

Changeling Press

Dakota Cassidy

**A Were-Cat
Christmas**

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ISBN: 978-1-59596-935-4

Formats Available:

HTML, Adobe PDF,

MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:

Changeling Press LLC

PO Box 1046

Martinsburg, WV 25402-1046

www.ChangelingPress.com

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Meet Frankie Lane -- trapped in her Persian cat form, homeless, lost, stuck in a Dumpster in the back of a Chinese restaurant just before Christmas.

Sucks to be her.

Enter Glynice the savior and all 'round pushy broad -- secretary to workaholic Sam Carsters, who spends more time devoted to his law practice than enjoying life. Determined to give Sam a reason to come home at night, Glynice rescues Frankie and deposits her on Sam's desk at his house as an early Christmas gift.

In a cage.

With a big red bow around her neck.

Meet Sam Carsters -- criminal defense attorney, and proud new owner of his very own cat who's half human, rockin' hot and can't seem to hang onto her human form unless she's engaged in a little thing called mating fever. And engage they do...

Frankie's run away from the restraints her culture places on her and the mate who's been chosen as hers. A mate she doesn't want, but desperately needs in order to keep herself erect. Sam's just run away from emotional involvement and anything that has to do with a social life outside of his work.

Frankie needs a place to stay while she figures out what to do about her intended mate and that the guy whose desk she ends up on is hawt and makes her out of control hormones meow? Well, hoorah, baby.

Dedication

For Sheri Fogarty, and Renee George who always has a plot on the spot. You rule!

Love,
Dakota

Chapter One

Of all the jacked up shit.

What to do, what to do?

Frankie Lane lifted and shook a white-blond paw to avoid anything squishy and looked upward once more with a skeptical glance at the lid of the crusty Dumpster. Her keen cat eyes told her she was well and truly fucked.

How utterly degrading to be trapped in some freakin' smelly Dumpster.

After having not one, but two -- *two* -- trash bags dumped on her head. Two filthy, stanky, slimy garbage bags hurled at her by some guy who spoke a language she didn't understand.

It's what every feline that's been pampered all of her life gets when she decides to take matters of mating -- a serious ritual amongst those of her kind -- into her own hands. She deserved nothing less than to have to Dumpster dive for her food.

The indignities she'd had to suffer since she'd gone out for a walk to clear her head five days ago were above and beyond a point well made, thank you. *I get it, okay?* She mentally transmitted a message to whoever the Powers That Be were. Surely someone up there was listening.

A loud, angry growl of discontent drifted to her ears.

Ah, ding-dong. Her empty stomach was calling.

The scent of chicken taunted her, wafting to her delicate, pink nose and settling in it... oh, God, chicken, chicken -- chicken -- chicken. What she wouldn't do for just one bite and it wouldn't even matter if it was still clucking -- which was hedonistic, no doubt. But she was way beyond hedonism after five solid days without much but the scrapings of a Hungry Man Salisbury Steak Dinner and a half eaten corn dog. She might

* * *

"Beulah?"

"Glynice?"

"Wait. Stop right there. Did you hear that?"

Glynice Ackerman halted her purposeful steps, placing a hand on her longtime friend Beulah's arm and held up a wrinkled finger. "Shhhhhh."

"Did you have too many Cosmopolitans at Hwang's, you crazy bat? Don't shush me, old woman."

Glynice narrowed her eyes at her friend. "I said shut up and listen, and don't call me old. You're older than me by three years. Now, hush!" She cocked her head, turning it to the left, then to the right. Damn, she'd swear she'd heard a cat howling.

"Glyn --"

"Shhhhhhhhhh," she hissed, placing a hand over Beulah's mouth. Turning her head once more, she reached for her hearing aide, cranking it up a notch. She nodded her head in affirmation.

Beulah swatted at her hands. "Get off me, you crazy coot!"

But Glynice grabbed her hand and dragged her around the corner of the Chinese restaurant they'd just eaten far too much in. Not to mention it was a work night and they'd consumed alcohol long past what was considered an acceptable Happy Hour. "It's a cat, Beulah. Don't you hear it?"

Beulah yanked her arm from Glynice's grabby hands and straightened her tweed jacket. "I don't hear a damned thing but your senior ramblings. Now let go of me. I have to get home to Angus in time to give him his heart medication or he'll die on me and I don't fancy joining one of those date sites with that cute Dr. Phil on it at the ripe old age of seventy-five. I think my choices would be severely limited to monthly Viagra subscribers and men who wear white socks with their sandals."

Glynice waved her off, distracted by her mission. "You go then."

Beulah's aggravated sigh rasped the cold night air, slicing into Glynice's freshly turned up hearing aide. "I can't leave you here alone. It's dangerous for a woman to be out this late at night. Rapists wander the streets at this hour."

"Beulah, it's nine o' clock. That's only late to old broads like us. Kids are just getting started at this hour and ask yourself something."

Beulah trudged behind her friend, dragging her feet through the cold slush that had accumulated as they'd chatted during dinner. "Uh, what?"

"Who, mugger or rapist, would accost an old woman in galoshes?"

Beulah chuckled. "I see your point, friend. But I'm still not leaving you alone."

Glynice tilted her head again. "Over here," she said, picking up her pace to a brisk trot and stopping at a Dumpster.

"Meooooooooooooooooowwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww!"

"Hell's bell's, Beulah! There's a cat trapped in there. Hurry, help me open the lid..."

Frankie yowled for all she was worth when her acute hearing picked up the two women talking.

As they tried to pry the lid open, she planned her escape. If she was quick, which wasn't terribly likely seeing as she was downright weak from lack of salmon, she could escape the trash can without the "Oh, poor, homeless kitty" spiel. Frankie knew all about being caught unsuspectingly when you'd shifted at a most inconvenient time. It'd happened to her cousin Ralph and there was no way in hell she was going to be someone's pet, thrown the occasional sardine from time to time while she ate dry cat food, lapped tap water and slept on some cheaply carpeted kitty condo.

No. Way.

Chapter Two

So maybe it wasn't the worst thing that could've happened to her.

She did, after all, have Bart's Bacon and Tuna Treats to gnaw on.

And really, Glynice was truly lovely. If one were to choose their captor, Glynice was now high on Frankie's list of most treasured abductors. She had scooped her out of the trash can, weak and undernourished, whisked her away to the local twenty-four hour deli, bought her some outrageously priced canned cat food and treats and given her a yummiy warm, hand-knitted blanket to sleep on.

That said blanket was in a *cage* was neither here nor there.

That she was sporting a big, red bow around her neck, a couple of pokes from some vets needle, the suggestion that she be spayed and was left feeling grumpy about it all was petty after such great lengths had been taken to see to her comfort.

However, that she was in some strange house, on some moron's desk that apparently worked too much, had next to no family and didn't have time for anything other than business acquaintances as his Christmas present was stretching her generous nature.

A line sincerely had to be drawn here.

Frankie closed her eyes, ignoring the mat of hair she'd shed since her adventure had begun and allowed her mind to drift. So Glynice worked for this guy, and according to the conversation she'd had with her friend Beulah, Sam was a lonely man. Always wrapped up in his business. All work, no play made him dull, dull, dull. Sam was the only one who didn't seem to notice his life lacked a good frolic through a buttercup field.

So Glynice, being the motherly sort and an employee of Sam for a number of years, had decided he needed the tender, loving care of a pet that would snuggle with

him at night. Greet him lovingly when he came home. And she thought Frankie was the one to fill the position.

The hell?

How many times did a feline have to hiss at only the merest of glances before her valiant rescuer got the hint? She was so not going to cuddle with some strange old man.

She'd gone out on that fated walk because she didn't want to cuddle with just anyone -- or wonk with them as tradition in her culture deemed necessary.

Of course, because she wasn't willing to mate with the man her parents had chosen for her also meant she was perpetually stuck in her cat form for indeterminate periods of time. It was just unfortunate timing when she'd run out of her parent's house needing space, then ended up shifting and was unable to return to her human form. Stubborn ass that she was, she'd refused to go home and admit defeat. And just look at her now.

"What did you say, Glynice?"

The sound of heavy feet coming from the hallway startled her, the husky voice of her new "owner" carried on a chilly whoosh of air brought in by the opening and closing of the front door. Frankie slammed her eyes shut and curled tighter into a snug ball, but her ears perked up.

"You did *what*?"

Frankie would nod in sympathy if she were in human form. Sam must be hearing the goodwill Glynice thought she'd spread for the first time via a phone.

A longwinded sigh, followed by the slamming of a door came just before an astonished, "A cat!" happened. "Look, Glynice, I know you think I'm overworked and I don't get out enough. I know you think I need more fun in my life, but I like my life just the way it is and it doesn't have the time or the room for a cat in it. And cats aren't fun, they're aloof and hairy."

Oh, good. She had neither the time nor the room to be someone's aloof, hairy cat either. They were officially even.

"No, Glynice. I don't want to see the pretty cat. Yes, I'm sure it's very fluffy, but I have a meeting in twenty minutes and I left my briefs here. I don't have time to fool around with some homeless cat you saved from a Dumpster, but thanks for the yuletide cheer just the same."

Pacing ensued by the sound of scuffling feet and then the rustling of papers. "I know they don't require a lot of care, Glynice. Yes, I know all they need is some food, a bowl of milk, toy mice and a cat litter box, but I don't have time for a pet."

Frankie could hear the war he was waging with himself not to yell at Glynice. When that woman got something in her head, God himself couldn't pluck it out.

"Ohhhhh, don't you dare do that to me Glynice Ackerman -- don't play the pity card. If the cat needs a home then we'll find it one, it just won't be here."

Well, that was okay by her. She didn't need his, by the minimal view she was allowed, stuffy, boring, dark brown and light beige home.

"You named it?" Disbelief rang in his tone.

