it, twisting it just enough for the ridges along the dildo to rub every inch of Shaun on the inside. Shaun could see the fascinated expression on Ashley's face. It mirrored in his own with the sensations coursing in his body. He pushed back on his hands as the toy expanded him, letting his ass take in as much as he could. A slow tremor of excitement raced through him.

"Faster, please, Ashley."

Ashley started fucking Shaun harder and faster with the dildo, groaning loudly. The rubbing friction turned Shaun's insides into quivering jelly, and the rock of his body kept time until Ashley removed the toy.

"Turn over," Ashley said in a shaky, husky voice.

A soft mewl of disappointment sounded, but Shaun quickly shifted to his back. His legs spread open for Ashley as he slid his hands down his thighs to hold up his legs. The position gave Ashley the perfect view of what Shaun knew he wanted. His gaze held Ashley's, pleading silently as he called to his Master with a soft, needy purr. Ashley slid up his body and took his mouth in a kiss, sliding two fingers easily inside him. Deepening the kiss, his Master added a third finger.

It felt so good and Shaun arched, bearing down on Ashley's fingers, pulling them inside of him as his body squirmed. Opening to the kiss, pure hunger greeted Ashley as Shaun's tongue played quickly over his. He badly wanted every sensation his Master could give him.

Adding a fourth finger, Ashley licked at Shaun's lips, moving his fingers inside him, slowly spreading them open. "If you need me to slow down or stop or even come out entirely, then don't hesitate to tell me."

Shaking his head vigorously in answer, the sensation of fullness made Shaun's body tremble with the tension. "No, Ashley, stay there." His fingers tightened on his legs, keeping them held up for Ashley. He

wanted more, though he really had no clue what his body was begging for. Each small movement drew a shaky breath from him.

"Shh," Ashley murmured. "Let me in, Shaun. Open for me."

Tucking his thumb against his palm, Ashley pushed gently, taking things slow. When the widest part of his hand started to go in, he twisted his hand slightly, then pushed one more time. Shaun's ass closed tight around his wrist, sucking Ashley's hand inside.

"Shaun. Oh, fuck."

The burning stretch of his body drew a tiny pained sound from Shaun as he felt the inner muscles protest. He tried to remain still and when his body drew Ashley's hand inside, a rush of feeling swept away all but the sensation itself. He could barely believe the fullness, and he shuddered in response. Closing his eyes, he felt himself, in a way, laid bare to his Master. The only sounds he could make were soft whimpers, calling to Ashley. Ashley gave him a kiss, then sat back up.

"Come on, babe," Ashley whispered. "Ride my hand. Come for me, Shaun." With a twist of his hand, Ashley started pumping it gently inside Shaun, his knuckles grazing over the smooth gland inside with every twist. "Come on, baby."

It took very little movement at all before powerful tremors shook Shaun's body, his mind suddenly adrift in the unbelievable sensations. "Ashley, Ashley." His Master's name became a chant until Shaun lost his breath as his entire body was flooded, his cock pulsing without a single touch. Everything was so strong, he felt like he would pass out.

"Oh, God...Shaun!"

Ashley's hand stilled inside him and his Master jerked, heat spilling onto Shaun's thigh as Ashley came. Panting, Ashley eased his hand out slowly, then leaned down to lick Shaun's cock clean. After wiping off his hand, Ashley slid up Shaun's body.

"Love you. God, I love you, Shaun."

All Shaun could do was let go of his legs. They were still shaky, in the same shape as his body. Staring up at Ashley, he slowly came down from the high his Master had given him.

"Rest, love. That would take a lot out of anyone." Ashley slid to the side and pulled Shaun close. "Next time you can do it to me. Did you enjoy it?"

Shaun curled up against Ashley, desperately needing the contact. Tipping his head back just enough to see Ashley, he whispered, "I don't think 'enjoy' is the word I would use." He could still feel the pressure inside him, leaving an echoing sensation of Ashley's hand.

Ashley smiled and kissed him softly. "I'll second that any day. I'd love to feel your hand inside me sometime." Entwining his fingers with Shaun's, he brought Shaun's hand up to kiss it.

Giving his Master an uncertain look, Shaun shook his head slightly. "I would like to, but I've never done that before." The idea of doing the same thing to Ashley had definite appeal, if he weren't afraid of accidentally hurting him.

"I'd coach you through it, but until then, I'm quite happy with anything else you can think of to put there."

Shaun had to laugh. Curling his hand to Ashley's, he said, "Being with you like this is..." He trailed off, trying to find the words, tears just on the verge of spilling.

