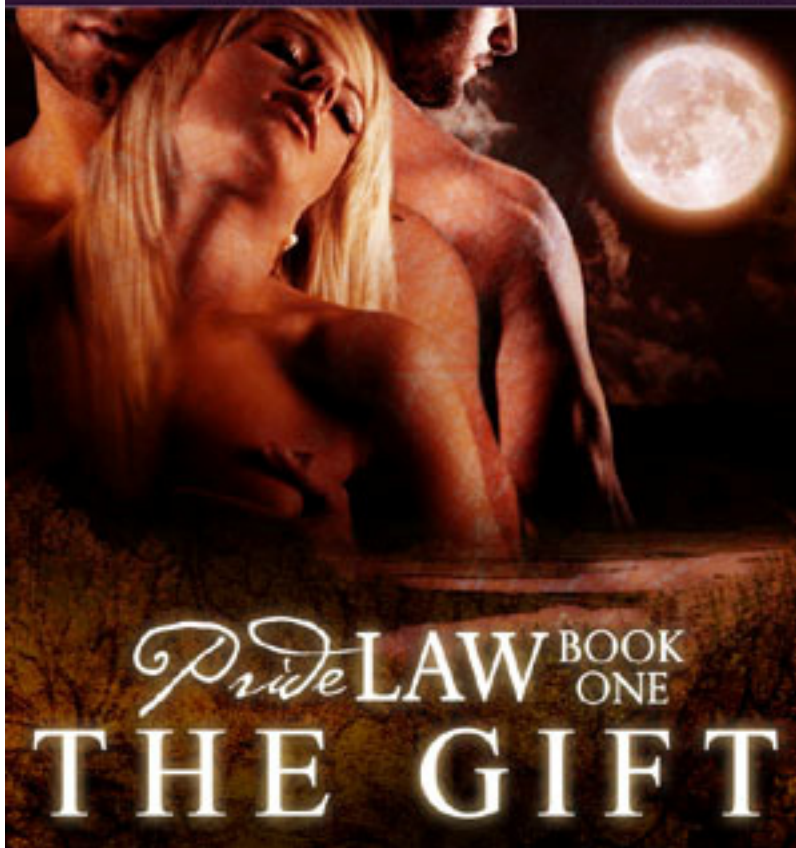


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Loribelle Hunt



Pride LAW BOOK ONE
THE GIFT

The Gift by Loriblle Hunt

***PRIDE LAW
BOOK ONE***

The Gift

By Loribelle Hunt

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The Gift

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Dedication

To my family and friends.
Your continued support is what keeps me going. Love you all!

Chapter One

Carlos Rivera was careful the woman wasn't aware of his study. She'd been introduced two months ago as Sunny. No last name, and it'd taken weeks before she'd confessed it was Nolan. He could have just asked Julian, but he'd wanted her to open up to him. He couldn't shake the feeling her knew her.

Her name was the only information she'd willingly given up, but even with her last name, his background check on her had come up completely empty. It was like she didn't exist. She was a mystery, and his cat had never been able to resist a puzzle.

He called her the Ice Queen in his head, not entirely comfortable with his rising obsession. But after just a few weeks in her silent company, he realized his first assessment was wrong. It wasn't that she was cold. She was just very reserved, especially with weres.

That shouldn't have surprised him. She was a tracker in a secretive human organization that hunted feral werelines and rogue werewolves, and probably any other were species that got out of line. It was obvious most of the human hunters were a part of the organization because they'd experienced tragedy at the hands of one species or the other. He was dying to ask what her story was, but he was pretty damned sure it was too soon to get it out of her.

A sign detailing restaurants at the next exit flashed by, and he slowed to enter the ramp.

"Why are we stopping?"

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The first words she'd spoken since they'd left North Carolina were soft, almost drowsy, and they hit him hard, intensifying the arousal he already felt into painful need. He glanced down, shifting a little in his seat, and hoped she didn't notice his cock had grown hard in his jeans.

"We need to refuel."

She turned to look at him, right as he looked up, and he swore he saw a flash of amusement in her eyes.

"You did that an hour ago."

"I meant food," he said, turning into a fast food place.

"Oh."

She exited the car without another word and waited on the sidewalk outside until Asa and Declan, who were following in their own vehicle, joined them. The three entered as a group with Carlos bringing up the rear. She relaxed as she ordered, took the wolves gentle teasing in stride and didn't argue—too much—when they insisted on paying for her meal.

The genial atmosphere continued at the table. Between the three of them, at least. Carlos was finding it increasingly hard to control his cat, the wild side of him scratching to break free. Each time she smiled at one of the wolves, each time she laughed at a joke, it grew worse. And it wasn't just her smiles, her laughs winding him up. Carlos enjoyed men just as much as women.

There was something about the wolf, Declan, that called to him too. A call he was finding harder and harder to resist. He wanted a taste of the man, and then some. His lion considered Asa an interloper, and it wasn't pleased to not be the center of Sunny and Declan's attention. Carlos struggled to contain a low snarl and knew he hadn't succeeded when she turned to watch him with somber eyes.

What the fuck was wrong with him? Jealousy? Possessiveness? He couldn't remember the last time he'd gone territorial over a woman, much less a man. He just wasn't built that way. What was it about this one that made him want to roll her in bubble wrap and hide her away? What was it about the male that made him want to roar his dominance?

"If you're done, we should get a move on," he snapped.

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Of course, she didn't reply. It was almost like she figured if she didn't respond to him, he was no threat. She was wrong about that. She'd engaged the cat and was now its prey whether she liked it or not. Once she'd thrown out her trash, she returned to the car, the three of them following. Declan stopped him before he could get into the driver's seat.

"Careful, cat," he said with an expectant grin. "That one scratches back."

As far as warnings went, it was a lousy one. He craved this mysterious warrior woman, not a domesticated kitten. He could get plenty of that at home.

"And so do I," Declan murmured, and there was no mistaking the heat in the werewolf's eyes.

Carlos's nostrils flared to take in the growing scent of his arousal. Fucking ambrosia. Oh yeah. His interest was reciprocated. It was only a matter of time before he had the wolf exactly where he wanted him. Declan flicked his gaze to Sunny, who watched with interest from inside the car. He gave her a tight smile before getting in the SUV he was traveling in.

Carlos continued south, turning seduction scenes over in his mind as he drove. His lion insisted he take her first. Declan wanted her too, but the lion would never accept less than supreme dominance. It wasn't until they crossed the Georgia state line into Florida that Sunny spoke, startling him from his thoughts.

"Do you think we'll find him there?"

He glanced over and let his gaze sweep over her regal profile, moving down her torso to the sweater covering her generous breasts, before forcing his gaze back to the road.

"I don't know."

This was their third trip to south Florida looking for Arthur Roberts. The werewolf was excellent at hiding when he wanted to. Carlos was pretty sure if they found Arthur, and the man had succeeded in his mission, he'd take his own life before he let himself get captured by the good guys. That was why Declan was along. Arthur was his older brother, and he was determined to see him safe. But Carlos knew that wasn't likely

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to happen. Arthur's mate had been murdered by a rogue werewolf years ago, and the only thing he lived for now was revenge. To make matters even more difficult, on each trip south, Carlos had the nagging feeling Sunny was there for another mission entirely.

The car fell silent again, and for once in his life, he wasn't comfortable in it. Eventually she twisted her body so she could face him, pulling one leg up to rest her knee against the center console. The urge to touch her, to set his hand on the inside of her knee and slide it down, was so intense he gripped the steering wheel. Even if he could talk her into pulling off the side of the road and stripping for him, they weren't alone. He was glad when she spoke again, but less than pleased with the topic.

"At the Halloween party, you implied..." he braced himself during her brief hesitation, "you'd lost someone once. Your mate?"

He should have kept his trap shut back then. He'd spoken to Gia, tried to tell her that once mated a were couldn't live alone, without his other half, but he'd really wanted Sunny to understand that.

"My parents."

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked."

This time he didn't resist the urge to touch her. Setting his hand on her knee, he squeezed it slightly when she tried to pull away.

"You have every right to ask," he said so softly he knew her less sensitive human ears wouldn't hear and understand the words. Hell, he wasn't ready to acknowledge that himself. When she didn't ask anything else, didn't push for answers, he forced himself to tell the story instead of wondering about his feelings.

"My mother was beautiful. Talented. Frail." He took a deep shuddering breath, the pain just as sharp now as it had been when he was a child. "She had cancer. Fought it a long time, but she died when I was ten."

Her slim, cool fingers closed over his hand. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked," she whispered.

He shrugged. "You would have found out soon enough."

"That's not all, is it?"

"No." He wasn't sure the best way to continue, so he just spit it out.

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"My dad gave up on life after that. He died a couple months later."

"Oh God. That had to suck for a ten-year-old."

He lifted her hand to his lips for a soft kiss, then scraped her knuckles with his teeth. She trembled, and he moved his hand so he could brush his thumb over the pulse point on her wrist. It was fast and erratic, and when he lifted her wrist to his mouth to taste the delicate skin, her arousal was a heady perfume on her skin.

And she wasn't happy about it. She tugged, and he only released her after licking her wrist. Her pulse jumped under the stroke, and her inviting scent grew stronger.

Once again safe on her side of the car, she snapped at him. "Don't do that again."

Fine. That left plenty of other places to taste, and he was definitely going back for seconds.

"Why?"

"Did it occur to you I might not be available?"

He gripped the steering wheel hard and struggled to control the lion side of his nature. He could only describe what he was feeling as possessive rage, which made absolutely no sense. He'd often shared women. Werelions were sensual with high sex drives, and he was no different. Even among mated pairs, there were third and fourth parties active in the relationship. Sometimes they were temporary. Usually they were long term or permanent. It was pride law. So why did he object so strongly to sharing this woman? Well, he'd share her with Declan, but that was probably because he had every intention of keeping him too.

"You're not wearing a ring."

She laughed, but it held more anger than joy. "That doesn't mean I'm not involved with someone."

He growled. Couldn't help himself. "Get rid of him."

"Yeah. Sure. Just as soon as hell freezes over."

Her voice vibrated with anger, and he bit back a smile. Yeah. He'd been wrong about Sunny Nolan all right. Her reserve hid a passionate temper, not a lack of emotion. As soon as the opportunity presented itself, he'd test that passion. And even as he struggled with jealousy, he

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wondered if her lover was someone he'd want to bring into their circle.

"Well, get ready, baby, 'cause hell just froze over."

She twisted in her seat to face him, her anger simmering in the air between them, but she didn't speak for several minutes. When she did, her words were a shock. The hurt he felt even more stunning.

"Are you just incapable of hitting on women? Is that a cat thing?"

"There are plenty of women I don't hit on." He was bewildered by her accusation. His cat had been stung by the anger in her voice.

"You flirted with every female at Julian's party. Including Gia, who was obviously taken."

"None of that was serious flirting. It was more along the lines of being friendly."

She huffed. "Yeah, right. You aren't being very friendly when you order me to quit seeing someone," she pointed out. "How many women does that work on?"

Was it possible she was jealous? He shrugged, attempting to hide how much he liked the thought. "No idea. I've never tried it before."

She snorted. "And, yet, you're trying now."

His reaction was immediate and instinctive. *Because you're mine.* Fuck. How had he not realized that? He refused to turn and look at her. As soon as he'd crossed that line in his mind, his cock had swelled to painful, demanding fullness. He was afraid if he faced her now, he wouldn't be able to fight the need to pull off to the side of the road, take her into the woods, and make his claim a physical reality.

They had too much company for that. Both the wolves wanted her, that was an undeniable fact, and later he would invite Declan to join in. But she would be his first and last. Always. Fuck. He had an even bigger problem. According to pride law, once he took a mate he had to bring at least one male into the group. There was no denying he wanted that male to be Declan. But traditionally, he should take one more. Since Declan was a wolf, he wouldn't really have an option not to. The fourth didn't have to be his lover, however. In fact, fourths were usually younger brothers. His just happened to be single and close to their destination. It wasn't the best solution, but it would be enough to prevent any challenges. And just in

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time for Christmas.

"Well?" she pushed.

No way in hell was he touching that subject now. "How long have you been a tracker?"

She faced forward again and stared out the window so long he didn't expect an answer. "Ten years."

"So you were what when you started? Sixteen?"

"Fishing for information?"

"Just making small talk. Long drive." They still had at least another ten hours ahead of them if they didn't stop for the night. If he didn't have two werewolves tagging along, he'd play tired. Hell, that's what he would do if Asa wasn't along.

He looked at her from the corner of his eye. In a tight black sweater that showcased high, full breasts, along with tight black jeans, she made his mouth water. Her hair was a curious mix of blonde and brown. She had it up in a high ponytail, and he wondered how she'd react if he pulled it free to spear his fingers through.

"You're drooling," she said tartly.

"Not yet. Might when I get you naked though."

She huffed again. "Not likely."

He grinned. He liked that acerbic tone. The challenge. "Maybe I'll wrap you up. A Christmas present to myself."

This time she rolled her eyes. "I don't do Christmas, cat."

He'd noticed her discomfiture with the décor and music, the cheer when they'd stopped to eat. "Why not?"