Oh, indeed. Frankie had a fine new name now. Glynice had dubbed her *Wiggles* and that held truth to it. She had wiggled -- okay, fought to get away from the vet and his shiny needles. Hopefully two rabies shots in one year wouldn't kill her.

"Glynice, be clear on one thing. When the holiday is over, you and I are finally going to talk retirement packages." He paused, apparently listening closely to his secretary.

His laughter was a sharp bark, oozing sarcasm, but it also held a hint of affection too. "Oh, I am so not a tyrant and you know it. What employer on the face of the planet lets his secretary take two-hour lunches so she won't miss a sale at Bergdorfs? What employer in their right mind gives any employee his time-share in Cabo for a month? A month! A long month where he has to deal with everything he does, like playing lawyer, plus what his secretary does."

Another pause, and then, "I know the heat is good for your arthritis, Glynice. Look, I'm just saying I don't want a cat. That doesn't make me mean. It makes me

practical and I have friends, Glynice. I just don't choose to throw darts with them or play golf once a month. I have my work friends and that's plenty."

Dude was dull as the day was long and it showed not only in his décor, but apparently enough that Glynice had decided he needed some un-dulling. He just wasn't playing quite the way Glynice and Beulah had planned. Which was just fine by her.

Frankie Lane was no one's pet.

She just looked like one right now and if she could only find someone, anyone, acceptable enough to mate with temporarily she could shift back to her human form and begin the hunt for the real man of her dreams.

Because the man of her dreams was definitely *not* Henry Weintraub.

Bleh. He was squicky, but her parents found him suitable enough and the mating of their only daughter was a ritual she had no choice but to abide by. Which meant if she didn't hurry up and wonk like soon, she'd be stuck in her cat form forever. Within the shifters of her culture a strict rule applied. Go forth and breed and do it before you're thirty or suffer the wrath.

But somehow, playing with one of those peacock feathers held by the hand of a small child, having her tail nearly yanked off, being potential meat for a dog, eating dry cat food and using a cat litter box seemed worth suffering the wrath rather than ending up with Harry.

Until she'd impulsively left her parents in a rush, shifted, got lost, and couldn't find food because she'd never had to do something so degrading before in her life. She just went to the store and bought it. Which some might call spoiled, but what-evah. She'd still rather starve to death than bunk down with Harry. It wasn't that he was a bad person -- he was just -- just squicky and *so* not meant to be hers. It was the best word she could come up with.

If she'd spent less time creating a career for herself and more time hunting down a mate like so much prey, she'd be sitting pretty. Like her cousin Maude in Queens. She

had a suh-weet deal. A nice house and a couple of kids and a husband who was a Scottish Fold in his cat form. He had an awesome accent...

But alas, here she was on some guy named Sam's desk, listening to him talk about how he didn't need a pet, and she was doing it from a cage.

A cage...

Caaa-razy.

This was all too much. A catnap was in order.

She fell asleep to the tune of Sam rebuffing Glynice's *heartfelt, well thought out* gift.

Damn, that woman so knew how to pluck the guitar strings of guilt.

Chapter Three

Frankie stretched with a wide yawn, rolling as best she could in the confines of the cage to her back, giving it a good scratch. As her head lolled upside down, she caught sight of the cage door.

It was open.

Fly.

Flipping over to her belly, she tentatively poked a head out of the opening and sniffed the air, her whiskers fluttering. The room was dark and there wasn't a sound coming from anywhere in the house.

How generous that her new master had decided she could have free rein. He might regret that when he sat on his boring leather couch tomorrow.

But that was spiteful, wasn't it, she thought, hopping down from the shined to within an inch of its life desk and onto the plush carpeting in Sam's office. She padded out and into the entryway, ignoring the call of a box of takeout that, to her nose, undoubtedly had veal cordon bleu in it. She should get up on the countertop and yark up a hairball or two just to show him who's who 'round here, but she opted against it because the scent of something else was far more enticing.

It made her cock her head in question and follow its heady path down a small hallway and up a flight of stairs.

A door stood open at the top of the stairs and it was exactly where the delicious scent was coming from. Frankie's nose dragged her into another thickly carpeted room where she stopped dead as the familiar surge of flesh and bone shifting overtook her.

Two things happened at once.

She saw a naked man with a bunch of muscles, lying face down on the bed and at the most inconvenient of times, she began to shift. After five bloody days of degradation and torment, now -- *now* she was shifting?

Which would be cause for a *yippee skippee* if not for the fact that clothes were crucial after shifting. Oh, and sex. If she hoped to remain in human form, boinking had to happen ASAP.

Squeak.

Okay, so from where she stood, naked as the day she was born, this Sam was daggone hot. But then, in her human form her eyesight sucked big, fat man hooters and her glasses were probably somewhere off the coast of Oregon by now, lost in her flight to get away from Harry. So maybe he was a total toad and she just couldn't see it well enough to tell. Her glimpse of him before she'd shifted *had* been brief...

She squinted, moving closer to the bed. Damn, it was dark.

The incessant roar of her nerve endings increased, tugging at every cell in her body like she was a tightly strung violin.

Holy fuck.

If she didn't do something to get the hell away from this poor, unsuspecting soul, he was *prey*. Ohhhhhh, prey was so not okay. She didn't even know this man, but her body didn't have its listening ears on -- because it kept creeping closer to the bed.

Her hormones called to her, screaming in agony for satisfaction, every muscle in her newly shifted body on fire with uncontrollable need. Her steps to the edge of the mattress were slow, cautious, but the nearer she got to the bulky outline under the sheet, the harder her heart slammed against her ribs and the stronger her hormones demanded attention.

Her nose twitched, his scent filling her nostrils with luxurious, raw, sound asleep man.

Frankie's legs trembled when she inhaled, letting the smell of his natural odor permeate her senses. Waves of his personal aroma, spicy, male, decadent, bathed her nostrils.

This was bad. Bad. And getting worse.

An arm snaked out, grabbing her around the thighs and pulling her to tumble onto the crisp sheets covered in that delicious scent that had drawn her here in the first place.

Oh, and what an arm, strong, firm, muscled with just the right amount of ripple. Frankie shivered, the shudder twitching along each available inch of her body.

And then his lips were on hers, crushing her mouth, slipping his silky tongue in to stroke hers. Fleeting denials came and went. She was kissing a stranger. And it was an amazingly good kiss. So she was sharing an amazingly good kiss with a stranger.

Hellllooooo, stranger, her cautious half whispered sinisterly.

I know his name, so he's not totally a stranger, her logical side chimed in. *Seriously, Glynice gave him a cat for a Christmas present. He couldn't be Attila the Hun if Glynice thought he'd at least entertain the notion of owning a pet, right?* Pet lovers were good peeps. Obviously Glynice had a good heart. She had saved her from smothering via the stench of garbage. She wouldn't just give her to someone who was a fucktard.

Fire shot to her pussy, sweet, hot, pangs of wanton need spiked in her gut when Sam dragged her to him, shoving the sheets away and pressing his flaming skin to hers, making her forget that he was a stranger for a moment. God, that was so good, flesh against flesh, molten, sizzling, overwhelming.

If she didn't consummate soon...

And now she was contemplating having sex with a stranger.

Sweet mother.

But if she didn't have sex with him, the mere scent of him would make her explode. When the fever of mating took hold it clouded your thinking, turned you into a total sexual animal. A body without a brain. Chemistry and scent were everything in her world and Sam had both in spades.

But she was contemplating having sex with a *stranger*.

And this stranger, whether she knew his name or not, didn't much seem to mind. In fact, he'd started it.

Neener, neener, neener.

This thing she was thinking about doing was like indiscriminate bar sex without the benefit of the booze. She couldn't even see what he looked like. Yet her hormones demanded she submit.

But then she forgot everything when moisture gathered between her thighs instantly at the feel of flesh-against-flesh.

Sam's flesh.

His skin was smooth but for a patch of hair on his chest, rubbing against her breasts with enticing friction. He curved a hand over her hip, stroking it, pulling her against the rigid outline of his cock -- from the feel of it, a cock that was thick, but perfectly proportioned to his long, lean length.

Frankie fought to keep from gasping when his fingers slipped between her thighs and delved into her cunt. His rough-tipped fingers, a contradiction to his cushy office job, stroked her aching clit as his mouth devoured hers.

Her thigh went around his hip to allow him deeper exploration. Sam obliged by inserting a finger into her swollen passage, plunging deeper with each thrust. Frankie's hips bucked upward then rotated on the digit, clinging to his shoulders, digging her nails into them as she clenched her jaw tight.

Sam tore his lips from hers, skating along her neck and shoulder to end at the hard tip of her nipple. His hot breath lingered over it and Frankie lifted herself up, begging for him to pull it into the hot cavern of his mouth.

He took a long pull on it, then twirled his tongue over the pebbled flesh, making her suck in a sharp intake of air. Pleasure, wet and electric sizzled along her veins. The grip her hormones had on her leaving her dizzy and weak. His fingers left her body, making her cry out her disappointment, but there was more when his hair scraped her breasts as he moved downward.

Sam slid along her body, dipping his tongue into her navel, nibbling at her belly, lifting her leg up over his shoulder and burying his face in her cunt.

Frankie clung to his shoulders as waves of anticipation made her impatiently squirm, writhing with agonizing need. She took hold of his hair, lacing her fingers through the thick strands and spreading her legs and when his tongue took its first, long, silky swipe, Frankie clenched her teeth, clamping her jaw shut.

Sam stroked her clit, slow, lazy, long and wet. The decadent slurp of his mouth against her cunt made her quiver. He slipped a hand beneath her ass, pressing her flush to his talented mouth, laving her with his tongue until she dug her fingernails into his scalp and her heel dug into his shoulder.