Ashley reached up and caught a tear just as it escaped. "Like Heaven," he said quietly. "Being with you is Heaven to me. I could never live without you, Shaun."

Shaun understood exactly what Ashley meant. "Being with you is like every dream I've ever had, Ashley." Smiling, Ashley pulled him close for a kiss, both of them just relaxing into it. Ashley slid his fingers through Shaun's hair, stroking and petting. Heaven, indeed.



## About the Authors

**Mychael Black** never set out to write erotic romance (or romance or erotica, for that matter). When Mychael first started writing (way back when), it was to be a fantasy author—someone along the lines of Tolkien or Mercedes Lackey. Mychael even thought about breaking into horror. Then, somewhere down the line, Mychael got hooked on gay porn.

The rest is history.

Born in Alabama in 1976, Mychael is known by many names. At this point, most people in the e-publishing world (readers and authors) know Mychael as Kay Derwydd.

The name Mychael Black came about when Mychael started working with Shayne Carmichael. (See Shayne's bio for the progression of that whole thing.) To date, Mychael has written countless works with Shayne, plus several single-authored works as Mychael Black.

When not writing, Mychael can usually be found researching anything medieval—arms, armor, history, religion; anything Welsh—culture, language, history; languages—namely Welsh, Hebrew, German; and only God knows what else.

Aside from research, writing, and editing, Mychael spends most of the time chasing down two young children and fighting off the plot bunnies left and right.

More information can be found at the following places:

<http://www.geocities.com/mychaelblack>  
<http://mychael-black2.livejournal.com>

Who is **Shayne Carmichael**? His real name is Shayne Lee Smith. He was born in Itazuke, Japan to American parents. (ie - Dad was in the Air Force). From the age of three to eight, he lived in Taiwan. He's traveled a lot, and only discovered even more he wants to learn about the world.

When not writing, Shayne is a self taught PHP and MySQL dynamo. Or at least one would think from the number of scripts he's been begged to write for free. With any spare time left to him, Shayne runs ERWI (Erotic Romance Writers International), aggravates his co-author, Mychael, to no end, often drowns under Mychael's plot bunnies, and holds a forty hour a week job.

Currently Shayne is working on a six book series, The Legends of the Romanorum. Blood Ties, Blood Magic and Blood Sins are being written by Shayne. The Prince's Angel, And the Two Shall Become One, and Forever May Not Be Long Enough are being written by Shayne and Mychael. Included in the writing list are a few other books, Magic and the Pagan, Night Song, and numerous novellas and shorts.

Shayne writes under the pen names of Sable St Germain and Shayne Carmichael. Sable was an RP character he used to play. Shayne Carmichael is a combination of his first name and Cian's (Angel/sorcerer in The Prince's Angel) last name. The character Shayne writes for in The Prince's Angel is Mael Black. That would explain why Mychael's last name is Black, and the character Mychael writes for is Cian.

Shayne's first official publishing contact is with Phaze for the Power of Two. A vampire D/s, BDSM story written with Mychael Black. The status of Phaze author has been one of their goals. Having achieved that, their next goal is to take over the world.

Over the last nine years, Shayne has rped (roleplayed) and written both male and female characters. Gay, lesbian and het (vanilla and non vanilla). You could say he runs the gamut.

He's never believed whatever gender he happens to possess dictates what he can and can't write. And he pretty much ignores anybody who thinks that way. Especially since he's never been a vampire, were tiger, ghost or guide, but he writes about them anyway.

Hell, he could be a woman pretending to be a man, or a man pretending to be a woman. He might be a 21 year old sex crazed female or a 60 year old dirty old man. It's the world wide anonymous web, remember? In the anonymous vacuum of web space, nobody can hear you scream. They can't tell your age or sex either.

In the publication of most of his books and for advertising, his persona is male. In the comic strip The Beleaguered Lives of Mychael and Shayne, his persona is female. Why? He likes confusing the readers. Then again, maybe he's a bit of both.

Whether he's a man writing gay, lesbian and kinky het or a woman writing gay, lesbian and kinky het, doesn't matter. If he can draw you into a story with his words, he's done his job.

Who is Shayne Carmichael? Does it really matter?

Shayne shares a website with Mychael Black, his partner in crime at <http://www.theprinceangel.com>. Excerpts for other works and several freebie stories are available on the site. To contact Shayne, email [shayne@theprincesangel.com](mailto:shayne@theprincesangel.com).