"No reason to," she said softly.

He retrieved her hand, squeezed it. "You do now."

He expected her to argue, but she didn't. Leaning her head back against the rest, she closed her eyes and ignored him for the rest of the drive.

Chapter Two

Declan Roberts tried to concentrate on his missing brother, Arthur. Whether he meant to stop Arthur from going after Burns on his own or help, he wasn't sure. He told himself he only kept coming this far south to protect his brother. But it was a lie. He watched the taillights of the car in front of them while Asa drove. Silent. Not inviting conversation. Declan sighed. Endings sucked.

He could see Carlos and Sunny were talking, and he was jealous as hell. They were the reason he kept coming here. He wanted to be in that vehicle. With both of them. Privy to all their secrets, their desires. He wanted to be the one to grant them.

He was so fucked.

He'd met Sunny a few months ago when the human hunters joined with the werewolf Hunters. He'd been paired to work with her. Over that time, his fascination with her had grown way beyond sexual.

There'd been a girl once, one who was his, but she'd died, long before he could claim her. If they'd had a mate bond, even a sexual bond, he probably wouldn't have survived the loss. But they hadn't, and he had. Eventually.

Eventually he'd moved on. Joined the Hunters. Eventually he'd discovered women. He glanced at Asa. And men. Eventually he'd met Sunny, and something about her drew him.

It'd taken a long time to get her to open up even a little. A long time before she let him see the keen mind she hid, before she let him see

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the heat in her eyes. He knew what movies she liked. What books and art. How she voted. But always, her past was a secret. A mystery that was almost as big a draw as the woman.

He wanted to know her inside and out.

And she wasn't the only one.

It was too silent in the Excursion, so he turned on the radio, gave up on finding a station not playing Christmas music and settled on Rudolph with a Southern twang.

"Do you think you can have them both?" Asa asked softly, like he was afraid of breaking a spell.

Ah, they were finally going to discuss it.

"Yes. No. I don't know."

Asa looked at him, grinning, shaking his head. It wasn't the bitter look he'd feared. "You won't be able to control the lion."

He chuckled. "Don't be so sure of that."

If it came down to a relationship, he didn't believe either he or Carlos would top for long. They'd always struggle for that position. Sunny would almost be a buffer between them. Someone their animal natures would agree to protect, leaving them to...each other.

"Carlos is..." Declan looked over sharply when Asa broke off. He held up a hand. "Hey, I don't want him for myself. No worries there. Cut out the growling and I'll go on."

Declan hadn't even been aware he was growling. Shit. He was too far gone for anyone to go back now. He wanted Sunny. He wanted Carlos. They both wanted him. It was going to happen. Simple equation. Right?

"Like I was saying, Carlos is an enigma. We don't know much about him except he's the king's brother. Or the way lion dens work. But they aren't like wolves." He paused. "Have you heard of pride law?"

"No."

"I don't know much about it." He shrugged, but Declan didn't miss the curiosity in his voice. "But what I got was when a male lion takes a mate, it isn't just one, and the plus is male. Males. More than one, usually. And they all belong to the dominant male in the group."

And just where the hell had Asa gotten this information?

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"And you heard this how?"

Asa didn't respond, and after a moment, he remembered. "I see," Declan said softly.

According to werewolf tradition, males were unabashedly heterosexual. Macho, alpha men who only liked women all the time. Tradition could go hang. Gay and bi werewolves were careful to keep their private lives private, but that didn't mean they didn't indulge. Hell, he and Asa had done the on-again off-again thing for longer than he cared to remember. And he remembered a time not long ago, when they were off, that his friend got involved with someone. He didn't know much. Just that it had ended badly. He'd bet anything now that that someone was a lion.

Asa gave him a sharp grin. "I keep going back there 'cause I catch his scent. And *hers*. She's down there somewhere, Dec."

Declan leaned back against his door, suddenly not feeling guilty that he was going after Sunny and Carlos with no intention of bringing Asa along for the ride. He laughed. "You could have said something. I might have felt less guilty."

Asa sent him an incredulous look. "Are you kidding? And miss watching you squirm?"

He threw an empty coffee cup at him, but, laughing, Asa easily sent it sailing into the backseat.

"So, you're okay with this?"

"Yeah."

"Who is this guy? Why didn't you say anything? I would've helped, you know."

Asa shrugged. "I know. It's just...I got the feeling even if he did mate, he wasn't bringing a wolf into his circle."

Well, didn't that have to suck? Did Carlos feel the same way?

"Sorry, man," he said softly.

Neither spoke for a long time.

"There's the woman, though. My mate," Asa finally said.

"Who is she?"

Scowling, Asa shook his head. "No idea. I just know she's there. I

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catch a faint whiff on the air sometimes.”

“We’ll find her.” He and Asa had been through way too much shit together for Declan to abandon him now.

“You’re gonna be busy enough.” He laughed. “But when y’all head home, I’m staying.”

He started to protest, but Asa stopped him. “I have to, Dec. And you have your own life to get on with.”

Friends didn’t abandon each other, though. He shook his head. “No.”

Asa grinned. “How did I know you’d say that? I have a feeling, Dec, this is the trip I’ll find her. So maybe it won’t even be an issue.”

Chapter Three

Sunny Nolan breathed a sigh of relief when they finally reached the safe house in south Florida. For more reasons than one. It was the only house on the street not decked out for Christmas. *Not* her favorite holiday. She hadn't celebrated it since she was sixteen. Had never seen the point, since she was always alone. It looked like this year would be different though. Unfortunately. If anyone insisted on decorating— She cut the thought off. It felt a little too Scrooge-like even for her. Things were bad enough without borrowing resentment and loneliness.

What the hell had possessed her to get in the car with Carlos anyway? The feline oozed sex appeal, and it wasn't like she didn't have an open invitation from Declan anytime she wanted to take it up. Asa too for that matter. She was tempted more often than she dared to admit. So tempted she was itching to take them up on it. She'd thought Carlos might make a good distraction. Not.

She was in worse shape now.

The problem was she was a victim of her breeding and her secrets. Well, her breeding, or more to the point her DNA, *was* the secret. Tradition said females were never weres. Tradition had nothing on evolution. Once the stories and legends were probably true, but like everything in nature, shapeshifters were evolving. She only knew of one other female shifter, but they couldn't be the only ones, and she was desperate to find the missing one. Her twin sister. It was why she kept making these foolish trips to Florida with Carlos, Asa, and Declan.

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She had vague memories of werelions from her childhood, and like them, her cat craved touch and companionship and was all about making it a group event. The woman was distrustful, though. What kind of danger would she be in if she fell under the control of anyone who discovered what she was? Would she be allowed freedom? Would she be allowed to make her own choices? She just didn't know whom to trust, and she'd kept the secret so long, it was ingrained in her to walk her own way. Yet the cat fought her for control. It liked these men. It trusted them. And maybe that was why she was so reluctant. She needed time to think it over. Time to decide what she should do. Try it out or run away?

She didn't wait for any of them before jumping out of the car and walking up the front step. The house was one of many Julian owned for his people to use while on a hunt. She had the key and twisted it in the lock, pushed the door open. Carlos grabbed her before she could step over the threshold.

The hold triggered an instinctive reaction. Fear. Anger. Fight. He caught her elbow before she could shove it into his stomach.

"Whoa, baby," he whispered against her ear. "I know you're keyed up, but you know better than to just walk in without making sure the place is clear."

That damned voice of his. Sinful. Sexy. And in this case, right. She hadn't used any caution. Hadn't drawn her weapon. Hadn't done an outside sweep on the property. She'd just wanted some distance from the men making her crazy with want. Finally her mind and body fell back under her control, and she stilled.

"Let me go," she ordered softly to keep her voice from carrying in the quiet pre-dawn morning.

She set her hand on the butt of her pistol and felt his reluctance to set her free. Once he did, she drew the weapon and they entered together, quickly moving through the house to ensure no unwanted guests were in residence. Her heart stuttered when she checked the only bedroom. It was nearly filled with a giant king-sized bed. The only one in the house.

She backed out quickly, before her unruly body could get any ideas. Carlos, Asa, and Declan were waiting for her in the living room.

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One of them handed her a beer, and she sat in the only chair, leaving them to the couch, though none took it. The room was tense and silent. She rolled her eyes. If she wasn't sure she'd tear him to bits, she might wish for a nice, calm, biddable beta male. Instead of opening her mouth and inviting disaster, she sipped the beer.

"Should we toss a coin for the bed?" she asked, weary, tense, ready to get some sleep. Sick of fighting the heat in her body. Why the hell hadn't Julian warned her about the sleeping arrangements? Or was he still in matchmaking mode? He'd been incredibly pleased with himself since Gia and Anthony got together.

"That's not quite what I had in mind." Carlos's deep, carnal voice could drive a woman to insanity. She wondered if he was half as good as he thought he was, but she didn't get the chance to think about it long.

Declan and Asa both tensed at the werelion's words, at the intent clear in them. Hoping to steer everyone away from trouble, she stood and tried to move between them and Carlos. The lion gave her a low snarl and pushed her behind him, snapping *don't* when she tried to move around him.

The situation could go from dangerous to deadly in a matter of seconds, but she was more irritated than afraid. She pounded a fist on Carlos's back, realizing when he purred he might find it an invitation, not a protest.

"What the hell are you doing? We're all friends now, remember?"

The werewolves and humans had been working together for months, and the werelions were a recent and not entirely trusted addition. New or not, trusted or not, she wasn't about to let anyone start a feud.

"Let her come out where we can see her."

Carlos shook his head. "Not until you give me your word you won't interfere."

She wasn't sure whom the bitter laugh belonged to. Maybe Declan. "Cat, we promised Julian she'd be safe with us."

Her palms were pressed to Carlos's back, and she felt him stiffen at the insult. She tried to intervene. "He wouldn't—"

He twisted a little to look down at her. "Shh, kitten. Let me handle

this.”

She narrowed her eyes. First she was baby, and now kitten? Did he think she was a child who needed taking care of? He faced the wolves before she could ask.

“There are some things that can’t be interfered with. Y’all know that.”

“Only mates,” Declan replied.

“Yes.”

Oh no. No way. She didn’t know as much as she should about the werelions—she’d been only six when her father had taken them away—but if they were anything like the wolves, anything like her hazy recollections, there was no way in hell she’d mate with one of them. She just wanted to fuck him. Was that too much to ask? Sick of being ignored and talked around, she slid her hands under his shirt and scratched to get his attention. Unfortunately, it wasn’t quite what she’d been aiming for.

He purred again, and she yanked her hands back, knowing she’d awakened that sleeping hunger she’d so often glimpsed in his eyes. Ignoring the wolves, he spun around to face her. “Don’t stop now, kitten.”

“I don’t think I want to start,” she whispered, knowing she should back away, put some distance between them, but unable to resist the pull she felt towards him and so damned curious about what it would feel like if he touched her. Again, that need she’d been feeling since Halloween struck her. Her nipples were painful points, her pussy wet with desire. She wrenched her gaze from his, casting her eyes down only to be caught by the bulge in his jeans. There was no doubting he wanted her.

He groaned. “Sunny.” She looked up into his oddly glowing gray eyes.

Shit, she was in trouble here. The rational woman in her was fascinated by him. The cat even more so. The dual urges were making her crazy and were just compounded by the cat’s interest in Asa and especially Declan. They’d been dancing around each other for months. She cared for them both, found it harder and harder to resist the invitation in their eyes. Her feline side preened under the attention. It liked sex and intimacy, believed they should be lavished with care and attention. It

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basked in it. The woman would have protested less if the men in question weren't werewolves.

"Wolves don't share well." Declan's words snapped her back to the ongoing conversation. She saw Carlos relax with a slow, lazy smile.

"Cats do."

After a short pause, Declan nodded and exchanged a look with Asa, who followed his lead. God, had the three of them just decided to share her? She didn't know if the sudden thumping of her heart was from fear or excitement.

"Anyone care what I think about this?" She resorted to sarcasm to cover her confused reaction, her cat clamoring for freedom, hissing at her for standing in the way of sexual fulfillment. It didn't care anything about morals or reputations or broken hearts. Between it and them, she was pretty sure she'd give in to temptation if she didn't get some space soon. Hell, she wouldn't be there at all if not for her missing twin, right?

"Where are you going?"

Of course, she wouldn't get out unnoticed. "I need a shower. And sleep. And y'all need to chill out. It ain't gonna happen."

She wasn't fucking any of them. No way, no how. She'd just end up too involved to walk away when the time came.

* * * * *

Carlos watched her walk into the dark hallway, sensing her trying to pull back as well as the angry wolves behind him. When he heard the door open and close, heard the lock clicking into place, he turned to face them.

"She's mine."

"You're a cat. You don't mind sharing," Declan reminded him.

"True. But if you get involved with us, and it will be *us*, what happens when you do find your mate?"

Declan's expression closed down, and Carlos felt a pang of sympathy for the other man. "She's dead. A long time ago."

Carlos wanted to offer him comfort but figured it would be

rebuffed, so he moved on to the current issue. "If I let you join, you have to recognize my dominance." He allowed a brief smile that he knew was just this side of menacing. "Do you know what that means coming from a cat?"