A small, hissing noise erupted from her throat when she came. The orgasm ripped through her, caressing each nerve ending as it went with a forceful, yet gentle hand. Her legs tightened, her body clenched and she reared up against the rasp of his tongue, coming with a burst of air from her lungs.

Sam crawled up her body, rolling her to her belly with forceful hands, dragging her by the waist to prop her hips up and positioning himself between thighs she willingly spread.

Frankie had long left her doubts behind. The fever of the mate burned white-hot, and if Sam didn't drive into her now she'd lose her mind.

And he did just that. His cock, thick, wide, hard as steel speared her with a jolt that made her head rear back and her neck arch as a silent scream of pleasure she couldn't seem to vocalize fought to be released.

Sam's hand went around her neck, sliding down along it to tug at her nipple while his other hand held her hip tightly against him. The slap of flesh increased its rhythm, the tempo growing frantic as Sam thrust his shaft in tight pulls and draws.

His hand squeezed the flesh of her hip, gripping it as he drove into her, rocking his hips in small circles. Her heart crashed, her limbs ached, yet she lifted her ass higher, taking all of him. Thrust after wet thrust, Sam was relentless and Frankie reveled in the force he put into each stroke, her passage aching, thrumming with the delicious drive of his cock.

His hiss of completion was followed only by the tightening of his hands on her. The long pull he took at her nipple with his fingers, making her lift her hips higher until she let her lower body sink to the bed.

A hot ripple of wanton lust swept over her and as she clung to the bed sheets, she muffled her orgasm into the mattress. The spiral of desperate, clawing need lifted her higher, her pussy soaked and slick, convulsed around his cock, milking the pulsing shaft.

The tension of his body, hard and angular, tightened, tensing for a jaw clenching moment, and then releasing as his hot seed spilled into her on a grunt.

Sam collapsed onto her, a tangle of limbs and sheet, his grip loosening, his breathing evening out.

Frankie gasped for breath, it wheezed in and out of her lungs with a rasp, and the rebel yell of her hormones had finally quieted. Thank God.

Yeah, your hormones are in good shape there, Frankster, but what about your morals?

Shame closed in on her. Shit, she had to -- to -- well, she had to something. What something was, had yet to be determined. Apologize? Did you apologize for that kind of hawt, nasty, Earth shattering sex?

She reached behind her for Sam, his limp form curled inward. She rolled over to find the rise and fall of his chest was even.

He was asleep?

After that?

Peering down at him, she squinted harder, trying to see what he looked like, but failed miserably.

Maybe it'd be best to shift back to her cat form. Then she didn't have to explain anything. Yeah, problem solved. That is, if she could shift back.

Things to ponder...

And she'd do that -- ponder -- right after she napped.

Chapter Four

Sun poured in and fell on Frankie's face, making her pop an eye open. The window on the far side of the room dripped, melting away the ice from the night before.

She burrowed deeper into the warmth of the body next to her.

The body.

The hard body.

The hard, naked body.

Frankie sat up like a shot, taking the blanket with her. Leaning over that hard body, she was finally able to see the owner of it in the daylight. She squinted. Without her glasses he was hard to make out unless she got closer. Memories of last night came back with a rush of visual aids careening through her mind's eye.

She'd had sex with a complete stranger. The man she was supposed to be a gift for.

Hoo boy.

It'd all happened so fast, but her hormones had been out of control. There was just no stopping the call of mating.

Like you tried to stop it? Uh, yo. Wasn't that you all thrusting and heaving?

Frankie scrunched her eyes shut. Okay. Guilty. She hadn't tried to stop it, but when her hormones screamed like that, it was like a freight train. Reason gave way to her uncontrollable urges and nothing short of death could stop it.

She squinted again and looked at the man lying next to her. He had dark chestnut hair, perfectly cut, perfectly conservative. When he rolled over, she jammed a fist in her mouth to keep from screeching in mortification.

Sam. Omigod. It was *Samuel Carster's* bed she was in? Jesus Christ in a mini skirt. She'd slept with the guy she leased her flower shop from. The guy she'd occasionally gabbed with in the elevator when she was making a delivery to his office.

The guy she'd always thought was smokin' hot, but had never had the guts to introduce herself to.

Why in thee hell she hadn't put that together after hearing his name escaped her. She could only claim malnutrition and sleep deprivation. And how the fuck had she missed seeing his secretary Glynice for all these months? Where did the woman hide? Didn't she say she was Sam's secretary?

Sam pulled the sheet up and looked beneath it to see her in all her naked glory. "I think we had sex," his voice startled her. When she didn't immediately reply, he repeated his words. "Did you hear me? I think we had sex."

Hell and yeah. Rockin' sex. With the guy who owns your flower shop. She fought a groan. "Um, yup."

"And you are?"

Wow. He was like the iceman cometh. He didn't even blink, seeing her in his bed. He gave good game. No wonder he was a lawyer. "Frankie." Maybe he wouldn't remember her. She did work downstairs in the lobby and, really, she had little if nothing to do with his law practice other than to supply flowers to the employees there.

Something clicked in his brain and it was all over his face. "I know you. Francis Lane, right?"

In every carnal way imaginable. "In more ways than one now, and everyone just calls me Frankie." *Atta girl, you stir that pot of shit right.*

"You run the flower shop in the lobby of my building."

His building being the operative word. Damn. Foiled. "That's me."

"I *own* the flower shop in the lobby. Along with everything else at Carsters, Weston and Felton."

Eek. "Uh-huh. You do. You own the coffee shop and the newspaper stand too." Lots and lots of ownership here. Oh. God. She'd slept with Sam Carsters. The man whose name was on her lease.

"And you ended up in my bed how?"

"Well, I was kind of scoping the place out and all of a sudden, er... you grabbed me and then one thing led to another and we were all... um, you know..."

He eyeballed her with a cold glare. "Uh, yeah. I get the 'you know' part of this. *Why* did I grab you and how did you get in here to scope anything? I went to bed alone last night. That much I'm sure of."

Frankie tightened the sheet around her and gave him her best innocent look. "I don't have a clue why you grabbed me, but you did. I swear. You were really woozy afterward, though. Maybe you thought you were dreaming?"

Crossing his arms over his broad chest, Sam rolled his tongue in his cheek and cocked a dark eyebrow upward, arrogantly assessing her. "I took one of those prescription sleep aids last night. You know the ones that say you need to prepare for eight hours of sleep before taking it? I have insomnia..."

And an awesome chest...

His jaw squared. "Forget it. You do realize you just slept with someone you don't know."

How kind of you to say it out freakin' loud. Her lips puckered. "You did too." So hah.

"But I wasn't aware I was sleeping with you."

That so sucked. To not remember such amazing sex was criminal. Heinous even. Fuck, what had she done? "Well, there were parts of your body that say different. You'll be happy to know all of your man-parts are in perfect working order."

"Those parts of my body were drugged. Yours? Not so much."

Hookay, he was making her sound fast and loose and she wasn't. All right, so she'd been a little fast and maybe even a little loose last night, but she had a reason. A

good one. A human or perpetually feline one. So how would she explain this? "I do have an explanation."

His caustic glare made her cringe. "And that is?"

There was just no getting around this. None. She had no choice but to come clean. If she didn't, he might call the police or worse, not hear out her intended proposition. For shit's sake, of all the times for her hormones to decide to roar to life. It had to be her hormones on overdrive that had done it. The scent of an attractive man and all. Yet, she was in human form and she hadn't shifted back yet. This was promising, if not slutty to all outward appearances. "Look, I just need you to watch for a minute, okay? I say we get the freaked out shit over with now and move forward because my time is limited."

He cocked a sleep-rumpled head in question. Gawd, he was sexy when he first woke up, all bleary eyed and naked. "Freaked out shit?"

Frankie shook her head, pushing long, blonde strands of hair from her eyes and cracking her knuckles. "Yeah. Believe me when I tell you, you'll freak out. It's standard procedure. But when you're done with all the typical adjectives like disbelief, astonishment, denial and then finally horrified acceptance, it'll all be okay. I promise. Then maybe we can talk because I need your help and I don't have a lot of time to screw around."

Frankie scooted to the end of the bed and slipped off the edge. Forgetting modesty, she let the sheet flow to the floor.

Sam's gaze was many things. Confused was high on the list of things, but there was also a hint of appreciation for her nudity.

"Ready?"

"For?"

Frankie held up a hand to silence him. "Just watch." Thankfully, the shift was easy this time, probably due in part to the sex they'd had.

For the love of dick. She'd had sex with the man she leased her flower shop from. Oh, if she lingered on that thought she'd hide in a tree for the remainder of her days. But she couldn't afford to do that right now.

As her body took over, her human form melting away, she vaguely heard a yelp from where Sam sat, in all his yummy goodness, on the bed.

But he didn't scream or anything and seriously, that was a testament to his strong constitution.

Chapter Five

"More whiskey?"

Sam held up a big hand and shook his dark head, plunking the tumbler on the kitchen counter. "I don't know that any amount of whiskey will ever be enough, but I'll be in AA after what you just showed me if I keep this up." His voice was gruff, his face shell-shocked. He was soooooo cute, drifting in and out of disbelief like he was. Poor thing. She'd have liked to work up to that, but there'd been no time for easing him into her lifestyle.

Frankie's smile was apologetic, concern for his mental health at the top of her list. "Sorry. I know it can be a shock."

His lips formed a thin line. "A shock? *A shock?* You're a cat. A cat, woman, person... *cat*..."

"Which is better than a dog, don't you think? Dogs can be so territorial and they're much harder to potty train. Plus, sometimes they drool. I've never drooled. Not once."

Sam's mouth popped open for a moment, just hanging there, then he closed it with a sharp snap. "Which is surely consolation for the fact that you're a cat. I don't think I can process this right now."

Their silence ticked uncomfortably between them.

"So *you're* my Christmas present from Glynice?"

Frankie threw her hands up in the air as though she were throwing pretend confetti. "Yep. Just like I said. So yay! Merry Christmas and all that fa-la-la jazz."

His gaze pierced hers, dark grey and stormy. Clearly, he wasn't feelin' it. Scrooge. "I think I need a moment." His hand tightened around the glass of whiskey, but she hadn't broken him yet.

Such a man. Such a gorgeous, hunky, brick shithouse man.

"But we have to talk." It was probably too soon after her revelation, but she had no choice. She'd formed a plan in her mind and nothing would make her deviate. Well, unless he said no. Then deviation would be cause for Plan B. Which she hadn't formulated just yet, seeing as Plan A was still in the fly-by-the-seat-of-her-pants stage.

"Is anyone able to talk after seeing something like that?"

Frankie grimaced, tugging his borrowed shirt closer around her. It smelled spicy and male. Soooooo male. "I guess it depends. I mean, there once was this kid who lived down the road from me and whenever I shifted to my cat form, in order for me to get to the field to roam, I had to pass his house. Christ, he was a total shit. I mean, he threw stuff at me, even shot me with his BB gun, the freak. So one day I just got tired of being tormented and I shifted -- like in broad daylight. Risky, I know, but he was a complete tard who deserved it. Anyway, after that, I think he did time in the local nuthouse, but I'm not sure. I just know I didn't much see him around after that. And no, he didn't talk. He did cry, though. So you're right. We can wait to talk. Want to nap? Maybe sleep will help you assimilate this -- me -- our situation. Sometimes sleep is a defense mechanism against the unbelievable."

Sam's brow furrowed, his broad chest expanding with air. "I have to be honest when I say I don't know that I'll ever sleep again. Not with my eyes closed, anyway."

Frankie ran a sympathetic hand over his forehead. His cheeks were flushed and his eyes were kinda glazed. "I really think you should lie down."

His lips became a firm line again. Obviously, he was hanging on to his sanity. By a thread, no doubt, but hanging nonetheless. "Ooooh, no. Absolutely not. I'm all in now. I want to hear the full story. So let's begin from the beginning." Folding his hands in front of his wide chest, he turned with expectation written all over his hunky face. It was clear he wanted her to make sense of the incredibly, and unfortunately for him that just wasn't going to happen today.

Frankie saw his lawyer mind working all the angles and finally said, "Okay. Ask and I'll spill."

"You're the cat Glynice gave me as a Christmas gift? The big, fluffy, white cat in the cage on my desk?"

"I am. A Persian cat to be precise."

"*You* were in a cage on my desk yesterday with a red bow around your neck? That was really *you*?" He sank back into silence.

Her snort made him jump. "I so thought the bow was overboard and so did Beulah, but Glynice insisted. You know, I have to wonder something..."

Sam's head cocked, his gaze bewildered. "You -- *you* have to wonder something?"

"Yeah. I mean, we see each other from time to time all over the building, but how did I miss ever seeing Glynice. She is your secretary, right?"

Now he snorted. "Well, that's easy. She hardly ever shows up to work. I inherited her from my father and she really should be considering retirement, but she clings because she thinks she's helping me and I let her because I love her and she's been a part of my family since as far back as I can remember."

The hint of affection in his tone for Glynice made her heart warm. "Ahh. Okay, anyway, yes, that was me on your desk. You want I should show you aga --"

Sam flipped his hand up so fast it was almost *Karate Kid*-like. "No!" he cleared his throat. "Once was enough." He paused and ran a hand over his stubble-riddled chin, the sound rasping in his sterile kitchen. "And why were you a cat? I mean, how..."

"I'm always a cat. Well, half of one anyway. The other half of me is human. I'm what's known as a shapeshifter."

His shoulders, broad and thickly muscled, flexed under bronzed skin, but his face remained calm with no outward signs of panic. If he was going to freak, he sure didn't show it. Dude was a man, through and through. Yum-my. "And you were in a Dumpster, why?"

"Because I was stuck in my cat form while I was looking for food. Embarrassed as I am to say it, I was starving and I smelled food in the Dumpster. It was just my kind

of luck someone would close the top on me. Truly, it was disgusting. I could have died of asphyxiation in there." She made a face to emphasize just how disgusting.

"And you couldn't shif -- uh... be a human because?"

"I couldn't shift back to my human form because I got stuck and then I got lost and well, you know the rest..."

His hard, chiseled, oh, so angled, fabulous face held nothing but bewilderment -- disorientation. His luscious mouth -- a mouth that had dedicated much time and pleasure to places on her body she didn't know could respond like that -- fell open again.

Frankie placed a hand under his chin and gently closed it, settling onto the barstool at Sam's breakfast bar. "Okay, here's the short story. I'll try to go slow so you can absorb everything. I come from a culture of shapeshifters. We can shift from human form to cat form. My culture believes procreation is the way to keep our breed alive. If we don't mate and begin to at least try and procreate by the time we're thirty, as sort of a punishment because we're not doing what's necessary to keep our breed alive and kicking, we're cursed to remain in our cat forms. It's some ancient bylaw or something. The time between shift from human to cat gets longer and longer the less I mate and inevitably, if I don't mate, I become someone's house pet -- *forever*."

Sam massaged his temples and muttered, "Jesus Christ."

Frankie shook her head in agreement. "Huh-huh. Believe me, I've said that a lot lately. It's archaic, I know, but it is what it is. I had a horrible argument with my parents and I stepped outside for some fresh air before I said something I'd regret, shifted and got lost, couldn't shift back, then got myself stuck in a garbage can. But seriously, I'd do it all again. In fact, I'd go out on a limb and venture to say I'd rather be stuck in PetCo for the rest of my life than mate with Harry Weintraub."

"Harry who?"

"Weintraub." She shuddered for effect.

"So *why* do you have to mate with him? Is that an ancient bylaw too?"

With a roll of her eyes, she clucked her tongue. "I have to mate with him because he's the guy my parents thought would be a good mate for me and he's available, and I haven't produced anyone to show them I'm working toward mating for life -- or even mating at all. I was career oriented and a procrastinator, if you listen to my cousin Maude. Anyway, Harry...well, he's icky."

"Icky... Wait, they mate you off in this shapechanging whatever place? Like arranged marriages?"

Frankie tugged at her long tendrils of hair, pulling them up and twisting them into a knot on the top of her head. "*Shapeshifting* and yep. Unless I find a mate on my own I'm on the chopping block and the curse of being a shapeshifter means I have to abide by the laws and the laws say I must mate and procreate."

"So you were stuck as a cat... What unstuck you?"

My raging, flamin' hormones? The fact that you're hotter than volcanic lava? Your deliciously decadent scent? "I'm not sure," she hedged. "It just happened and then you grabbed me and well, desperate times and all... truthfully, I think it was the sex."

"So what we did --"

"Boinked. We boinked, Sam." No use in not stating the obvious. They'd wonked, banged, stomped the shit out of his mattress.

"Right. What we did... it kept you in your human form?"

Frankie blew out a nervous breath. "Yeah. I think so, and that's why we need to talk. I'm gonna go out on a limb here and guess you aren't around here much because, according to Glynice, you work all the time, yes?"

The look of surprise at her blunt assessment might have made her chuckle. If she wasn't so desperate. "Glynice thinks I need a life. I think she needs to retire. We often spar about it."

Sliding off her chair, Frankie gave him a coy, playful look. She didn't have much practice at it, but her mortal life *was* in the balance here. Her flower shop... her cute apartment on the West Side. Giuseppe's fine Italian dining. Manicures. Oh, God, there was no way she could give up her manicures. "Right, I heard. So I had a thought, seeing

as I have a predicament and all." She winked a green eye and let her lips slide into a slow upward tilt of a half-smile.

Sam put his game face on. The one he probably used when he cross-examined criminals. "You're not very good at this, are you?"

Frankie left her expression blank, opting to play dumb. "I don't know what you mean."

"I mean the sex kitten thing." He inhaled, then chuckled at his own pun. "Sex. Kitten. Funny, huh?"

"A riot."

His face immediately went sober. "Okay, so again I say, you're not very good at it, are you?"

"You say that, why?"

"Look, uh, Frankie, right?"

"Yes. Frankie Lane. Definitely not Wiggles."

"Whatever. I'm a lawyer. I can read people pretty well and this just isn't a role you're comfortable in. Not even a little."

Well, he had her pegged, now didn't he? "That's not the point. Here's the point. You're hardly ever here, right?" she encouraged, praying he'd agree to this.

In an instant his face was hard, much the way she imagined he'd be when he made a closing argument. "Why don't you tell me what you're getting at? I'm a facts kind of guy. It's the lawyer in me. So let's stop beating around the bush, okay? What do you want? Money?"

"A crib."

"A *what*?"

Her face flushed, but she plowed onward. "A place to stay, lawyer. Look, I can't go back to my apartment because that's the first place my parents will go looking for me. I can't go to the flower shop either. Thank God for Renaldo, is all I have to say to that."

"Renaldo?"

"Yeah, he works for me."

Realization flooded his face and he nodded. "Right, short, spiky hair with the fake blond highlights and a tendency toward wearing the color pink."

Frankie grinned. "Yes, that's him. He'll take care of the shop until I can get back there. But here's the thing. I'm in my human form for now and I need to use that to my advantage while I can. Who knows when I'll shift back again? But I need somewhere to hide."

"A place to stay..."

"Yeah, and you're hardly ever here. You won't even know I'm around. Promise."

"Exactly how do you plan to figure this out -- no matter where you stay? If there's nothing you can do but mate to stop this shift thing from happening then --"

Her eyes strayed toward the cold, white ceramic tile of his kitchen floor. "I know, I know. It looks like I'm fucked, right? I dunno. I haven't thought past actually being in my human form and that's why I need a place to hide because there just has to be some other way." Her chin set stubbornly as she crossed her arms over her chest.