There was a long pause and a flicker of knowledge in both wolves' eyes. Asa shook his head, his expression rueful. "You two may be willing to share her. But I'm not getting involved in a mated group."

So he knew how these things worked in a lion pride? Asa looked between Carlos and Declan. Took in the color that stained the wolf's cheeks, the erection hidden in his jeans, and laughed. "I'm on the way out anyway," Asa said.

Carlos realized with a surge of excitement that they were, at least occasionally, lovers, and Asa was stepping out to allow him to have Declan. His arousal spiked to a level he'd never experienced before.

"I think I'll run a patrol," Asa said and left the house. His respect for the wolf grew. He almost regretted Asa's decision. He might have enjoyed watching him and Declan fuck.

It wasn't unusual for a dominant cat to keep several lovers in his wider circle of friends, for his and his mate's pleasure. It was expected. And as the king's brother and second, it didn't get much more dominant. It didn't hurt that he'd hunted with these two. He respected them. Even liked them. Oh well. It was Declan he really wanted. Declan he was beginning to crave with increasing intensity.

Declan was watching him, waiting silently, and Carlos couldn't ignore that he was a strong, dominant male in his own right. It was a heady thrill knowing Declan was ready to submit to him. His cock was so hard it hurt, and he fought the urge to pound into someone. There was no way his human mate could take that, but the wolf could, and he could see the excitement, the expectation in Declan's eyes. He walked to the overnight bag he'd dropped near the door and pulled out a bottle of lube.

"Strip. Now."

Declan followed orders without saying a word, but his eyes flashed in irritation at the order. Carlos smiled. "Who do you think is more dominant?"

Declan's eyes narrowed. "Right now? You." It was clear the other man expected to reverse roles someday soon. Carlos unzipped his jeans and squeezed the base of his cock to keep from coming.

"We'll deal with that later."

He'd allow that. Under certain circumstances. Ground rules could wait for another time, though. Both men were naked in seconds. There wasn't a soft dick in the room. He gestured to Declan to step forward.

"On your knees. Suck me."

While Declan took his cock in his mouth, Carlos groaned. There was no build up. No gentle suction. No soft licks. Declan sucked his cock into his mouth hard. With teeth. Carlos felt an orgasm building, tingling in the base of his spine, and yanked Declan's head away. His eyes glowed, the wolf moving in them, and Carlos flipped him over, pulled him to his knees on the floor.

Carlos moved into position behind him and dropped to his knees also, the lube gripped in one hand. He squeezed a few drops around Declan's puckered asshole and worked a finger inside, then two. His muscles tightened around the invasion.

"If you don't relax, it's gonna hurt," Carlos promised, somehow knowing this wolf welcomed pain.

With a full body shudder, Declan relaxed enough for Carlos to work in a third finger. He slowly withdrew and pushed back in, twisting his wrist as did, spreading his fingers to stretch Declan for his cock. When his big body started to move with Carlos's thrusts, he pulled out long enough to lube his cock. Then he gripped his hips and slowly slid in. Declan's head fell back as he gasped. Was it pain or pleasure? Carlos held still and gripped his hips harder.

"Don't stop," Declan demanded.

Carlos returned to his task, working in and out slowly, as the sound of movement came from the hallway. He looked up to see Sunny, transfixed but ready to bolt.

"Don't leave, kitten. Watch us."

He held her gaze as he thrust back into Declan. The wolf groaned, and Carlos wondered if Sunny knew it didn't matter if the sound was

born of pain or pleasure. She needed to understand that he was the most dominant male in the room. That he was responsible for the lives, the pain and the pleasure, of the two people he was taking into his care.

He watched her as he fucked Declan. Freshly scrubbed from her shower, she wore an expression of both delight and embarrassment, but was poised for flight. She had on short cut-off sweats and a tight tank top without a bra, and as she watched them her nipples turned to hard points.

He leaned over Declan's back to speak close to his ear. "Look at her. She's turned on watching us."

Declan moved into the thrust, taking Carlos farther into his ass, and lifted his head to look at Sunny. When he looked over his shoulder to meet Carlos's gaze, his question was easy to guess. Was he allowed to make demands of Sunny? He nodded his approval, and Declan turned back to Sunny.

"Take your clothes off and join us, baby."

She shook her head but didn't budge. "Not a good idea." Carlos could see her struggle clearly on her face. She wanted to say yes. He wasn't sure what was holding her back.

"Come on, kitten," he cajoled softly. "Think of how good we can make each other feel."

He thrust hard against Declan as he spoke, and the man's hungry moan filled the air. Carlos kept his gaze on Sunny, saw her eyes flash, seem to change colors for a moment, before she pulled off the shirt and shimmied out of her shorts.

She stood frozen, watching as Declan took him deep. Carlos slid one hand up his back, moved it around the front of his throat and splayed his fingers. Sunny's gaze went hot and cloudy as she watched.

"Sit right there, kitten." She cautiously moved a little closer, then sat, cross-legged in front of them. Carlos smiled. "That's right. Right there. Touch yourself, kitten. Show us what you like."

She trembled and bit her bottom lip. He could see the indecision warring with desire on her face, wondered only briefly why she was fighting it so hard.

"Start with your breasts, baby. Touch your nipples for me," Declan

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ordered.

She lifted her hands to cup her breasts. Kneaded them, wringing them a moment before sliding her fingers in and taking her nipples between them. Her eyes slid closed when she squeezed them, harder than he would have expected, turning them a bright red that begged to be suckled.

Her head fell back, wet hair clinging to her skin, and her breath raced. Her heart thudded a fast rhythm that called to him. More. He wanted more.

“Now your cunt, kitten. Fuck yourself for me. For us.”

Her head lifted, eyes snapped open to focus on them. She released one nipple, slid her hand slowly down her torso, over her belly, and finally between her glistening folds. She thrust two fingers in and cried out. Watching her pleasure herself pushed a button in him he hadn't realized he had. He thrust harder, felt the tingling begin at the base of his spine that signaled his coming orgasm. The more rapt her expression, the more he reached for his own release, and he didn't do it gently. Didn't have the control left.

He was vaguely aware of Declan's throat convulsing. Knew he was close too. He moved his hand from Declan's neck to his cock, squeezed and pumped it as he pumped into his ass. They spilled at the same time, the orgasm so intense that for a minute, he was unaware of anything around him.

When he came back to his senses, he saw Sunny still working her hand against her pussy. Her head was back, her pelvis moving while she moaned. She was beautiful. Declan had rolled away but reentered with a bowl of soapy water and a washcloth. Carlos took them both and quickly cleaned himself. With one last cry, Sunny's body clenched up tightly and she came, sprawling back on the floor.

She looked over at him, her expression lazy and sated, and he decided to make sure she had that look on her face every day for the rest of their lives.

A throat cleared behind him, but he didn't turn. “What?”

“The sofa is a pull out. I'll take it. For now.”

Chapter Four

Sunny's heart hammered in her chest, and her mouth went dry when Carlos gave her a heavy lidded stare. He didn't bother to respond to Declan, just picked her up and carried her down the hall to the bedroom, shutting the door behind them.

"We can't share a room."

He smiled. "We're going to share a lot more than that, kitten."

God. His insistence was tempting, and if they hadn't been speaking of mates earlier, she would have jumped at the chance to touch him, taste him, feel him deep inside her. And didn't that make her the worst kind of tease? After getting herself off in front of them, letting them direct her. Teasing them. After watching the two of them find pleasure in each other. Man, had *that* been hot. She wanted more, but instinct told her it wouldn't be some simple coming together. It wouldn't be just about sex. She liked both of them too much to risk her heart. She shook her head. "I don't think so."

Then he stepped forward, catching her hips before she could dodge him. He leaned down, resting his forehead against hers, and spoke softly, "You're scared of us being together. Why?"

"I don't do permanent." She was afraid she was already falling for him. That he'd eventually get bored and take part of her with him when he left. Or worse, that he wouldn't leave, but that he'd take her over. Take her will, her independence.

His hands slid up her sides and came to rest on her lower back.

They were warm. Searing. "Who said this was permanent?"

Oh God, maybe she'd misinterpreted his intentions? Maybe he'd only brought up mates with Asa and Declan to get them to back off because he just wanted to get laid? Well, he'd already done that, hadn't he? She ignored the knife that twisted in her throat, but he must have anticipated her thoughts. His hands tightened on her, drew her so close his cock pressed against her belly and she could feel it throbbing. He bent his head to her neck, and when his lips pressed against her skin, she let her head fall back. Even if it was just one night, she wanted to feel him around her. On top of her. Inside her.

His teeth scraped her skin before he sucked it into his mouth. She felt the laving of his tongue all the way to her core. He kept one arm around her hips and slid the other to her belly, slowly moving it up to cup her breast. She moaned at the contact, tried to move away enough to regain a little control, but his low growl froze her in place.

It wasn't fear that held her still. There was so much possession, so much promise in that growl, she couldn't budge an inch. She wanted more. A lot more. Her cat scratched at her insides, responding to the dominance in his voice.

"Carlos," she begged, not sure exactly what she was asking for. He didn't wait to find out. Bowing her back to shove up her breasts, as if in offering, he moved to capture a nipple in his mouth. She had to cling to his shoulders, sure she'd collapse without support, when his lips closed over it for a long, slow pull.

He took his time, seemed to savor it like a special treat. She whimpered when he let her go and lifted his face to meet her gaze. She saw more emotion in his eyes than she would ever imagine possible. They were swirling with desire and passion, need and hope and longing. But she only got a glimpse of them before his expression shuttered. The change made her feel exposed.

"Beautiful."

Hands on her hips, he backed up to the bed, pulling her with him until he sat on its edge. He pulled her between his thighs and leaned forward to press a kiss against her belly, hands sliding up her sides to rest

on her nape. In a move swift enough to remind her his charm concealed the soul of a predator, he pulled her down and under him on the bed.

His lips covered hers in an explosive kiss that made butterflies take flight in her stomach. Her tongue dueled with his, and she tried to angle her body to take more control, secretly thrilled when he growled his dominance low in his throat.

She realized with a shock she and her cat side wanted to submit to him. *Mate*. The word whispered through her mind. She tried to ignore it, but she wondered if she could tie a man to her the way male shifters could? It was a tempting idea, and she forced her incisors to retract before she could give into the urge. She wanted him to stay with her because he wanted her, not because she'd given him no choice.

He broke the kiss and glared down at her. "You're supposed to be concentrating on me, not worrying."

His body pressed against hers. Grinding against her. It felt so right, like watching him with the werewolf had felt right. She smiled, gave into the longing. Looping her arms around his neck, she pulled him to her. "Just shut up and kiss me again."

She didn't have to tell him twice, and this time the kiss was slow and lazy. Seductive. She followed his lead, let him take control. He rolled to his side without breaking the kiss, freeing his hands to plump her breasts. He molded the flesh before concentrating on her nipples. She moaned her pleasure, rocking her hips against his, as he pinched them. Finally, when she was sure she'd come with no further stimulation, he broke away and positioned her on knees and hands.

His cock pushed against her backside, and she thrust against him, a desperate need to be filled, to come, overwhelming her. Long slim fingers stroked her back, trying to coax her down. "Shhh, kitten. We have plenty of time."

She shook her head violently. He might. She didn't. "Carlos, now." She felt him hesitate. "Please."

With a sound more sigh than moan, he gripped her hip with one hand and found her pussy with the other. He stroked her for a moment, testing her wetness before the head of his cock pushed in. She gasped.

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She'd seen he was big, but she hadn't considered how long it had been since she'd had sex. He was going to hurt going in. And he did. Slowly. One teasing inch at a time. So good.

He was making her crazy.

She thrust back against him, taking him as deep as she could, and squeezed her inner muscles around him. Snarling, he slapped her ass. "Behave."

But she wasn't the least bit cowed. She could hear the control slipping in his voice, knew he would be wild and out of control in moments. It made her giddy.

"Fuck me, Carlos," she ordered, hoping to push him into action.

He moved, thrusting shallowly, not too fast. It wasn't enough. Would it ever be enough?

"More," she said with a moan.

"I don't want to hurt you."

Of course. He didn't know she was a were. Faster, stronger, more resilient than a human woman. She considered confessing on the spot. "You won't."

He slid almost all the way out of her, then back in, gradually increasing his pace until it was fast and hard. She moved with him, trying to take him deeper. The penetration was so good, hard and getting rougher as his control continued to slip. He took her clit between his fingers, rubbed and pinched and stroked, until a fine tremor overtook her. The need to let go of everything, to come was like a fire inside her, an inferno getting hotter and hotter. She was so, so close to the edge. He took her over it, his teeth closing over the vulnerable spot on the side of her neck and biting down, breaking the skin.

She came so hard her brain stopped functioning, her vision went colorless, and she was grateful she wasn't facing him. He couldn't see, wouldn't guess, at the cat hidden inside her.

They fell to the bed together. Her breath came in fast pants, and her heart still hammered in her chest. But it was from panic, not the aftereffects of great sex. She felt a trickle of blood slide down her collar, smelled it, but she didn't dare move to wipe it away. He'd just brought

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her worst fear to life, and she'd loved every minute of it.