His gaze returned to skeptical. "Question?"

"Go."

"I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but in this shapeshifting place, do you people -- cats -- um, women... do you all have sex with just anyone because you need to mate?"

Frankie giggled. "Don't be silly. We're not a bunch of 'ho's. Well, most of us aren't. Me included."

"But you had sex with me and I'm a total stranger. That makes no sense."

She hung her head and peered at him through her lashes. "I couldn't help it. I mean, my hormones couldn't help it."

"Your hormones..."

Her sigh was long and windy as she toyed with the edge of the coaster his drink had been on. "Yeah. My hormones are definitely discriminatory. They won't just have sex with anyone. Hence why I won't mate with Harry. So don't go feeling like you were

only a warm body. There has to be some modicum of attraction there. Some kind of chemistry. But when my instinct to mate gets all riled up... caution goes out the window like a credit card at a good sale on Jimmy Choo's..."

He took a long gulp of his whiskey, swishing it in his mouth, then swallowed. "A cat. You're a cat."

"*You're* cat for all intents and purposes."

Slapping the tumbler back on the counter, Sam rose from his barstool and groaned. "Okay, I think I really need to go lay down now. Wait. We didn't... um, did you use... I mean, we're not going to make --"

She read his face and then laughed because his alarm was so evident. "Kittens? No. I can only reproduce at specific times of the year. Promise. And I'm clean. Ask Glynice. She made sure I had all my shots."

"Shots... Okay, yeah. Now I'm *really* lying down." He was drifting off again, clearly letting his disbelief settle back into his logical brain. He'd shut down soon if she didn't let him process.

Placing a hand on his warm arm, she asked, "But while you lay down, would you give some thought to my proposition? I'd really appreciate having a place to hang while I figure this out. I promise to stay out of your hair while you think. Oh, and I cook. If that helps in the decision making process."

That mask of confusion on his face returned. "Uh, right. I'll go do that. Think. About cats. About cats and sex I hardly remember and hiding and you in your human form, not your cat form. So you don't have to mate with Harry Wein -- Weir --"

"Weintraub," she supplied. "Remember? Blech."

Sam turned back around and grabbed the entire bottle of whisky, tucking it under his brawny arm. "Yeah. What you said," were his last words before he wandered out of the kitchen and back up the stairs.

Frankie sank back onto the barstool and rested her head in her hands.

Oh. My. God.

Chapter Six

"You can cook." Sam made the statement like he was surprised when he entered his kitchen almost six hours later.

Frankie stirred the noodles for the pasta without looking up. "And you can sleep."

"I was traumatized."

Giving the sauce one more stir, she placed the top back on it and turned to face him. "Look, I'm sorry I put you on the spot today. It was really, really wrong of me because you were sort of still in shock. I know it seems like I was catching you in a weak moment on purpose, but I wasn't. I'm just desperate for some peace and quiet from my parents who've nagged me forever about Harry." Frankie whipped back around, hiding behind the curtain of her hair.

Sam came to stand behind her, peering over her shoulder to take a whiff of the sauce she was intently focusing on. "Smells good."

Her eyes met his chin, sharp and angular. "Did you hear me? I just apologized. And now you accept so I can save face."

The warmth of his presence behind her seeped into her spine. "Yep, I heard you. Apology accepted. Spaghetti?" he asked, the press of his broad chest against her back curling her toes.

"With marinara sauce. You didn't have much else in your pantry and I figured it was the least I could do, seeing as we, you know..."

"I like marinara sauce," he murmured against the shell of her ear. "And yeah, *I know.*"

Her nipples beaded, tight and hard. Oh, fuck. He so had to move or she couldn't be held responsible for hurling herself at him. "Good. It should be ready in twenty minutes."

His breath stirred a long strand of hair and the heat wave he'd created last night returned tenfold.

Frankie backed away, because if she didn't that hormone thing would happen again and while it might keep her in her human form longer, it would make her look like a slut. Those who didn't know her culture would never, ever understand the fever created by the need to mate. Especially when you were as attracted to someone as she was to Sam. Physically, he was so fantastic he made her mouth water.

She moved to brace her back on the counter by the sink, letting the cool granite soothe her overheated skin. "So have you given some thought to what I said?"

His dark head dipped while he jammed his hands into the pockets of his worn jeans. "I have."

"And?"

He'd changed into jeans and a black pullover sweater, leaving her feeling naked in the dress shirt he'd handed her earlier and nothing else. "Who told you I work all the time?"

Frankie's shoulders shrugged. "Glynice. Well, she didn't tell me, she told Wiggles and Beulah, but she's right, I guess. And it's sort of obvious. I mean, it's two weeks till Christmas and you don't even have a single decoration. Or don't lawyers decorate for Christmas?"

"I'm busy. I don't have time to decorate."

Frankie held up a finger, pointing it at him. "Exactly my point. You're never here except to sleep. So, are we cool? I'll sleep on the couch and I can pay you if you'd like. Write you a check or whatever."

His dark eyebrow rose. "I don't want money. What I want to know is what happens if your hormones do whatever they did last night and you shift back? It won't matter where you stay then, will it?"

Ah, the dilemma. All out in the open. "No, but I think I've bought myself a few days at least."

"And in that time you expect to find a mate so you can..." he stalled.

"Mate," she stated matter of factly.

Sam sucked in his cheeks. "Right, that and keep your human form?"

Her smile was crooked. "Hope springs eternal and all. Look, I seriously don't know what I'm going to do, but if I could just do it without being cold, half-starved and stuck in some garbage can, I might be able to think more clearly."

"Okay."

Frankie cocked her head at him. "Just like that?"

"Just like that. I know you're not a thief because of the lease for the flower shop. We do background and credit checks, and you came up clean. I know what you're saying is true, at least the cat part of it because I saw it with my own eyes. I don't know that it's sunk in, but I saw it. So yeah, just like that."

Relief flooded her belly and the headache that had begun to stir right between her eyes instantly dissipated. "Thank you."

The doorbell chimed, startling them both. Sam shot her a confused glance. "Who the hell..." He padded out of the kitchen with Frankie in tow. Yanking open the heavy door to a rush of chilled air, she peered over his shoulder to find Renaldo, and he wasn't alone.

Ah, her beloved intended.

Harry Weintraub.

Suh-weet.

"I think my sauce burned." She plunked the top to the pot down on the stove and wrinkled her nose.

"I think Harry's more burned."

Frankie giggled, a carefree bubble of laughter spilling from her throat. "Hey, I wasn't the one who burned him. That, lawyer, was you."

Sam threw his hands in the air, palms up, a twinkle of the kill still in his eyes. "It was do or die. I didn't have a choice. Either I saved your ass from the icky Harry or he was going to throw you over his icky shoulder and take you home to mate. So I improvised."

"Know what I can't believe?"

"What's that?"

Frankie crossed to the living room and plunked down on Sam's couch, crossing her legs. "That Renaldo was such a pansy-ass. I should have never called him and told him where I was so he wouldn't worry. Who knew Harry was so intimidating he'd make Renaldo sing like a bird?"

Sam sank down beside her. "Harry was pretty pissed."

"You should never have told him you were my boyfriend, but I appreciate the sentiment."

Brushing a strand of hair from her face, he twirled a finger around it. "Well, we couldn't have you end up with the icky Harry, could we?"

Frankie's somber eyes sought his, her stomach twisting into a knot. "Seriously, thank you. You saved me a lot of hurt feelings because if I had to tell Harry I thought he was icky, I would have felt really bad. I don't want to hurt his feelings. I just don't want to --"

"Mate with him," he offered, his lips but inches from hers.

Frankie gulped, the spiral of electricity whirring between them made it hard to swallow. "Right. No mating with Harry."

"You think he'll tell your parents where you are?"

"No. He'd suffer some serious humiliation. He won't let the cat out of the bag just yet, so to speak. Not until he absolutely has to. And you did hear him, didn't you? He's going to fight for me." Christ, how utterly humiliating. Harry waving his fist, which in proportion to Sam's was laughable, swearing he'd win Frankie's heart if it was the last thing he did.

Sam's lips lifted into a smile that made her heart flutter. "Oh, I heard. In fact, the entire neighborhood heard."

How they'd begun to lean into one another, Frankie couldn't say, but the air between them grew thick, pulsing with an unspoken energy.

Her breath caught when Sam leaned into her, the spicy scent of his aftershave lighting her nostrils on fire. "I think I have to go to bed," he declared suddenly.

"I think that's a good idea."

"I have court early tomorrow."

"Court... early," she repeated, hushed and shaky.

Sam's grey eyes scanned her face. "This is me going to bed."

Frankie's cheeks flushed, her body instinctively leaning toward his, shivering wantonly. "This is me saying goodnight and wholeheartedly encouraging you to go to bed." *Pronto. Before my hormones make your hormones scream uncle.*

Sam's hand cupped her cheek, his thumb gliding along the curve of it. "Goodnight, Frankie."

"Night, Sam." Her voice was strangely husky and if he didn't take his hand off her, move his smokin' body as far away from hers as he possibly could, some shit would fly. "This is the part where you go to bed and I clean the kitchen," she tried to joke, yet the heave of her chest and her stilted words betrayed her.

But he didn't move away, instead he moved in closer. "What if I don't go to bed?"

"We'll find out if your man-parts still work while traumatized."

He chuckled, thick like hot fudge. "I wouldn't mind finding out if my man-parts still work."

Her throat became thick and her toes tingled. "Trust me. They work."

"But I don't recall them working. Remember? Prescription sleep aide?"

"Then you'll have to consider me your inside source."

"Maybe I don't want to go to bed."

"Sam, if you don't go to bed now --"

“You’ll what?”

Frankie didn’t answer him, but the call of her body did. Much the way a steamroller might. His scent intoxicated her, his frame, hot and hard, begged for her to slap herself up against him in a way that would leave him calling her a nymph come morning.

The mating fever rushed over her in a heavy swell of hormonal agony. Christ, she needed him inside her, but this time she wanted to taste him. Every lusciously rippled inch of him. She threw her arms around his neck and Sam responded by dragging her to his lap, yanking open the buttons of her borrowed shirt with such force they popped off.

Her groan when he tore the shirt from her shoulders was husky and oh so needy. Sam pushed her down to the couch, the cool leather sticking to her skin. He slipped an arm under her waist, lifting her breasts to his mouth. His grunt of satisfaction when his hot tongue encircled each nipple made her cunt clench hard.

Frankie’s hands tore at his sweater, dragging it over his head and hurling it to the floor. The rigid outline of his cock pressed insistently against his jeans and her mouth watered when she traced a finger alongside the hard flesh.

She slid between his legs, stopping at his waist to pop the button of his jeans and reveling in the sound of his zipper being pulled downward. Her hands were shaky, impatient as she shoved the material of his pants and his boxer-briefs down over his hips.

Sam shoved his jeans off with a kick and came to rest in front of her mouth again. His cock was thick, long, pulsing with a heat that emanated from him in waves.

Frankie took a swipe at the steely flesh, running her tongue seductively up and down along each side of his shaft. He bucked against the touch of the tip of her tongue, making her smile in satisfaction. She reached up, gripping his hips and positioning him over her lips, then enveloped him in one swift glide, tightening her mouth around his cock and letting her tongue graze his length.

Sam wound the length of her hair around his wrist, pulling her up flush to his abdomen, plunging in and out of the silken cavern her mouth had created. She cupped his balls, fondling them, then reached around him to grab his hard, muscled ass and push him deeper.

She took long pulls on his cock, alternately sucking and stroking him until his loud hiss and the rough yank of his hips dragged his shaft from her mouth. And then he was pulling her to him, settling her in his lap, sliding down over the edge of the couch, and slipping between her thighs to nip the insides of each one.

His lips were like magic, sipping, gliding over her skin. She held her breath just before he opened his mouth wide and placed it over her pussy.

Bright colors floated behind Frankie's eyelids, leaving her dizzy and weak. Her hands blindly reached for the back of the couch, clinging to it, rocking against the slippery wet length of his tongue. Her clit throbbed, pounding unbearably until she wound her fingers in his thick hair and drove his mouth against her cunt.

Harder, faster, hotter he stroked her and then everything was exploding at once. A rushing tidal wave of sharp, sweet relief sliced through her. Her nipples tightened to aching points, her toes curled, her gut clenched, her uterus contracted as she came.

Tears stung her eyes and the crash of her heart against her ribs became almost uncomfortable, but Sam wasted no time. He was sitting in front of her again in a matter of seconds, and his cock slipped between her slick folds, rubbing, sliding, enticing her.

Frankie reached a hand between them, taking hold of his rock-hard length and letting it caress her clit. Her fingernails dug into his hard shoulder and her head fell back as soft moans escaped her throat.

Sam placed his hands on her hips, raising her up to bring her crashing down on his cock. Frankie gasped out loud this time, biting her lip. The pleasure of his entry, swift and forceful was so intoxicating. He fit her tightly to him, molding the lower half of her body to his, rasping her clit against the thick curls above his shaft.

Her arms let go as he plunged upward into her, hanging limply and letting her hands rest lifelessly on his sculpted, smooth thighs. Sam sought her nipple, pulling on it

with his lips, sending sharp pangs of need to her cunt. He ground against her, driving into her, their flesh so connected Frankie could no longer feel where he began and she left off.

Again, the hot spiral of climax clawed at her, wickedly dragging her into a vortex of nothing but the feel of Sam inside her.

Sam's final plunge upward was slick, wet, flaming hot. Frankie felt him tense beneath her, releasing her nipple and throwing his head back with a roar of satisfaction, and taking her with him.

Mary Mother of God. She didn't think it could get any better than it'd been last night.

Apparently, she shouldn't think so damned much.

She collapsed against the thick wall of his chest, inhaling his clean, crisp cologne with a shuddering breath. When she could breathe again, she quipped, "I did say you should go to bed, didn't I?"

"You did," he mumbled groggily.

"And you didn't."

"Nope."

Sam lifted her off him, turning her to lie beside him on the couch. Oh, hell, this was way too good.

Her hand instantly curved around his forearm as she snuggled her back into his chest. She shouldn't be encouraging this. She should be getting up and going to sleep in her cage. Like now. But he pulled her closer.

"See what you get for not listening?" She chided. "I warned you. The fever of mating can be an entity all unto its own."

"No kidding."

"This is sort of what happened last night. Except I wasn't nearly as forward."

Sam's laugh was muffled against the back of her head. "Go to sleep, Frankie. I'll see you tomorrow."

Yeah, but would he see her like he saw her now, or would he see her with four paws and whiskers?

Hellafino.

Chapter Seven

Sam bounced his pen on his office desk, ignoring the closing argument he was working on, and instead drifted off to the place known as Frankie. A wry smile lifted his lips, unwilling, but not unnoticed.

Funny, quirky, homeless, sexy as hell Frankie.

Who was a cat.

A cat.

A week and a half later and he was still having trouble wrapping his logical, Harvard educated brain around that. Yet, there was no denying what she'd done -- right in front of him, no less. She'd gone from a perfectly normal looking, albeit beautifully naked, woman to a fluffy, almost white cat.

And then she'd asked to stay in his house while she figured out exactly how she was going to avoid turning back into a cat because of some cultural ritual.

A cat.

And rituals.

Jesus Christ.

It was probably best not to dwell on that. Yet, when he thought of her, coming home to her every night for the past week and a half like he had been, he smiled. In fact, he'd catch himself smiling like some dumb ass teenager out of nowhere. When it was totally unwelcome and completely inconvenient.

You couldn't deliver a stern cross-examination if you were grinning from ear-to-ear like an asshole. You couldn't take a deposition if you were daydreaming about wrapping your wrist around all those long tendrils of blonde hair and almond shaped green eyes that sparkled when she laughed.

Sam threw the pen down in frustration. He didn't want to like her. He didn't want to look forward to seeing her at the end of each day. He didn't want to admit he left work early so he could do just that.

See her. Talk to her. Share meals with her. Meals she cooked as part of their bargain.

His career was demanding. It had never left room for personal relationships. They always ended because owning this law firm took up almost all of his time. The women he'd dated ended up unsatisfied and ignored -- at least that's what the last one had said as she'd departed in a cloud of perfume and heels. But that sure the fuck wasn't stopping him from rolling out of his office as fast as he could every night at six sharp, now was it? So what was so special about Frankie Lane?

He'd like to attribute his fascination with this woman to the sex. Christ knew they'd had plenty of that this past week, and not only that, it was the hottest he'd ever experienced with any woman. It seemed he couldn't stop himself from finding any possible excuse to touch her, but there was more.

He liked opening his front door and smelling whatever she was cooking. He liked eating it with her too. He liked that she made coming home more than just a place to sleep. He liked to talk to her. He liked to just sit in silence with her.

He liked.

Damn.

* * *

Frankie tied her hair back and took one last glance in the mirror at her human form. So far so good. After a week and a half, she still had no conclusions to her problem and that sucked, but she did have Sam.

Who really had to stop infiltrating her every thought. The habits they'd fallen into were much like any other couple, and knowing eventually that had to end did something weird to her insides. Because they weren't a couple and she had to go home sometime. She couldn't stay at Sam's forever. She had a business -- a business she'd run out on during the busiest time of the year -- and a family who, even if they weren't

exactly cutting edge rule breakers, were her family. And it was Christmas. She missed them. But when she had to leave Sam, she'd miss him too. More than she liked admitting. Every night she looked forward to his coming home. They talked about everything and nothing over dinner, while they watched TV, in the dark after they made love.

And she was getting attached.

Fuck. A Duck.

The reports from Renaldo on the Harry front were he'd assured her parents that while he'd heard from Frankie, knew she was safe, he didn't know where exactly she was. And that comforted her to a degree. Her parents knew she was all right, but she had to go home. She didn't have a choice. Hiding was the short-term answer. Her fate was to mate with Harry and if she wouldn't, she'd suffer the penance.

Mating with Harry was unthinkable after Sam, but Sam, even though he never said it, didn't want a long-term relationship. His lifestyle thus far had proven that. He lived in a house that looked like it was one of those model homes. There was nothing that screamed Sam hanging on the walls or even in the way of personal pictures. He was a man, in her estimation, who was just going through the motions of life. Doing what he had to do to be successful, but never enjoying that success by sharing it with anyone else.

Yet the Sam she'd come to know wasn't just hot in bed. He was a million other things she couldn't pinpoint and that made her secretly smile.

A lot.

Maybe if they'd met under other circumstances, the way normal people do when they date, things might have been different, but she couldn't keep kidding herself. The longer she stayed with Sam, the harder it'd be to leave him. Her throat grew tight.

The front door popped open just as she resolved herself to do what she had to do. Clearing her throat, she swallowed and slapped a fake, carefree smile on her face. "Wow, home early again? It's my fettuccini, isn't it?" Frankie teased with a flirty grin.

His gaze scanned his living room, then stopped to rest in the center of it. "What the hell is that in the living room?" he growled, clearly out of sorts.

"Well, let's see. It has lights and ornaments and oh, look they're on a tree. I call Christmas tree, but that's just my wild assumption." What kind of reaction was that to something as fun as a Christmas tree?

Throwing his briefcase and cell on the counter, Sam eyed her with those dark grey eyes. It was a different look than she'd become accustomed to this week and it made her pause from the task of getting their plates from the cabinet. "Why is it in my living room?"

"Because it wouldn't fit in the kitchen and I figured it was way overboard for the bathroom."