Chapter Five

It took a long time to still her racing heart, to get control of her alarm. Sunny lay still, focused on the sounds of the house. When she heard nothing but soft snores and was sure all three males slept, she rolled carefully out of bed. The door snicked softly when she opened it, but Carlos didn't budge. First she crept down the hall and gathered her clothes before retracing her steps to the back door.

Her cat side, sensing her unease, wanted out to roam, to run off some energy. She kept it caged so much of the time it was nearly bursting from her skin. She considered going out naked, but couldn't risk coming back to find anyone awake. They'd be damned curious why she was roaming the swamp in nothing.

She wasn't getting dressed before she was forced to, though. Even two weeks shy of Christmas, the south Florida swamp was hot and muggy. She headed into the trees, searching for a good place to stash her shorts and tank. Shrugged when she realized she hadn't bothered with shoes. She found a bunch of low hanging branches that created a cradle about four hundred yards in. Her belongings were hidden from view when she put them in, and hopefully it was far enough from the house to avoid attracting anyone's attention.

Satisfied she'd covered her ass as much as possible, she dropped to all fours and called for the lion, let it take over. It was pain and joy as her muscles shrank, her bones and joints popped. But it was over in seconds and she was the big hunting feline, no longer the woman.

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The cat wasn't without thought or cunning, though, and the woman *was* still inside, still the one ultimately in control. She had a mission, and in this they were agreed. The sister, the littermate, must be found. She allowed that side of her to take over and follow its instincts in the wild.

She was Julian's best tracker. They thought she was just a gifted human woman, but her success was due to the superior sight and smell of her cat. This was their third scouting trip to Florida. The males were after Arthur. She was determined to find her twin.

Months ago she'd heard a rumor the Society rogues in the area were kidnapping women. She could only think of one reason they'd do that, but she hadn't had any luck finding Jaz. Every time she went to their compound and sniffed around, she came up empty handed. No sign of Jaz. Or Arthur. No way in to check it out more thoroughly without risking detection.

She wasn't giving up. Somehow, she *knew* her sister was here. The safe house was an easy five-mile trek through the swamp from the Society's headquarters and she headed in that direction. She needed to be careful, but quick. She couldn't risk getting back after the others were awake.

Before the place came into view, she sank to her belly and moved forward with stealthy caution, just a few inches at a time. She blended in well with the brush surrounding the house, but with the sun rising, she didn't dare draw attention with her movements.

With each visit, she'd been working on getting closer, and this time she made it all the way to the fence. It was tall chain-link, with razor wire at the top. Impossible to scale and cross, as that task would be too time consuming. There was too big a chance of getting caught that way by one of the roving guards. She pawed at the dirt, testing to see how compacted it was. Would it be easier to dig a tunnel under the fence?

The fence was sunk into the ground, but before she could determine how deep, she saw movement on the lawn. Someone had made a half-assed attempt to decorate for Christmas. One corner of the lawn was still early-morning dim, lit only by white lights, and in their glow a

tall, lanky male leaned against a palm tree, staring in her direction. She was downwind, her scent carried away from him on the breeze, and there was no way he could see her through the tall, thick grass and shrubbery. She repressed a shiver of fear, hoping she hadn't compromised herself or the mission. Finally, with a lazy nod in her direction, he peeled away from his spot, his gait sneaky and furtive.

The lion watched until he was out of sight, wondering if he was also an outsider or one of the rogues hiding inside. His actions seemed to suggest he didn't belong there, but for all she knew it was just a ploy to draw her out. Testing his loyalty wasn't an option, so she eased back toward the tree line just as cautiously as she'd approached. She did a quick sweep around the perimeter, staying back far enough to not be spotted or scented, and then headed back.

Carlos was sitting in a glider on the back porch when she stepped into the lawn. Thank God she'd had the foresight to bring her clothes into the swamp with her. She didn't have to get a good look at his face to know he was pissed. Most likely at her. She decided to brazen it out, strolled over and leaned her hip against the porch rail.

"What's up?" she asked.

"Where the fuck have you been?" Strike that. He'd moved from pissed to furious. She shrugged, trying to maintain her nonchalant ruse.

"Exploring. I'm the tracker, remember?"

"Best I've ever seen," he snapped, but there was consideration, questioning in his gaze.

Uh-oh. He didn't suspect, did he? "Makes me wonder why Julian keeps wasting you on this."

She had two choices. Denial, or tell him about her sister. But if she did, she'd have to give him a reason the rogues would go after a female, and a female she just happened to be related to.

"I haven't given him a choice," she replied, making a split second decision she hoped wouldn't bite her in the ass later. "I think my sister is here somewhere."

His eyes narrowed. Clearly, he didn't like her keeping secrets. "I didn't know you had a sister."

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"My twin. Her name is Jaz."

He stared her down a long time before nodding. "Here in south Florida, or here with the Society?"

Ah, now, there was the question. Did she give him the truth or continue to protect her and her sister's identities? He'd marked her. Claimed her. How long did she really expect to be able to keep the secret? Long enough to free her sister and help her escape again, at least. She hoped.

"I started picking up rumors a few months ago that the Society was kidnapping women. One of the descriptions fits my sister."

It was some truth.

"Why your sister?" he asked suspiciously.

"I don't know."

A lie.

"Our father was a werelion."

Sprinkled with some truth. Would it be enough to deflect him? Possibly. For now. But she didn't expect her luck to hold out. Eventually he'd want to know who her father was. What pride he was from and why she wasn't with it.

He stood, stripped off his clothes, and stepped around her. Her breath caught in her throat. He was magnificent. Lean, with ropy muscles that spoke of strength and speed. He smiled at the appreciation she knew shone in her eyes.

"I'm going to look around. I think Asa is going after food. Why don't you go with him?"

She cocked an eyebrow. "Why?"

He growled a warning. "I don't want you here alone."

"We're gonna have to talk about that protective streak."

Smiling, he grabbed her hand and pulled her close. Pressed a quick, hard kiss to her lips. "No we aren't, kitten. I'm going to protect you, and you're going to let me."

Before she could protest, he stepped back and shifted. He was just as tawny and golden as a cat, his mane a luxurious fall she couldn't resist touching. When her fingers brushed through it, a rumble erupted from his

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chest. She laughed. He was such a cat, susceptible to any stroking or petting. She scratched the spot between his eyes before stepping away.

"Go. I'll stay near Asa."

He turned and walked away, giving her one last commanding look over his shoulder before he disappeared into the trees. Clenching her fists, digging her nails into her palms until she felt a spike of pain, she held herself very still, struggling against the urge to shift. To follow him, run with him in her feline form. It was a battle she almost lost, and when she turned, she found Asa watching from the doorway with a curious expression on his face.

"What?"

"So much longing in your eyes, sweetheart, watching him shift."

She blinked, shocked into feeling nothing. His observation was unexpected. And unwelcome. It skirted dangerously close to the truth. What would it be like to not have to hide what she was? She'd never know. Shrugging, desperately hiding the painful longing, she stepped around him into the house.

"I thought we were going after dinner," she called over her shoulder, hoping he'd get the hint and drop the subject of shifting.

She groaned when she reached the living room, then turned to glare at him while jerking her thumb to indicate the tree set up in the middle of the room.

"Do we have to do that?"

He grinned. "You need some Christmas cheer."

She rolled her eyes. Like hell she did.

"Come on. Let's grab some dinner, and we'll decorate it later."

She stomped after him. They could decorate all they liked. She had better things to do.

Chapter Six

Anyone watching would think Carlos was wandering the property with no purpose. They'd be wrong. He'd seen which direction Declan took when he left and knew they'd meet somewhere in the middle soon.

The coming confrontation was one he both looked forward to and dreaded. He hadn't missed the considering look in the wolf's eyes, or the commanding tone in his voice when he'd suggested Asa and Sunny go find food while they ran a patrol. Declan had decided it was time to assert his own dominance.

Carlos knew it was coming sooner or later. Declan wasn't a man used to submitting or following another's command. As long as he followed Carlos's lead in public, Carlos would be the submissive in private every now and then. They'd get to that soon enough. He wasn't concerned about it; that was just the way things were done among lions.

He was more worried about Declan's former mate. It was obvious he'd never claimed her. He wouldn't be exactly sane after her death if he had. So why hadn't he? Was it because of age or circumstance? Would he be able to give Sunny and Carlos the kind of commitment, devotion, his lion side demanded? He'd dreamt while he slept, woke to the realization he wanted Declan with them for more than scratching an itch, more than to simply heighten Sunny's pleasure. More than lust. Carlos wanted Declan for himself.

He moved into a clearing blanketed by the wolf's smell and knew this was the place Declan had chosen to confront him. He shifted back to

his human form and leaned against a tree to wait, churning up inside. Wanting to demand a commitment, almost afraid to push it.

Sunny was his. She couldn't walk away, but Declan could. For all their sakes, he couldn't allow that to happen. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, filling his lungs with air that smelled of the wolf. He didn't move when he sensed the coming attack. Didn't struggle when Declan spun him around, pushing his front against the rough bark.

The aggression made his cock hard. And Declan's. He felt it hard and pushing at his ass. He let the sensual nature of the cat rise and take over, could hear the coaxing purr in his voice. "What? I don't even get a kiss first?" he teased.

Declan growled, but the sound was more turned on than pissed off. "I haven't decided yet."

Declan continued to grind his cock against his ass. It took all his control not to make room between Carlos and the tree to grip his cock. He wasn't sure if he wanted to give him pain or pleasure. So often the two were mixed. Damn, it was hard to concentrate with temptation so close. So accessible. He squeezed his eyes shut a minute and counted to ten, tried to slow his racing heart. He was going to fuck Carlos, but first he wanted answers. He got the feeling Carlos did too.

"How does this work, cat? All of us together."

He couldn't resist pushing his cock against Carlos, groaned when it slid between his cheeks. Carlos thrust back against him with a demanding snarl, and Declan twisted his hand in his hair. Tugged. "Answers first. How does it work?" he asked before nipping the male's neck.

"Pride law," Carlos panted. "There are never enough women. Anyone who finds a mate is expected to share her with his best friends. Or lovers."

"So I won't be forced out?"

Carlos stilled, and Declan wondered what about the question had triggered the response.

"Are you going to be able to stay?"

This time his growl was low and menacing. "Why wouldn't I?"

"You mentioned a mate."

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And they both knew how debilitating losing a mate was. "We were too young." He paused. "A new bond can be created."

Carlos froze. "If you make that kind of commitment to her, you're also making it to me. Can you live with that?"

He shrugged. "I love her." He'd do anything for her, anything to stay close to her. He'd worry about his growing confusion over the werelion later. "Can you say the same?"

Carlos took a long time to respond, and Declan used it to explore the man's skin with his lips and teeth. He wondered if the bond would function three ways, if he could mark Sunny and then Carlos. No, it wouldn't work on males. He'd drawn enough blood over the years to know that. Even so, he wasn't willing to let either go, even if the cat infuriated him half the time.

"What about Asa?" Carlos finally asked.

"We're not together anymore. He's still searching for his mate."

Carlos nodded. "So it's the three of us. We'll have to take a fourth, but it can wait."

He didn't want to hear that. That he'd have to share either one of them. "A cat?"

"Some traditions can't be broken."

Declan considered the words. Taking a wolf into the group was probably pushing it. "When the time comes, Sunny gets a voice in the decision."

"Of course."

The next stretch of silence seemed filled with heat and tension. Carlos groaned. "Ah, Dec, would you fuck me already?"

He hadn't realized he'd been grinding his cock against Carlos, and he was damn tempted to take up the invitation. "No lube," he reminded him gently, then realized just how much the cat had been holding back when he shoved away from the tree, throwing Declan back with him.

"The house isn't far," he practically snarled, and they raced back in human form, together.

Declan entered first, found the lube on the nightstand table. Carlos was breathing hard when he turned to face him and gave him no warning

when he jumped, taking them both to the floor. Chest pressed to chest. Cocks rubbing against each other. He recalled the request for a kiss and fused their lips together. It was a hard, demanding clash of teeth and tongues. A punishing kiss. And brief. Carlos broke away and rolled over.

“Now,” he demanded. A demand Declan was happy to give into.

Lube squeezed into his palm, he coated his cock, guided it into place and pushed in. No going slow, no easing into it, no finesse. He reached around their bodies and grabbed Carlos’s cock. Then he fucked him. Hard and fast and furious. They came in minutes, one howling and the other snarling.

He didn’t know how much time had passed when he felt the stunned silence. He looked up from where he’d collapsed on Carlos to find Sunny, frozen in the doorway, bottom lip sucked between her teeth.

“Um. Sorry for interrupting.” She started to back out of the room, but he rolled over and smiled, held his hand out to her.

“C’mere, baby.”

She hesitated, but he saw the excitement in her eyes as she cautiously stepped forward. He sensed Asa nearby, hanging back, and silently thanked his old friend for staying out of the way. With a fluid move he was amazed he had the energy for, he rose to his feet. Taking her hand, he led her into the bathroom. He got the water going, then stripped her, growling with each inch of skin revealed.

When she was naked, he pulled her into the water with him. She went almost docilely, not uttering a sound when he reached for the soap and lathered his cock. Her eyes rounded, and she licked her lips.

“Do you want a taste?” he asked as the water washed away the soap.

She looked up, gaze startled, but nodded, and then she dropped to her knees.

“Ah, Christ,” Carlos muttered from where he peeked in the shower curtain. Declan wanted to laugh. It was his cock she was exploring with lips and tongue and the slightest hint of teeth. And then, yes, ah, Christ. She sucked him into her mouth, cheeks hollowing as she drew him deeper.

Too much. He'd fantasized about her too long. At this rate, he wouldn't be able to hold back and he was determined to come inside her, to leave his mark on her. He'd thought long and hard about the wisdom of taking such action, and had finally realized he couldn't love her more even if she was that girl from so long ago. It felt right to join them this way. Final. Irrefutable. Forever.

He pulled her to her feet and lifted her, pushing her back against the wall. His fingers went straight to her pussy, delighted and thrilled to find her wet and slick and ready. And tight. He went slowly, giving her an inch, letting her wiggle and adjust before giving her another inch. She was gasping, rolling her head back and forth against the wall when he was finally seated all the way inside her.

"Does it hurt?" he asked, a little worried at her dazed expression.

She moaned. "Yes. But *so* good."

He grinned. He'd hoped she'd like a bite of pain. He leaned back a little, hoping to find her clit, but was forced to use both hands to hold her up. A small disaster, because he'd waited so long for her he was afraid he wouldn't be able to hold back. He wanted, needed her to come with him.

Then Carlos was there with them, spreading her lips so they could both watch raptly as his cock slid in and out of her. The sight mesmerized him. Thankfully, one of them was still capable of thought. Carlos exposed her clit, took it between two fingers and tugged. She screamed, convulsing around him, and he lost all control, ramming through her tight folds.

"Do it now," Carlos ordered harshly, and Declan knew exactly what he wanted. Hips still pistoning, he leaned forward and sucked the skin just above her collarbone between his teeth. Excitement surged in his blood. This was it. Once done, it was unbreakable. There would be no separating him from Sunny. Or Carlos.

His teeth sank deep, and the taste of her blood on his tongue, the emotion that flooded him, made him cry out in triumph, spurting jets of cum into her welcoming body. With a loud keen, she came too, her pussy clamped so hard around him he didn't dare move.

Chapter Seven

Sunny was lost in sensation, only vaguely aware of them drying her off and tucking her into bed. She drifted for a while, the low rumble of voices carrying to her through the house. Gradually, she seemed to wake up, to become aware of the enormity of what had happened.

Claimed. Twice over. Once by a lion, once by a wolf. Her soul shrunk a bit at the knowledge, cringed in fear. She'd never keep her independence, her freedom, now. She was all too aware of what the bond meant. Hoped to God she never had daughters. The best she could hope for was to find her sister and get her to safety.

She stood slowly. Testing used and sore muscles. Her cat stretched in languid satisfaction. What the hell did it know? She dressed with precise movements, strapping on weapons, pulling on boots. The sense of being on borrowed time rode her hard. Her sister was in danger. The feeling was so strong, it was easy to ignore the blinking lights on the tree. She hovered outside the kitchen door a moment, eavesdropping, before entering.

"I say she goes. Never seen a better tracker," Asa said.

"No way," Carlos and Declan said in unison.

She moved enough to get a glimpse inside, saw Asa roll his eyes. "You're only protesting 'cause you claimed her. Neither one of you is thinking straight. She's a tactical advantage."

Even though they didn't know what she was, didn't know she was a shifter, the comment made her blood run cold. She stepped inside.

“What’s going on?”

Carlos and Declan gave her the reserved look she’d come to know meant they were holding back information. Thankfully, Asa didn’t feel the same reticence about sharing.

“Carlos has someone inside. We’re going in tonight.”

Finally. It was difficult to hide her excitement. “I’m going too.” Her voice shook a bit, but if anyone noticed, they didn’t say anything.

Carlos opened his mouth, and she knew it was to protest. She held her hand up, glared at both males. “Forget it. My sister is in there. I’m going.”

Declan and Asa weren’t surprised by her declaration, so she knew Carlos had filled them in. She wasn’t happy about that, but at least it saved time explaining.

“You don’t know that for sure,” Declan said.

He had to be as eager to go inside and look for his brother as she was her sister. Was he trying to spare them both the disappointment if they didn’t find their siblings? Spare her the pain if Jaz wasn’t there?

But she was. Sunny couldn’t explain it, but she knew, and she knew time was running out. “She’s there. And I’m going to get her out,” she said stubbornly.

Carlos cursed under his breath and glared at her. “You stay right with us. No going off on your own. And you follow orders. If we say get out, you do it.”

She nodded her acquiescence, but she had no intention of complying.

Hours later, she was anxious to get moving. It was almost three a.m., and she was cramped from hours of waiting to move inside the fence. They’d found the least patrolled area and cut away a portion of fence big enough to squeeze through in human form.

She exhaled a sigh of relief when Carlos gave the signal to move. She was operating purely on instinct now. They entered a back door, and she ignored a hiss when she broke away from them. She found a door down a short hallway and rested her palm on it a moment before twisting the knob.

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It was locked, but easy to pick. It opened to reveal deep stairs going down. This was where the Society kept its prisoners. She swallowed a lump in her throat and stepped down, shuddering when she reached the bottom. It was dimly lit, row after row of locked doors like any good dungeon.

There was a single guard sitting behind a desk, and she moved quickly, stealthily, knife in her hand. Its tip dug in the underside of chin before his eyes snapped open.

"Keys," she demanded, sensing the others entering behind her. It made the lion nervous, but she knew she could trust them.

Her prisoner took a deep breath, and she knew he meant to scream. Her knife dug harder, turning a trickle of blood into a stream. "I wouldn't." She gave him the grim smile born of years of disappointment in her people. He jerked, tried to nod.

"In the desk."

Asa moved around them and retrieved several sets, turning to give her a speaking look. She knew what he expected, knew he was right, but taking a life didn't sit well with her. Even if the man in question was a scumbag. She moved before her hesitation could compromise the mission, slit his throat cleanly, and grabbed one set of keys. She'd deal with the guilt and horror of her actions once her sister was safe.

The first cells were empty, the next few occupied by men in irons. She heard the others snarling their fury and barely restrained herself from echoing them. Iron would prevent shifting and healing. Over time, it would sap away strength and fight and will.

She moved on and discovered the women. Most cringed when she approached, but took off once she'd freed them. She didn't offer comfort, didn't ask if any were shifters. None were her sister. Only three doors were left. The first two were empty but ripe with the smells of blood and fear and death. None held the scent of family. Her gorge rose in her throat at the last door; her hand trembled as she twisted the key.

She heaved a huge sigh of relief at the figure huddled on the bed, at the recognition that flashed in her eyes. She knew they were in trouble when she opened the cuffs and helped Jaz stand. She swayed on her feet.

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Her wrists were cut up and blood encrusted, and she had cuts and abrasions everywhere that wasn't covered by her jeans and t-shirt. Sunny felt a heavy load of guilt. She'd been getting laid while her sister suffered.

Carlos stuck his head around the half open door. "We have to get moving."

Sunny heard the sounds of fighting coming down the corridor and went to look. Shit. It was the only way out, but there was no way she getting Jaz through in human form. In their smaller animal forms, though, they might be able to slip through. She went back to Jaz and gently took her hands, squeezed her fingers.

"We have to shift," she whispered, knowing she wasn't giving only herself away to Carlos, who waited outside.

Jaz's eyes widened, her fear easy to read. She shook her head. "We can't risk it. Too many males here."

"We can trust some of them. The ones who came with me."

God, she hoped they could. Carlos, apparently tired of waiting, stepped inside to hurry them up. He looked worried. And confused. Jaz didn't cringe, but she didn't move close to him either. The fighting in the corridor moved closer, however. She let go of her sister's hand and put some space between them.

"Now, Jaz. We have to hurry."

She yanked her boots and clothes off and reached for the change inside her, felt her cat's euphoria at being freed. When she looked up, Carlos wore a stunned expression that quickly morphed into anger. Trapped inside the cat's body, she sighed. As far as keeping secrets went, this was a huge one.

She turned and snarled at her sister for hesitating, and the reminder that freedom was close spurred her into action. In less than two minutes, she stood at Sunny's side in her cat form. Carlos studied them both, his body shaking with what Sunny hoped was not rage. She wasn't holding her breath. There'd be one hell of a lecture later.

"We'll distract them so you can slip by," was all he said for now, however.

They followed him into the shadowed hallway. He strode straight

down the middle, joining in the fighting, as she and Jaz pressed as close to the ground as possible and moved through the shadows against the wall. She didn't allow the sense of triumph to distract her when they made the stairs unnoticed or when they exited the house by the same door she'd entered.

They made it three feet before the voice stopped her, shouting into the dark. "The females! Don't let them get away!"

She looked for the source of the voice, saw a man she recognized as Burns running towards her, the same man Arthur was after. If half of what she'd heard about him was true, there was no way she could fight him and win, especially while trying to protect her injured sister. He was still several yards away when a wolf barreled into him from out of the shadows. She held her breath, frozen in place for a second. They'd finally found Arthur.

Burns shifted and fought back, howling rage and madness, which snapped her mind back to their precarious situation. The werewolves were fighting between her and Jaz and their escape route. Then she noticed the man she'd seen on her recon trip. He gestured to her to follow him and shifted into the form of a giant lion before walking away. Her heart pounded as she led her sister in his direction. This must be Carlos's inside man.

They skirted around the fighters, sticking to the shadows as they rounded the corner of the house. The lion waited by the fence line, and as she drew nearer, she saw a tunnel was dug under it. She pushed Jaz forward, nipping at her heels to get her to move past the lion and under the fence, and then she followed. When she turned, the lion was gone. She could only assume he'd left to assist Carlos inside the house.

Once in the swamp, she caught the scents of some of the escapees, thankfully moving in the opposite direction of the one she and her sister needed to go. Some of them were male; she had no idea how they'd react to female shifters. It was obvious the Society was trying to control them. For what purpose, she couldn't begin to guess. She picked up her pace, snarling and nipping at Jaz when she slowed.

When they reached the small yard behind the house, she hid Jaz in

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the brush while she looked around. Certain no one had been there during their absence, she bullied her sister inside and, after both changed back to their human forms, let Jaz collapse in exhaustion on the bed.

Then she started to clean. There wasn't enough time to do it properly, but as soon as the men returned, they'd have to leave. The Society might be down, but such a small force of invaders wouldn't be able to take them out. She doubted even the formidable rage and sorrow of Arthur's wolf could defeat Burns.

First she packed everyone's bags, leaving them at the front door; then, wadding up all the bedding from the sofa bed, she stuffed it into a large garbage bag and left it there too. In the kitchen she found some heavy-duty gloves and pulled them on. Using a spray bottle of bleach, she cleaned every surface in the house, every spot of wall she remembered anyone touching, door handles. The used paper towels also went in a garbage bag left by the door. Last she pulled out a vacuum, not surprised when her sister didn't budge at the noise. She was changing the bag to discard when the others returned.

Carlos and Declan wore matching furious expressions. Asa took in all her work and nodded. "Excellent. We need to move out ASAP."

He began moving bags from the house to his SUV and her car. She scowled when she noticed all the garbage bags were going into her trunk. He caught her gaze after his last trip.

"We should stick together. We'll find someplace down the highway to dump your car."

"Why my car?" she complained.

He cocked an eyebrow. "We'll all fit in the Excursion."

She pressed her lips together. Hell, he was right, but she hated to give up her sporty little hybrid. Course it wasn't really hers. Julian kept a fleet of vehicles. This was just one of them. She sighed.

"Fine."

"Where's your sister?" Carlos finally asked.

"Sleeping. Someone will have to carry her out."

Asa nodded. "I got her. You want to get the bedding?"

"Yeah."

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She grabbed two large garbage bags and then followed him down the hall. He was scooping up Jaz, wrapped in the comforter, when she entered.

"I'll get her in the SUV, then take your car. We'll meet up in about an hour. Keep your cell on."

She nodded, thinking it odd he was taking command and Carlos was letting him, until she got a good look at his face. He was beyond pissed at her. He was livid. His teeth were ground together, skin pulled tight over his cheeks. With a sigh, she moved to the bed and stuffed the pillows into the first bag. When she reached to pull one corner of the sheets free, he went to the opposite side to help.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Can we talk about it later? It's a story I don't want to tell three times."

Declan walked into the room. "But we're both here now, baby."

His smile made her shiver. It was a touch cruel, a lot mean. His eyes narrowed into a glare when he reached forward to touch her face and she cringed back. "I'd never hurt you."

She took a deep breath. "I know," she said softly.

She *did* know that. She'd never have risked her sister if she didn't. But taking that final step into full trust was hard. Didn't they get that?