"Why is it here *at all*, Frankie?"

She plunked the plates down on his breakfast bar with a clunk. "What the hell is up your ass, Sam? It's there because Christmas is in three days and I thought it might be nice to spread the love and all that commercial crap."

"So?"

Planting her hands on her hips, Frankie scowled at him. "All right. Why don't you tell me what the frig is wrong with you? Bad day? Difficult criminal? Retainer bounced? What?"

Sam's face became hard and unreadable. "Nothing's wrong. I just don't see the point."

"The point is, it's Christmas. It's fun, festive. 'Tis the season, you Scrooge."

His jaw set like drying cement. "Still don't see the point and they make a mess."

Her eyes narrowed. "Of course you don't. You know, Glynice was right about you. You work too much and you've forgotten what it is to have a little fun. You got lucky when she pawned me off on you, Sam. I could teach you a thing or two about letting loose sometimes."

He loosened his tie, yanking it off and dropping it to the counter. "I'd say we've been very loose this past week and a half."

Her cheeks flushed as she backed him into a corner and pointed a finger at his chest, her anger spiking. "And there's your problem right there, Samuel Carsters. You're talking sex. I'm talking Christmas. A Christmas tree for your boring, sterile house that no one would ever know was yours if your name wasn't on the freakin' mailbox."

Looking down at her, his eyes seared hers, hard and cold as granite. "So now I'm boring?"

Frankie snorted at him with derisive fury. It was a fucking Christmas tree, not a Martha Stewart makeover. The hell? "When it comes to the game of life, yeah, you're a total yawn. Jesus, you don't even take vacations and with all the money you have, you could've gone 'round the world by now."

His face held a look that had an "aha" written all over it. "So this is about my money? I should have known that's why you were here."

Her fists clenched at her sides to keep from wailing him right between the eyes. "Don't you go all lawyer on me, Sam. That's bullshit. If you only knew how far from the truth that is. Did you leave your mind back at that office you hole up in for fourteen hours a day? What the fuck does that mean?"

Sam's eyes narrowed in her direction. "This mating thing all makes sense now. If it weren't for Glynice mixed up in all of this, I'd think you orchestrated it yourself. If you manage to snare me and mate, you not only get to retain your human form but you get the perks my fourteen hours a day bring."

Her gasp was crisp, sharp and harsh to her ears. "You did *not* just say that to me."

His jaw squared, his lips thinned. "Yeah, I did. You're working me, weaving a web of sex and food so you can nail me."

Oh, of all the fucktards... "Yeah, Sam. That's exactly right. I cooked so I could win you over. If you'll recall our conversations, and we've had many between all those *loose* moments, I fucking hate to cook. And nail you? Like keep you forever?" Her voice became raw with that. Raw and tinged with flabbergasted.

"You got it."

Fury tingled along her spine, ripe and hot. "Oh, dude. You so have it wrong. I wouldn't keep you forever if somebody offered me ownership of Lord and Taylor's to do it. You're too involved in making that money you think I want so badly, buddy. I was keeping my end of the bargain. I said I'd cook and I did."

"Among other things," he drawled with sarcasm.

Narrowing her eyes, Frankie took a step backward, the angry rush of words that came to mind thwarted only by how insulted she was. He actually thought she'd done this because he was the answer to her mating problem? The fucking nerve. "You know something, Sam? You're not good enough to mate with me. Not by a long shot. In fact, I'd rather mate with Harry, you self-absorbed, arrogant, cranky shit!"

Whirling around on her heel, she grabbed the coat and a bag of her things Renaldo had given him and headed for the door, opening then slamming it with a force she didn't know she had in her.

Just who the fuck did Sam Carsters think he was accusing her of trying to nab her a millionaire? Kicking at the slushy snow, her anger fueled her pace out of his swanky neighborhood. The air chilled her to the bone, but she'd be fucked and feathered if she'd go back to his house ever again.

And to think she'd actually liked him -- a lot. She'd even gone so far as to wish they'd met in the lobby of his building. That the attraction she felt for him would have still been there without the urgent circumstances. Yeah, maybe then she might have focused a bunch of energy on working him, as he'd called it, but not in the way he seemed to think. She would have liked to show Sam what it was to enjoy life, appreciate the things he had and lighten the hell up.

Now she just wanted him to rot in that place called hell because he'd made her feel cheap and tawdry.

The motherfucker.

Chapter Eight

"So how's Wiggles?" Glynice asked, breezing into Sam's office to drop the last of his calls on his desk before rushing home to her family for the holiday.

Sam didn't look up. He couldn't.

"Are you still grudging about the damned cat? It's been almost two weeks since I found her, Sam. Get over it already. That hairy little thing's made you smile more in two weeks than in the twenty years I've known you. Your father would be so sad to see you like this, Sam. Here in the office on Christmas Eve. He loved Christmas and so did your mother, and they sure didn't work on it. They went home to *you*."

She leaned down over his desk and popped him under the chin. "Now go home to your cat and stop hanging around here. It's Christmas Eve, for God's sake. And you know, the invitation always stands to come to my house for Christmas dinner -- if you have a death wish, that is," she cackled.

When Sam didn't move, Glynice plunked a hand over the papers on his desk. "Hurry up and get moving. Your cat's waiting. Go home to it." She chuckled and patted him on the head before whisking out the office door.

If only he could...

* * *

"She's been like this for two days? Damn, I'm sorry, Frankie."

Renaldo raised an arrogant eyebrow at him and flipped his palm at Sam dismissively. "No thanks to you, from what I'm told."

"We had a fight."

"I heard."

The set of Sam's mouth was grim. "It was bad."

"You were a total shit."

"I can be like that sometimes."

"Ya think?"

Sam nodded and crouched down to bring himself face level with the ottoman. "I think. It's instinct for me to look for the crappy in people. I think my secretary pegged me right when she said I work too much. I seem to have forgotten what it is not to be so judgmental."

Renaldo smacked his lips. "Well, Mr. Greenbacks, way-to-go."

Sam gazed into Frankie's eyes.

Her cat ones.

When she'd arrived at Renaldo's two nights ago, first she'd cried, then she'd called her parents and then, because she wasn't mating anymore, she'd shifted.

She'd shifted and she couldn't shift back.

Sam ran a finger under her chin, but Frankie lifted her head and averted her eyes to the far wall. For all the misery he'd caused her by accusing her of being some mate stalking gold digger, she should spew the tuna she'd had for lunch all over his immaculate navy suit and red tie. She knew how to summon a good yark. Instead, she opted to be cool -- distant. Do what cats do best. Ignore the living shit out of you.

"So what happens now?" Sam looked to Renaldo, the worry in his eyes was clear as she peeked at him, but she wouldn't be swayed.

"Did I get here before you, hot stuff? If there was something I could have done, I'd have done it by now, but I'm late. I have a Christmas Eve party to attend." He pulled on a pink scarf and brushed a hand over his spiky hair. "And if I were you? I'd hang my head in shame, buddy. If you knew the first thing about Frankie, you'd know she comes from some serious cash. Old money, by the way. Not the new stuff you mouthy lawyers use as a reason to avoid entanglements and as excuses to be assholes."

Sam's sigh was aggravated, but contrition lingered on his strong face. "Look, I said I was sorry."

Renaldo's head bobbed up and down. "Uh-huh. You sure did. Good on you, bully. Now you go about being a dumb ass. You wear it soooo well. Me? I'm going to

my party. I totally don't want to miss the artichoke dip this year. Jay makes the most fabulous artichoke dip." He brushed a hand over Frankie's head and blew her a kiss, exiting his apartment door.

Sam sat down on his haunches on the floor in front of her. "So like I said, I'm sorry. I overreacted."

No. I'd hardly call accusing me of being a gold digger overreacting. It was a simple deduction.

"I have a lot of money."

Dude, no way? Me too.

"Women usually want to date me because of it."

Was that what we did? Date? How come I ended up doing all the cooking? When one dates doesn't that usually involve some wining and dining? I think I've been shafted.

"It tends to make a guy cautious."

Or paranoid delusional.

"And being a criminal defense attorney, I always look for the worst possible motive, and not just in the criminals I defend."

Shut. Up. Really? I so had the wool pulled over my eyes. Her spine began to tingle, so she rolled onto her back to stretch, lazily reaching upward to the ceiling with her front paws. Then she yawned -- wide. Frankie rolled back over.

"I'm a shit."

Indeed. She'd nod her wee cat head in agreement if that were possible.

He took to stroking her back, smoothing the long hair of her coat with a hand that was gentle. Like the Sam before he'd called her some money grubbing tramp. "And now you're stuck again because I was a shithead."

Observant.

Sam kneaded the spot just above her tail with his knuckles. God, that was good... "I turned the lights on the Christmas tree before I left."

Festive.

Sam rose and paced in front of the ottoman. "So I came here to tell you something."

Niiiiice. What haven't we covered? Money hungry? Check. Loose? Check. Really, what's left? But he'd caught her attention. Frankie took her time sitting up on her haunches, reaching her paws in front of her and rolling her head, then settling her feet beneath her in bored repose.

He stopped pacing and looked her square in the eye, his perfect hair glistening from the snow and his eyes sincere. "I can't stop thinking about you, Frankie. Not since you arrived and not since you left. You're the first woman I've wanted to get to know better in a very long time."

Like she'd stopped thinking about him? Not that she wouldn't have her tongue cut out before admitting it, though.

His hard face softened in the light of Renaldo's over-the-top Christmas light extravaganza. Running a hand through his hair, Sam shook his head, his grin wry. Words were his thing. He used them to slice people to ribbons all the time, but it was obvious to Frankie, in a personal setting, he sucked big, fat man hooters at expressing himself. "I think I miss you. I think I miss having you to come home to. In fact, I know I do. Look, I came here to apologize and see if you'd give me another chance. Maybe we could start over and do this the right way. Spend more time together."