Carlos took the sheets from her and stuffed them in the bag, leading the way out of the house. He tossed them in the rear of the Excursion, then took the wheel. She climbed into the back with her sister, who even in exhausted sleep recognized her ally. She moved to lay her head in Sunny's lap.

Neither of her men spoke. *Her men*. She closed her eyes and leaned her head back. She'd definitely crossed the line to acceptance in her mind. Jaz moaned and tried to move away. A nightmare. Sunny crooned to her, soft nonsense words until she settled.

"She needs a doctor." She looked up to meet Declan's gaze. The controlled fury was still there, but seemed to be pointed in another direction now.

"When we get home. We can't know who to trust here." She

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gently rubbed her thumb over Jaz's wrist. "She's already starting to heal. She needs sleep more than anything."

She could tell by his expression he didn't agree, but he kept his opinion to himself. Not all the worry and fear was for and her sister, though, and she felt guilty for forgetting she hadn't been the only one searching for someone.

"Your brother?"

"Gone. Again." His tone was bitter and uninviting. She didn't press for more information. He'd tell her when he was ready.

Silence reigned again until her phone chirped and Asa directed them to his location. They found him waiting on a dirt road; he'd already ditched the car. He climbed into the third-row seat, and once they were back on the highway, Sunny met Carlos's glare in the rearview mirror.

"Talk, kitten."

That had to be a good sign, right? That he was still using pet names? She stroked her sister's hair away from her face and wondered where to start.

"Our dad was a werelion, and so was Mom's father. She wasn't like us."

"What pride, kitten?"

She frowned. "I don't remember. Somewhere in Georgia, I think."

He nodded. "I must have seen you then. That's why you seemed so familiar when we met. What about your father?"

She took a deep breath, experiencing that pang of sorrow she always did when she remembered her parents. "When he discovered what we are, it scared the hell out of him. Not that we could shift," she hurried to add when she caught Declan's low growl.

"I was too little to really remember those days. Dad told us later to always hide what we can do. That when he took us away, there were already rumors of females who could shift, and males who were hunting them. He made us change our appearance. Our names. Everything."

"That's why the background check came up empty," he whispered. She would have called him on that, but hell, she'd done the same to him.

She took another breath, pain and horror filling her now instead of

irritation. "We thought it was overkill. His protectiveness. *I* thought it was overkill. I was sixteen, and I'd met this boy. A wolf. I thought he was as crazy about me as I was about him, 'cause hell, I was sixteen. I knew everything," she said bitterly. "I swore him to secrecy and let him see what I was. A long time later, I found out his father was a member of the Society. A few weeks after I showed him, our parents died in a car accident. We didn't know if it really was an accident or someone after us, so we split up. So you see, I couldn't tell anyone. I told once before and probably got my parents killed."

The silence that fell over the vehicle was frightening. It was Asa who finally broke it. "So now we keep this secret, between the five of us."

She twisted in her seat to look at him, trying to gauge how serious he was, but his gaze was fixed on Jaz, who'd sat up during the telling of her story.

"Sunny." Her eyes were filled with dismay, and she shook her head. "You know better than to tell."

"We can trust them." She squeezed her sister's hand, but the words didn't seem to register. She was staring at Sunny's neck.

"You mated one of them."

"Two, actually," she said dryly, still a little stunned at her wantonness. Her greedy lust for both men.

It was a long time before Jaz spoke. She nodded first. "Okay. We trust them. Now what?"

Sunny smiled, joy filling her at being reunited with her twin. "We take you home. Where you can recover. Safely. And you won't have to worry about hiding or running anymore."

She knew it wouldn't be that simple, but Carlos, Declan, and Asa already knew what they were. No one would have to pretend. Though they might go crazy overprotective.

"Where's home?"

"North Carolina." It was unwelcome to recall how little they knew of each other now. "It's a big house. Plenty of room for all of us, and it borders a protected area of forest. You can run without fear there."

Everything, all the pain and sorrow and emptiness of the last few

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years, was worth it to see the joy light Jaz's eyes at the prospect.

"Not alone," Carlos ordered. "Not until we're positive they haven't tracked us."

And here came the protectiveness, though in this instance she conceded he was probably right. She made sure her agreement came out reluctantly, however. She didn't want him or Declan getting the idea she'd let them have their way all the time. A little pampering, though...her cat liked that idea very much. Its purr was soft and eager, and Carlos answered it with a chuckle, Declan with a grin.

She settled back with her sister for the rest of the journey home.

Chapter Eight

"What about my father?"

Sunny sighed. She didn't have any answers to give Gia, who'd been waiting with her mate, Clint, on her porch when they arrived. She'd relayed the sanitized version of events. Basically accurate, but minus the female shape shifters.

"I don't know, Gia. I'm sorry."

The other woman bit her bottom lip and nodded. "You had to get your sister out. I understand."

"They were both gone when we exited the house," Declan added.

"Thank you for going after him." There was acceptance on her face. She didn't expect to see him again.

It wasn't long before Gia and Anthony went on their way, and Asa, promising to return in a few hours with dinner, also left. Declan turned to her.

"You've been a very bad cat, baby," he spoke in a tone that made her insides melt, then clench. Oh God. If he fulfilled even half that promise, she sure as hell hoped so. She'd be bad all the time if necessary.

Carlos laughed. "Somehow I don't think she's feeling threatened."

"She knows she can trust us," Declan spoke to Carlos but held her gaze.

"Hmm. Yes. The idea occurs to me...she's not human. We don't need to hold back as much."

She squeezed her thighs together, knowing it didn't make a

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difference. They would still scent how the words had made her arousal spike, then continue to grow. Carlos smiled. Slow and carnal. Sexy and passionate. He glanced over his shoulders at the wood line.

"Let's go for a run, kitten."

She frowned, looking at the door. She couldn't leave her sister unguarded.

"We won't go far," Carlos promised.

Both men were already removing their clothes, and her cat scrambled to get out and join them. Nothing matched running free through the woods in her other shape. Well, maybe one thing. She stripped quickly, shifted and joined them on the lawn. She knew the perfect place to go, the reason she'd bought this property, and led them there.

It wasn't far, and when she entered the small clearing she went right to the large slab of rock on one side. It hung out over a small pool that the creek ran through, and she often sunned herself on it, bathed in the pool during the warmer months. She stretched out and gloried in the sun beating down, warming her pelt.

Carlos and Declan entered the clearing and shifted. Her cat watched, breathless and horny and awed as Carlos pulled Declan to him. Kissed him. It wasn't what she'd expected. It was slow, almost soft, and deep, consuming. She felt the tiniest twinge of jealousy before they broke apart.

"I think our kitten is feeling neglected," Carlos teased when he looked up at the rock. "Come down, Sunny. Leave the cat behind for now."

She stood on all fours, made a lazy preening stretch before jumping to the ground and padding softly to them. Declan came to her side, stroked her neck. She purred, and he laughed.

"Yes, you're gorgeous. Now change so we can fuck you till you can't move."

Well, when he put it like that. She lay down on her belly and shifted, rolling to her back to look up at them when the change was complete. She laughed when they pounced until two mouths covered her

nipples, two rasping tongues stroking until she thought she'd combust.

Her chest heaved when they broke away. Her thighs were slick with her moisture even though neither had touched her there. Declan rolled to his back and pulled her over to straddle him. She groaned when his cock poked her belly. She tried to position herself to take him.

"Not yet, kitten."

Carlos knelt behind her, fingers thrusting into her pussy, drawing at her cream, and rubbing it against her ass. She groaned, her mind filling with images of him taking Declan's ass. Of Declan returning the favor.

Over and over again, his fingers drew moisture from her body, until he could press three fingers into her ass, twisting them to stretch her, while Declan alternated between teasing her nipples and clit. Finally, she felt the head of Carlos's cock pressed against her, not yet demanding entry though she knew it was coming. Declan took her hand and wrapped it around the base of his shaft.

"Take me slow, baby."

She guided him to her entrance, took the head into her pussy slowly like he wanted. Carlos flattened a palm on her lower back, urging her to lean forward against Declan. She kissed him, a flutter of teasing brushes on his lips, as she sank onto his length. His hand held the back of her head, his lips bit at hers until she opened her mouth for him. She moaned when his tongue met hers, tilting her head to get better access. She broke away with a gasp when Carlos began to push inside her ass.

"Relax, kitten."

She couldn't see his face, but she heard the wildness in his voice, the slipping control. She held herself still, panic rising as he gave her another inch. He stretched her impossibly, and it fell on the wrong side of the line between pain and pleasure she liked.

"Relax," he ordered again, this time nipping her back. He held her still with one hand on her hip while the other slid around her body, delved through her folds to touch her clit. Declan began to move in short, shallow strokes to match Carlos's caresses.

Her desire rebuilt with each move, until it was once again consuming, until she whimpered with Declan's long, slow withdrawal

from his body. She shifted to take him back inside her, and Carlos, moving with her, slid more of his cock in her ass. This time it wasn't pain that bloomed inside her but a different kind of pleasure. One that threatened to short-circuit her brain. Yet still it wasn't enough. On Declan's next withdrawal, she made her demand.

"More," she said, pushing back against Carlos. With a hiss, he gripped both her hips and slammed inside her. When he pulled out, Declan pushed back into her pussy. The pace was fast. The thrusts hard. Alternating so she was never filled by both at once, until the end, when her cry was more cat than human. When her whole existence just shattered, joy and ecstasy filling every nerve, every pore, as she came.

It took a long time for her heart to slow, for her mind to re-piece itself. She was sweaty, plastered between both men, and sighed her disappointment when Carlos withdrew his softening cock from her ass and rolled to one side. He pulled her off Declan so she lay between them.

She stayed on her back in the clearing, enjoying the cool air, the wrung-out satisfaction in her body, one mate on each side lightly grasping her hands. Carlos lifted her knuckles to his mouth, grazed his teeth on them.

"What do you want for Christmas, kitten?"

She'd almost forgotten. She'd ignored the holiday so long, having no one to share it with. "I already got it." She smiled. "I got my sister back. I got you two. What else could I possibly need?"

Declan's palm settled on her stomach. "I can think of one thing," he said softly.

She snorted, half amused and half horrified. "No way. It takes all my concentration just to deal with you two."

Carlos stilled, and she waited for him to speak, half expecting his words. "It won't always be just us."

She'd been expecting that, after hearing about pride law. Maybe it was better if they got it all out in the open now. Better if they decided on a third now. She scowled. Provided she was given a voice in the decision.

"Do I get a choice?"

"Of course."

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So what now? Parade possible suitors in front of her? Then she was struck by an odd thought.

"Who was the lion who led me and Jaz out?"

Carlos smiled, and she sensed his satisfaction, his approval. Whoa, bubba. She hadn't picked that one for sure!

"You know him?"

"He's my younger brother. His name is Fisher."

"Odd name for a cat."

The smile widened to a grin. "Trust me, it suits."

"So I meet this brother of yours and decide if there's any...spark there?"

And she realized Carlos wanted her to feel that way. Pride law again. This was someone he trusted with his mate. In every way, apparently.

"Okay. Well. I guess he should come visit."

"He's already around."

She didn't even attempt to cover her mortification. Around? Like, right now around? "I'd prefer not to meet a potential mate naked," she hissed.

Declan leaned up on one elbow and grinned. "But you look so good naked. Why not?"

She narrowed her eyes on him. "Cats share. It's part of their genetic makeup. You're a wolf, though. What gives?"

He kissed her. Soft. Quick. It made her blood pump. "I love you." Then her heart lodged in her throat. "You're a lion. You need a group. You crave it, don't you? Somehow, I knew that even before I knew you could shift. As long as I can have a piece of your heart, I'll learn to share."

Carlos cleared his throat, and Declan looked up to meet his gaze with a grin. "That goes for you too."

"I almost regret interrupting," a fourth voice said in the clearing. Oh God. The other lion. She tried to snatch her hands free to cover her breasts, but Declan and Carlos held them down. Carlos gave Declan a look filled with such wicked intent she was afraid she'd come on the spot.

"We could stake her out. Like an offering."

She could see Declan actually considering the idea. It should have made her furious. It should have made her feel used. All it did was bring her libido back to screaming wakefulness.

"Another time, I believe we will." His eyes moved down her body to where her nipples had become painful points. "She likes the idea."

She squeezed her eyes shut, torn between mortification and lust. She wanted Carlos or Declan or both to fuck her. She wanted to forget her own name. She wanted Fisher to leave. Didn't she? No. She couldn't lie to herself. That churning feeling in her stomach was excitement.

Fingers slid up her calf, to the inside of her knee. Two hands spread her thighs, and this new person, this stranger, brushed her folds, stroked over her clit. It shouldn't be a turn-on, but her body responded even though her mind ordered it not to.

"Oh yeah," Declan muttered. "Tying her down has definite advantages."

Crap. No, no, no. She was supposed to get a choice in this, right? Her eyes snapped open. "I thought I got to pick?" But her body had already decided for her. She almost snarled when the exploring fingers stopped.

Carlos's eyes crinkled at the edges. He was enjoying this. Watching her get wound up. Watching her try to fight embarrassment and lust at the same time. "But how will you know whether you want him or not if you don't try him out, kitten?"