Which might be awkward in social settings, seeing as I'm a cat and you're a human. Somehow, that would paint a very bizarre picture at say, a lawyer's convention, no? Me on a leash...

"But now you're stuck again and that's because of me."

Um, yeah. Fucktard.

Kneeling in front of her again, Sam scooped her up in his arms and scratched her ears. "Can I just say this is weird? I know you're in there, but I'm apologizing to a cat."

And driving me insane with those hands. Frankie couldn't help it, she arched into his palm, an unbidden purr erupting from her mouth. Gawd, he was so hawt. Which didn't

contradict the fact that he was still a shit -- a hawt one, but still a shit. The tingle she'd experienced in her spine earlier returned full force, tugging at her insides.

Sam searched her green eyes, intently, insistently. "Does this mean I'm forgiven?"

Her fur rippled. Well, it meant *something*. When he stroked her chin, it was all over but the cryin'. Just like that, in a tangle of shedding fur and crunching limbs, she was transformed to her human form once again.

Naked, but transformed.

Sam closed his eyes and gulped. Her eyes followed the up and down motion of his Adam's apple. "I don't know if I'll ever get used to that."

Frankie cocked an eyebrow at him, leaning away from the grip he'd taken on her hip. "Who said you'll have the opportunity?"

"Know what I say?"

She shook her head, fighting a chuckle, trying to ignore how good it felt to be in his arms again. "No, what do you say?"

"I say you need me. You haven't shifted in two days, yet I'm here twenty minutes and look. You're all human."

Frankie rolled her eyes at him. "Very knight in shining armor of you to point that out."

Sam cupped her chin, stroking her jaw with his thumb, making her body curl into his without will. "Seriously, Frankie. I was an asshole. I'm sorry."

"You really were."

He nodded his head in a somber motion, but his eyes glittered. "I really was. How can I make it up to you?"

She draped her arms around his neck and smiled. "I believe you mentioned doing this right. Doing this right could entail pecan-encrusted salmon during a fine dining experience. Dating me all right and proper. Movies, maybe the occasional concert. I'm a Barry Manilow fan, FYI. It means leaving the office at a reasonable hour to do it too. It means delegating so you can. Because if nothing else, I enjoy life, Sam.

Especially seeing as the possibility of it being reduced to a cat litter box is so real. Now, if you're up to that, I might consider it. "

He chuckled in her ear, sending a skitter of electricity along her spine. "Done. Anything else?"

Her nipples brushed against the fine silk of his suit. "No, I think we've covered the basics for now, Scrooge."

"About that..."

"About what?"

"The Scrooge thing."

Her smile was warm and she was curious, but she didn't want to pressure him to talk about something that had so obviously pissed him off. She had a feeling they had plenty of time. "Wow, you're all about the sharing tonight, huh?"

"My family is gone. My parents, that is. I think I have some distant relatives somewhere in Europe, but that's it. I never had a reason to celebrate Christmas after they died. But I like Christmas. Really. I was just picking a fight to pick a fight. You were turning me into someone I didn't understand and I reacted."

"Ohhhh, no. That was all you. I can't make you do anything. *You* were turning into someone you don't understand because you *way* like me. And I guess, for someone like you, who's always buried in some legal case, that can be a sort of overwhelming experience. I'll let it slide this time due to uncharted territory."

Sam's eyes held hers. "I can't help who I am and who I am is a man who defends pricks sometimes. I think that bled over into my personal life and I sorta got crazy."

"Ya think?"

He nuzzled her neck, trailing his fingers between her breasts with seductive passes. "I think. So you wanna kiss and make up or something?"

"Or something," she muttered as his lips found hers, his tongue plunging into her mouth with delicious silky-smooth strokes.

"I thought we were getting to know each other better," he muttered, pulling off his jacket and fumbling with the tie around his neck.

Frankie curved a leg around his waist, molding herself to the delicious, rigid line between his legs. "I thought so too, but my hormones say differently."

The grumble from his chest, now bare, made her tingle from head to toe. "The hormone thing. That must be what made you shift back. My hormones specifically, huh?"

"Don't get over-confident, mister." Her smile was sly.

Sliding out of his trousers and kicking off his shoes, Sam hauled the lower half of her body to his, letting his cock caress her folds. "I'm just sayin'..." he offered before he hiked her legs up around his waist and walked her back to the ottoman. Setting her on it, he slid down her body, planting kisses on her overheated flesh as he went. He cupped her breasts together, taking turns at laving each nipple to a fine, rigid point.

Frankie leaned back on her elbows, spreading her legs wide to allow him access to her cunt. Sam obliged, dragging his fingers through the wet, slick surface, stroking her clit to an aching nub, reaching for her mouth again and plunging his tongue into it to stroke the dark recesses.

Her hands reached between them, grasping his thick cock between her fingers and stroking the silken, hot flesh. Sam groaned into her mouth and she absorbed his pleasure by lifting her hips, sliding low on the ottoman and inviting him to take her.

Sam pushed her hands away, gripping his shaft and placing it at her entrance. The urgency of his gesture made Frankie squirm beneath him but he waited, driving her to the brink of insanity with anticipation.

He let the head of his cock dip into her, leaving her clenching desperately at his shoulders for more, whimpering with need. His chuckle against her mouth was seductively sinister, wickedly letting her know he was in charge.

And then without warning, his large hands forcefully grabbed her hips and he plunged into her, driving the heat of his shaft balls deep.

Frankie screamed, not even bothering to hide the relief he brought as he entered her with such force they both jolted. Her legs lifted higher around his hips, angling them so his cock touched the deepest part of her. Sam drove deeper and deeper, harder

and harder until she could only helplessly hang in his arms as he took sweet, measured plunges, leaving her breathless.

The fire that swept along her spine, the gut clenching intensity of his strokes made her thrash her head, clench her jaw, beg for release from this agonizingly, delicious spiral of pleasure.

Their flesh slapped against each other's, carnal to her ears. And then she was overwhelmed by sensation. The delicious friction his pubic hair rubbing against her swollen clit caused, the stretch of her pussy as it took him deeper and deeper and the slippery slide of sweat on their skin sent her over the edge.

She screamed again as the electric wave of orgasm assaulted her. Her chest crashed against his, her head swam, colored lights flashed behind her eyelids and then, sweet relief. Sweet, blessed relief washed over her.

Sam's last stroke made her limp body buck helplessly against him as he came too.

Their heavy, rasping gasps for air filled the room. Sweat glistened under the Christmas lights on Sam's forehead. "Wow, those hormones," he muttered with a chuckle thick like gravy.

"Yeaahhhhhh," she sighed, leaning into his broad chest and focusing on breathing properly as they slid to the floor.

When their lungs had filled with air again, she whispered, "I think we'd better get dressed before Renaldo comes home."

Sam's smile was lascivious when he wiggled his eyebrows at her. "I think we should go back to my house and do this again before Renaldo comes home."

Frankie mocked horror. "And you called *me* loose?"

"Didn't I apologize for that?"

Rolling over to straddle him, she giggled, planting her hands on his chest. "Yep, but a reminder about the error of your ways will keep you on your toes, don't you think?" she smiled with a saucy grin.

He returned her smile with an equally cocky one. "I think you'll always keep me on my toes."

"I think you'd be lucky if I did."

"I think you might be one cocky cat."

"I think you should thank your lucky stars you got *me* as a Christmas gift. Do you have any clue how sorry you'd be if I were Siamese? God, they're such snooty, tired bitches."

"I'll send out a thank you card to Glynice post haste. So how do we tell icky Harry you're seeing me now?"

Poor Harry. He hadn't taken the news well. "I already took care of that. Well, not the part about seeing you, but about how I wasn't going to be mating with him."

Sam's smile was filled with self-assurance. "Did you now? And what about your parents? How're they going to feel about a human dating their daughter? Is there some bylaw about that too?"

"Nope. But you'll be our first human ever. We don't travel very far out of our social circles for reasons I think I've shown you. You have a bunch of stuff to learn about me. You might regret asking to get to know me better."

Sam caressed her spine with long fingers. "I'm all in, but let me be sure I completely understand before I get in any deeper. You and me, we have to mate to keep you in human form."

Frankie walked her fingers along his chest and toyed with the hair between his pecs. "Yep. *A lot*. Bet you're sorry now, huh?"

His grin widened and his arms, strong, secure, encompassed her. "This is my sad face."

Her lips grazed his. "So you turned on the Christmas lights on your tree just for me, huh?"

Sam nodded. "Just for you."

"Wow, who's all in the Christmas spirit, eh, Scrooge?" she teased, planting a kiss on his luscious lips.

"The guy who got a cat for Christmas," he answered.

"Beats getting a tie."

"And then some," he joked.

"The *uber lucky* guy who got a cat for Christmas and don't you forget it."

His voice grew husky as he pulled her to a standing position, trickling a finger between her breasts. "That's me. So I say we go back to my place and I can practice unwrapping my Christmas gift -- over and over."

Frankie giggled again, light and fluttering. "You know what I say to that?"

"What do you say to that?"

She winked. "I say, woo and hoo. Merry Christmas to me."

His laughter filled her ears, his kiss seductively inviting. "I think I'm going to like this getting to know you thing. Merry Christmas, Frankie."

Her sigh was one of contentment, her smile warm. "Merry Christmas, Sam."

Dakota Cassidy

Dakota Cassidy found writing quite by accident and it's "been madness ever since." Who knew writing the grocery list would turn into this? Dakota loves anything funny and nothing pleases her more than to hear she's made someone laugh. She loves to write in many genres with a contemporary flair. Dakota lives with her two handsome sons, a dog and a cat. (None of them shape shift -- that we know of.) She'd love to hear from you -- she always answers her e-mail! Visit her at www.dakotacassidy.com or email her at dakota@dakotacassidy.com.