Oh God. How did he make that sound like the best, most reasonable invitation she'd ever had? Fisher took Carlos's words as permission. When his mouth met her pussy, she couldn't hold back a cry, couldn't control her hips when they thrust up to meet him. When his hands closed over her ass and lifted her to him, she quit fighting it. Let herself just feel. It wasn't long at all before his wicked, sinful tongue wrung one orgasm, then two, then three, from her body.

When he finally lifted his head from her, he looked at Carlos. "May I?"

"You tell me, kitten. Do you want him inside you? Do you want him thrusting you to another orgasm?"

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How could he ask her that? She couldn't *think* anymore. She was just a ball of need, a creature that demanded *more*. She nodded, knowing her voice wouldn't work, and Fisher lifted his body over hers, thrust into her with no hesitation as if afraid to leave her to second thoughts. Once inside, he held still, though, until she met his gaze.

"How hard?" And she remembered. He knew what she was.

"Hard. Fast."

He took her at her word, plunging and withdrawing, deep and furious, with a fast rhythm that blew her mind—and he made sure she came first. It wasn't until she was shaking, trembling in the aftermath that she felt his muscles tense, felt his cum filling her as he cried out his triumph. She felt limp, sated and satisfied, as he rolled to one side, Carlos making room for him.

No one spoke for a long time. She couldn't have even if she'd wanted to.

Chapter Nine

Declan waited on the front porch, admiring the colored lights Sunny had reluctantly allowed him and Carlos to hang. He knew eventually someone would come find him, and he wasn't surprised when it was Carlos. He sat next to him on the glider, and they let the silence spread until he couldn't stand it anymore.

"I knew I was going to have to share her," Declan said softly. "I can live with that. I don't like it, but I can live with it."

"What can't you live with?" Carlos asked, and Declan took a deep breath. He wasn't walking away from either one of them. He'd learn to adjust.

"Just how much sharing am I gonna have to do?" Okay, maybe not so much.

Carlos chuckled. "It's just you and me, wolf. I'm obviously not sleeping with my brother, and for some reason he isn't interested in you."

He hadn't been sure if he was expected to fuck the other lion, too. He exhaled a sigh of relief. Sunny and Carlos meant so much to him, so quickly, and it was a struggle against his wolf side letting this other male in. It didn't want to share its lovers. Didn't understand the necessity. Thank God, he'd discovered earlier, they wouldn't be expected to always keep this third. Once the pride was convinced the three of them were solid together, Fisher could go his own way. Just thinking of the other male made him growl.

"Where is he?"

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They'd decided to give Sunny and Fisher some time alone so she could make her decision. She had six months, but if she decided she didn't want Fisher, they'd still need time to find a suitable replacement.

"Gone. For now. He went to report to the king. He'll be back in a few days."

Declan froze. "She's made her decision?"

"Sort of. She enjoyed him. He enjoyed her." Carlos shrugged. "They've decided on a trial period."

He ground his teeth together, trying to come to grips with his mixed emotions. On the one hand, he didn't want to share her more than necessary. On the other, it was a hell of a turn-on watching her be pleased, watching her release.

"I don't think he'll be around longer than necessary," Carlos went on with a considering look at the front door.

"Why?" he asked, confused and not liking it.

"He had...a look on his face when he passed Jaz's door."

Ah, Christ. That spelled trouble. They hadn't spoken yet, but he was pretty sure Asa had decided on Jaz. Not that she was in any frame of mind to deal with men. Human, wolf, or cat.

"That could be a problem."

"We protect her until she's healed."

"Her mind may never heal. We don't know what they did to her," he said softly, aware of how many ears were nearby.

Carlos looked at him with disturbed eyes. "Let's hope that's not the case. Their animal sides will reject that."

And that was the other disturbing thing. "They can't both be her mate. Not like that."

Carlos shrugged. "It's a new world, isn't it? If she were wolf, I might agree with you. But she isn't. She's a lion, and we seem to be programmed for group relationships."

"Shit," he muttered. "This could be a problem." Especially since Asa was hung up on a male lion too. Unless Fisher was that lion. Asa had made it a point to disappear when Fisher showed up.

"What?"

"I was just wondering if Asa and Fisher will share her. And each other."

Carlos gave him a crooked smile, and his heart skipped a beat before resuming to a rapid pounding.

"Maybe. They'll figure it out. Just like we will."

Somewhere in the house, he heard the sound of water being turned off, followed by a soft rustling around.

"She's waiting for us," Carlos whispered.

Declan grinned. "Let's not keep her waiting then."

He led the way to the master bedroom. Sunny was curled up on her side, eyes closed and chest rising and falling in the even rhythm of sleep. So much for that idea.

Then Carlos stepped up behind him and put his hands on his waist. He held Declan still while he nuzzled his neck, licking and teasing.

"You're pretty hot for a wolf," he whispered.

Declan chuckled. "Yeah, well. You're not bad for a lion."

He closed his eyes and tilted his head to give Carlos more access. The werelion's tongue stroked, teased, made a leisurely study of his skin. Sunny murmured, and when he opened his eyes to check on her, she was watching them with heavy lids, still not fully awake.

Carlos slid his hands to the front of Declan's jeans, and she watched while he undid the top button, then pulled the zipper down. He freed Declan's cock, wrapped his big hand around it and pumped it slowly. Sunny licked her bottom lip.

Her enjoyment watching them together was easy to see, and when she held her hand out to them, Carlos let him go. They removed their clothes and joined her on the bed, one on each side of her.

They urged her to her back, pulled the blanket down to expose her body. Carlos immediately bent to take one nipple into his mouth. Declan just watched for a few minutes, heart racing. She was a miracle. His chance at having a happy life. And to have Carlos too? He'd obviously done something right in a previous life.

He was overcome by emotion, embarrassed by the lump in his throat when Carlos cast his eyes up to meet his. He released Sunny's

nipple and, reaching across her, put his hand on the back of Declan's head, urged him to meet in the middle. The kiss was deep and unhurried as Carlos's tongue thrust against his, mimicking the way they'd trusted in each other's bodies. In Sunny's body.

He broke the kiss and looked at her. She squirmed, her expression needy and avaricious, her skin hot to the touch. They returned their focus to her. Declan slid down the bed, spreading her thighs wide to settle between them. Inhaling her sweet scent before stroking her clit with his tongue. She jerked, crying out at the first touch. He thrust a finger inside her pussy, then a second as Carlos returned to her nipples. Flicking them, squeezing before sucking one his mouth.

He removed his fingers from her cunt, replaced it with his tongue and a groan of pleasure. She tasted so good. He rubbed his thumb over the small bud of her clit, working the ball of nerve endings while his tongue worked her channel. With a scream, her orgasm coated his tongue, and she bucked against him until he put one arm over her pelvis to hold her still.

He wanted her to come again and again. To drink her up each time. To brand her as his. And he did. With her next orgasm, he moved his head to her thigh, biting and sucking on her skin until he knew she would bear a mark. For a few days at least. He grinned. He'd just have to replace it when it faded. Hands stroked his back, his flanks, distracting him from the thought. He turned his head to Carlos.

"Take her now."

Yes. He could clearly read Carlos's intention, shivered at the promise in his eyes. Tonight he'd fuck Sunny, and Carlos would fuck him. Tomorrow? Well, who knew what it would bring.

He sat back on his heels, stroked his hands up her thighs and wrapped them under her ass to lift her up as Carlos stacked a couple pillows under her butt. He leaned forward for one last lick of her pussy before moving into position. He heard the squirting sound of the lube as he pushed his cock inside her, watching her eyes widen as she saw Carlos move into position behind him.

She pouted. "I can't see this way."

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His laugh broke off as Carlos pushed just the head of his cock in his ass. "You just need to feel, baby," he panted.

Carlos stroked his back before moving to grip his hips. "Ready?" he whispered. Declan could hear the excitement in his voice, saw it mirrored in Sunny's eyes.

He didn't reply to the question, just started to slowly ease into her pussy. Trying to draw out the pleasure. Carlos wasn't so restrained, and when he rammed into Declan, the action pushed him to the hilt inside Sunny. Everyone froze, taking time to adjust. Sunny recovered first.

"More," she demanded.

They moved together, Carlos and Declan withdrawing and thrusting at the same time. The pace was slow, unhurried, maddening the three of them with desire. It was so much more than simple lust.

Declan kept his gaze on Sunny as his cock slid in and out of her hot, wet cunt. Her eyes changed, glowing like they did in her lion form, growing dazed and heavy lidded with the heat the three of them generated together. So fucking beautiful.

"You want more, baby?" he whispered. She opened her mouth, but no words came out. She gave him a jerky nod instead. "Touch yourself, then. Show us how you like your pretty nipples handled."

She cupped her breasts, lifting them like an offering, then splayed her fingers so they surrounded but didn't touch her nipples. He groaned. It was his turn to demand more, but it wasn't necessary. Never taking her gaze from his, she took each nipple between thumb and forefinger. Rolled them until she panted, tilting her hips to catch his cock on each withdrawal. Then she squeezed, her touch no longer teasing as her nipples turned a rosy red.

Bending his head, he took one between his lips, sucked it hard against the roof of his mouth. She cried out when he bit her. Her pussy spasmed, milked him, as he slammed into her and Carlos into him.

The werelion came first, with a roar, nipping Declan's back before rolling to the side. He came up on one elbow, watching them, reaching a finger out to stroke them where they were connected. Declan gritted his teeth against the urge to come now.

Sunny protested when he slowed his strokes, her soft murmurs almost like a choked cry. He lifted her legs over his shoulders and caught his breath when he looked down at them. Her pelvis was raised off the bed, her thighs spread wide for him. The view was intoxicating. Next to him, the lion purred and reached between them, stroking Declan's cock a moment before finding Sunny's clit.

She grew slicker around him as Carlos heated her body up again, drew pleasure from her with each stroke of his thumb. Her eyes glazed over, face flushed. Declan's thrusts grew hurried, then frenzied as the wolf inside rose, demanded the submission, the total surrender, of its mate.

Between his thrusts and Carlos's attention to her clit, Sunny didn't stand a chance. She came, screaming in pleasure. Her cunt clamped down around him, holding him inside her when he too came, filling her womb with spurts of cum.

He let her legs down and fell on top of her. Sunny didn't know how long she lay under him, but when her mushy brain started to function again, she looked around for Carlos. He came out of the bathroom, rubbing a towel over his wet hair and holding a damp washcloth in his hand.

With a long lick on her neck and a whispered promise to return, Declan stood, kissing Carlos as they passed each other and he entered the bathroom. She heard the shower turn on and considered getting up to join him, then dismissed the idea with a sigh. No way were her legs getting her that far yet.

Carlos knelt between her thighs on the bed and leaned forward to wipe her brow with the cloth before moving down her neck, over her collar. Lingering on her breasts. His cock grew hard as she watched, and she groaned.

"Honey, there is no way..."

She cut the words off when he gave her that slow, teasing smile, her heart hammering in her chest. But he didn't push her. He cleaned her, moving the cloth down her belly and finally between her thighs. It stroked, rasped over her sensitive skin, and after a moment he tossed it aside. He lay down next to her, chest to her back, and slowly ran his hand

down her body.

"Sleep," he whispered, promised, his hand moving to cup her sex. "I'll be right here when you wake up."

She drifted to sleep and woke with him moving in her. Slowly. Leisurely. She tried to twist around to face him, but he held her still, lifting her leg over his hip, cupping her breast, teasing her nipple while he licked her neck with long, wet strokes. With a moan, she let him have his way.

He never hurried, never rushed, even when Declan lay down in front of them and wrapped his hand around his cock. She moistened dry lips as she watched him. He stroked his cock in a long, slow twist that kept the same pace as Carlos's thrusts in her pussy. She had a hard time deciding which was hotter.

She could see the pleasure build on his face, and hers rose in tandem. When cum pearled on the head of his cock, he rubbed his thumb over it and lifted it to her mouth. Keeping her gaze on his face, she sucked the digit into her mouth and rolled her tongue over the drop, groaning at the salty, masculine taste. With a shudder, he rolled to his back, his hand pumping his cock harder until he jerked, his cum shooting across his belly.

"Oh God," she whispered, unsure if it was the vision Declan made sating himself or Carlos's long, deep, slow strokes that pushed her into orgasm. He buried his head in her neck when he followed them, his big body tense and shaking at her back.

"Sleep now," he whispered, and she couldn't remember the last time she'd slept so well.

Chapter Ten

Sunny woke alone, her body pleasantly sore and her soul content. She took a deep breath, taking her mates' scents deep into her lungs, and listened for activity in the house. It was too quiet. She didn't even hear Jaz. Scowling, she got up and pulled on the first clothes she grabbed from the closet. She didn't bother with shoes, but put on heavy wool socks. The wood floors were cold.

She checked Jaz's room first and, finding it empty, went downstairs. No one was downstairs either. Her sister had been free a week, recovering with the swiftness of most weres, and had started to venture downstairs and even outside. Maybe the guys had taken her for a run?

Not likely. Not without letting her know. Where the hell had they gone? Opening the back door, she stepped out in the chilly December morning. It had snowed overnight, and a set of footprints led from the house to the woods. Not a problem, but the other set, from the road cutting across the yard, were alarming. She crossed to where they disappeared into the woods and caught a familiar scent, one she'd hoped never to smell again.

Burns wasn't dead after all, and like Carlos had worried, he'd tracked them down. One set of prints must be his. The other, smaller and narrow, could only be Jaz's. Shit. Where the hell were Carlos and Declan?

She ran back to the house for her weapons and boots, but hesitated before returning and following Jaz. She tried to call them but was shunted

straight to voice mail. They'd be furious if she went looking for Jaz without backup, and they were right. It was foolish to go alone. But she couldn't leave her sister unprotected, couldn't risk Burns kidnapping her again.

She went. A few feet into the trees, the tracks split apart. She wanted to follow Jaz but suspected Burns was trying to get in front of her for an ambush, so she peeled off to the left and followed him.

She jumped when her phone vibrated in her pocket. Thank God, she'd turned it to silent last night and hadn't thought to reset it today. Carlos's name was on the display screen, and she answered, hoping like hell her voice wouldn't carry too far.

"Where the hell are you?" she snapped.

There was a pause, and she could imagine his eyes narrowing at her tone. He might even threaten to punish her later. She shivered, remembering the paddle he'd shown up with a few days ago. Who'd known what a turn-on that would be?

"On the way back. We went to debrief Julian and grab some supplies. What's going on?"

"Burns is here. Somewhere in the woods stalking Jaz. And I'm a tracker, not a fighter, remember?"

He snarled. "Do you mean to tell me you're out there alone?"

"I can't abandon my sister."

A twig cracked nearby, and she crouched down, looking around carefully.

"Get your ass back. We're turning down the drive now."

He hung up before she could protest, but truthfully, she was relieved. She wouldn't leave her sister out here to fend for herself, but she knew they needed help. She heard movement again, and the breeze shifted enough to bring her Burns's scent. He was between her and the house.

She took her bearings, terror and adrenaline flooding her system as her body prepared itself for flight. She'd have to try to circle back to the house. She could do it. She was fast and agile. With her feline abilities, she should be able to outrun a wolf. Except this was no ordinary wolf.

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She heard a lion's roar in the distance behind her and knew it was Carlos's order to get moving. *It's now or never, Sunny.* Ignoring the shaking in her limbs, the racing of her heart, she moved in the opposite direction of the house. When she reached the clearing, she took another path that wound back to the house and picked up her pace.

She sensed movement behind her, could swear she felt hot breath on her neck. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw nothing, heard nothing behind her with straining ears, but snapped forward again when she heard rustling in the brush. Slowing to a walk, she edged closer with care, cursing the wind that blew from behind her. She nearly jumped out of her skin when Jaz peeked around a thick tree.

"Oh thank God," she said, walking forward, gaze panicked. "He's here."

"I know." She took her sister's hand and urged her down the path. "Carlos and Dec are hunting him. We need to get back to the house."

They ran, and Sunny was relieved when she could see the house through the trees. They were almost safe, but where were Carlos and Declan? They must have gone into the woods after her. Then they were on the lawn, running for the porch. They were halfway there when Burns and two gray wolves came around the corner. Shit. Burns had brought backup, and she and Jaz were the prey.

"You've caused so much trouble I might not let you live," he addressed Sunny with an evil smile. "And you, my dear," he turned to Jaz, "think of all the pain you put yourself through, and your secret is unveiled anyway. Now you'll have to be punished again, of course."

Jaz cringed, and Sunny pulled her close to her left side, reaching for the butt of the pistol strapped to the right.

"It'll go worse for you if you do that," Burns said. "Now move to the van."

The wolves at his side growled and split up, moving towards her and Jaz. When they refused to move, one of the wolves leapt forward, his teeth clamping around her calf. Sunny cried out when it broke her skin and she smelled her own blood. The wolf didn't release her. It pulled until she fell to her ass, then starting dragging her towards the waiting van.

Desperate to get free, she kicked it with her other leg, smiling at the satisfied crunch when her boot connected to its skull, but it still didn't let go.

They drew closer and closer to the van, and she squashed down her rising panic, fought back the tears threatening to spill. She just needed to slow the wolves down. Carlos and Declan would come. They'd never allow her to be taken. With a curse at her stupidity, she freed the gun on her side, took aim and fired. The punishing grip on her leg was gone in an instant as the wolf fell dead.

It hurt like hell when she dragged herself to her feet, her gaze desperately seeking out her sister. Burns was dragging her to the van, the remaining wolf protecting his flank. Fuck. She couldn't risk shooting. She might hit Jaz. But what choice did she have? There was a third man inside the vehicle, motor running, ready to take off. She would not let them take her sister. She'd failed to protect her once. Never again.

Then Carlos was running towards them in human form, Declan's huge black wolf at his side. Burns snarled and threw Jaz at them before jumping into the van with the wolf. It squealed down the drive. She sagged in relief. It had been too damned close.

She opened her mouth to thank them but snapped it shut when she got a look at their expressions. They were furious. At her. She didn't protest when Carlos ordered them all to pack, but it wasn't until they were all piled in the Excursion and were on the road that she spoke.

"Where are we going?"

"My den." His tone did not invite conversation. Well, too damned bad.

"You think we'll be safe there?"

"Yes," he said curtly; his knuckles were white from gripping the steering wheel so hard. She sighed. Didn't look like he was getting over it any time soon. "Get the boxes, Dec."

Declan pulled two small jewelers' boxes out of the glove compartment, handing one to her and one to Jaz.

She gasped when she opened it. The ring was gold, encrusted with emeralds and rubies. She'd never seen anything so lovely. She glanced

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over to see what they'd given her sister. Hers was a simple silver band with one only one ruby and emerald.

"What are these for?" Sunny asked, taking the ring from the box and sliding it on her right ring finger.

"*Left hand, kitten.*" Carlos was watching her in the rearview mirror with an intense expression. Of course. Being mated was more than marriage. Most weres didn't bother with the human ceremony, but most mates wore wedding bands anyway. "It shows everyone who you belong to. Gold for my mate. Silver for anyone I take under my protection. Like your sister."

"It would be better if I went my own way." Jaz's voice was bitter. "I got caught because I trusted the wrong person. I won't make that mistake again."

Declan shook his head. "No. You stay with us. Your father was right. You both need protection."

"And we already know what you are," Carlos added. "As do Asa and Fisher."

"He tried to help me. Fisher," she whispered.

Sunny could no longer interpret Carlos's and Declan's expressions, but she knew they were keeping something from her. She didn't attempt to hide her worry. What would be the point? They knew her too well.

"It's going to be okay, kitten. Trust me."

"Do we have a choice?" she whispered. She could see the longing in her sister's eyes. For safety. To belong somewhere. She shook her head. "Guess not."

"Merry Christmas, kitten." For the first time in a long time, she absorbed those words without a snarl, with hope instead of self-pity.

She leaned back in her seat, distracting herself by studying the glittering ring. No one spoke, and several hours had passed when they pulled off the highway and onto an unmarked dirt road. A few miles later, it dead-ended in front of a large Colonial. Actually, giving the building a critical eye, "mansion" would be the best descriptor. She thought she saw others like it through the trees.

They were just south of Savannah, and the first thing she noticed

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when she stepped out of the vehicle was the smell of the ocean. Then the noise registered. Music. Voices. Laughter.

"Are we crashing a party?"

Carlos grinned and took her hand. "It's Christmas Eve. My brother throws a big bash every year."

Jaz winced at the announcement, and Sunny could smell her reluctance, her rising fear. Carlos pulled her close, tucked her under one shoulder. "Don't worry, little sister. No one will harm you here."

Her heart swelled. She couldn't have loved him more than she did at that moment, as he protected her sister. He pulled her under his other shoulder, and Declan took her free hand as they walked towards the back corner of the house.

She wasn't sure if she imagined a split second of silence when they came into a view or not. She was distracted by Jaz's delighted laugh, a sound she'd been afraid she'd never hear again. "They decorated the palms."

"A silly thing my mom liked to do."

His smile was wistful, and she leaned closer to him, too aware of how scant the comfort was, but knowing it was hers to offer. He kissed her, squeezed her shoulder, then led them to the center of the party.

She was distracted by him and the lights and finally noticed people were nodding as they walked by, calling out greetings. Admonishing herself to pay more attention, she looked around and noticed the men far outnumbered the women, even among the children. She was so curious about that, a circumstance she hadn't noticed in wolf packs, that she wasn't aware they'd stopped until she looked up and met the gaze of the man who could only be Carlos's brother. He had the same golden skin. The same tall, lanky build that spoke of speed and power. He met her gaze, then switched to Jaz's.

"My brother, Isaac," he said, introducing them. "The pride's king." She'd known he was king, but she'd been expecting someone older. Distinguished. Not the sexy man who looked her over with hot, approving eyes.

"You've brought us sisters," he said, lowering his voice. "And

unless I'm mistaken, some of the rumored ones."

The instinct to shrink back from his knowing gaze was powerful, but Carlos held her still. "Rumors or not, she's mine."

The king smiled, his eyes crinkling in a way that made him look completely harmless. She didn't buy it for a minute. "So she is."

Then he turned his assessing, appreciative gaze to Declan. She and Carlos both tensed.

"And the wolf?" the king asked.

"Is also mine," Carlos snapped.

Isaac chuckled. "What a shame. Your Christmas is definitely better than mine, brother."

Grinning, Carlos released her and Jaz long enough to step forward and embrace his brother.

It was a long time later, lying sweaty and sated on rumpled sheets, that she wondered about what the king hadn't said. "He was ready to steal me and Dec away, but he didn't say a word about Jaz," she mused.

Carlos was behind her, tracing lazy circles on her back, while Declan sprawled in front of her, eyes half closed.

"He wouldn't really try. But he will flirt and tease. It's part of our nature."

"But he practically ignored Jaz."

"She wears the silver of protection. And your sister also wears...an injured air about her. My brother is more sensitive than first acquaintance would make you believe. Like all weres, we protect our women. Treasure them." His hand slid up her hip to her breast. "We like to keep them so pleased they think of nothing but us."

Oh yes. They certainly did. She groaned as his fingers slid south. A woman could get used to such treatment. "I'm not gonna be able to walk tomorrow," she complained.

"Ah, well," he teased. "We might take the pleasuring a bit farther than others."

That they did. Declan had moved to her torso, kissed his way down to her belly button when he froze and his gaze lifted. "Carlos."

He nodded. "I know."

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She frowned when they both inhaled deeply, wondering why they'd paused so completely in their play. "What?"

Two big male hands rested on her stomach.

"We need to get our own place." They were staying at Isaac's.

"And a crib. And all that baby stuff."

Oh, hell no. She shoved both their hands away and sat up. "No. Absolutely not."

"Little too late for protests," Declan said, cocking an eyebrow. She wanted to punch him.

"We're two lions and a wolf. Did it ever occur to y'all to wonder *what* we'd have? What kind of crazy mix? I can't do that to a child!"

"I don't think you have to worry about that," Carlos said, his expression turning worried. And reluctant. Now who was keeping secrets?

"Why's that, honey?" she asked with saccharine sweetness that made him flinch. Smart man.

"Um, my sister can shift." Sister? He had a sister? Who was also a shifter? Sunny was going to kill him. "She has two lion mates. And a bear mate," he groused, like he was pretending she wasn't ready to commit murder. "All their children are lions. We think it's the mother's DNA that determines what the child is."

She was a little reassured, but he was talking about only one woman. And she wasn't letting his withholding that secret go either. "Who else knows? Just your family?"

He nodded. "And her mates, of course." He sighed. "You'll meet them tomorrow." He muttered, "unfortunately."

She had to grin, her anger softening at his obvious discomfort. She could guess why, too. "Obnoxious older brother, huh?"

He scowled. "She's the baby. You can't blame us for making sure she's okay."

"I thought I didn't want girls. But it might just be the only appropriate punishment."

"Bite your tongue, woman," he said, rolling her to her back and leaning over her.

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“But it’s so much more fun when you bite it.”

She didn’t repress the saucy retort. It was going to be okay. Everything. The three of them and whatever kind of shifter children they had. Carlos pressed against her front, and Declan her side. She wiggled around, freed her arms to embrace them both, heart full of love for both of them, and sighed. It was a sound of pure contentment. She kissed each of them and lay back.

“Merry Christmas, my mates.”

The End

Author Bio

Loribelle is like the South she calls home. Hot and sultry. Languid and sexy. Magnolias and gardenias scent her silk-lined boudoir, and men and children alike bow to her magnificence...

Okay, maybe it isn't quite that glamorous. She does have two smart and lovely daughters who give her a run for her money and a son who will one day be someone's model of a romance hero. (She promises.) Her husband is a real-life hero, and Loribelle just tries to keep up with the demands of military life. In between, she writes a book or two.

She's had every job under the sun, but haven't most writers? That Army military police, bookstore manager, waitress, wedding photographer, website designer experience has to come in useful sometimes. As they say in the South, it all washes out in the end. She loves hearing from her readers and can be found at <http://www.loribellehunt.com>.