

*A Sip...*



*A Torquere Dress Short*

Sit Up and Beg

By Julia Talbot

"Sit up and beg."

"You're crazy," Killian said, fingers dancing in the air just over the collar wrapped around his neck. "I'm

a werewolf, not a pet."

The collar was driving him fucking crazy. It had to weigh several pounds, and it was like those radio collars so-called scientists put on wild animals. More like sadists. Let's make the animal stand out from all the other animals so it's ostracized and killed!

That wasn't the purpose of Killian's collar. His was more like one of those sci-fi series shock collars. Misbehave and get electrocuted. Or at least fried like a hairy sausage.

No, his collar was designed to kick his ass if he tried to get loose.

The guy who had finally appeared in front of the cage his kidnappers had put him in smiled. "I guess you are, at that. At least for now. These guys? They want to make you a fighting dog. A human pit bull, if you will."

"These guys?" Killian eyed the big man, noting the faded jeans and button-down shirt, the strapped on shoulder-holster. "What are you?"

"I'm just hired security."

"Hired..." Damn. Damn, damn, damn. Anyone who could work for the guys who'd taken him as a hired gun would probably only respond to one thing. Money. That was a commodity that Killian was flat out of.

"Yep." The guy nodded, blue eyes twinkling. Maybe glinting. A glint was more shark-like, right?

"Well. Stop taunting the captive, Mr. Security."

"But it's so much fun!" The guy tilted his head. "And it's Evan."

"Why do I care?" Killian tugged at the collar again, wondering if it would just fry him if he went berserk and changed. He could do full on wolf, but that wouldn't help him. He'd have to try and maintain that transitional stage, where he was a huge, misshapen mix of man and wolf, which was tough to do even when he wasn't singing the song of electrocution.

"Because I've been thinking of letting you out of here."

Widening his eyes, Killian went for shocked. It wasn't a stretch. "What?"

Evan sighed. "You're different. I've seen maybe twenty, twenty five guys come through here in the last two weeks. They've all been... damaged. Broken, somehow. You seem like just a guy."

"I just told you I'm a werewolf, and I seem like just a guy?" That was a new one on him. He'd been called a lot of things lately, including "bitch" by the one skinny little guy with the cruel smile and cold hands, but just a guy wasn't one of them.

Shrugging, Evan smiled a little, the little curl of the upper lip kinda hot. "My mom was a were-cat. It's recessive with me, but my sister is a shifter."

Matter-of-fact and... "Wait. If your family is were-friendly, then how on earth..."

"Can I work for these guys?" Evan leaned close to the bars of the cage. "So when someone like you comes along, I can get you the hell out of here."

He blinked, just stunned as all hell. Man, it had been one weird day. His fingers grazed the collar again. "Can you get this thing off me?"

"Not without the controller." Evan's well-shaped mouth twisted a little. "I'll get it. They think I'm kinda mindless. Won't be hard."

"Says you. I can't get past the bars without falling down."

"I know." Cocking his head, Evan grunted. "You'd better make like you're still drugged up. They won't poke you until you're awake and aware. I'll be back."

Amazing, how Evan had heard their incipient company before he had. Killian thought his hearing was pretty damned good.

He curled down around himself, protecting his privates and pretending to sleep. Evan's footsteps faded away, and Killian figured that was the end of that. He'd never see the guy again.

Pity. Evan was damned pretty. Too damned pretty for Killian's piece of mind.

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Evan watched the security feed for about a half hour, trying to see patterns in people's activities. He kept the closest eye on the skinny little guy who held all of the remote access to the collar controls. Hoaung. That one's name was Hoaung, and he had a real jones for fighting exotic animals.

Not African lions or Indian tigers, either. Evan had seen werewolves, big cat shifters and one werebear in the short time he'd been working at the complex. Hell, that was why he'd gotten the job. He'd planned on freeing the captives, letting them go and burning the place to the ground.

Then he'd seen the poor scarred, insane bastards that were locked in the cages. There was no saving them. Letting them loose would only get a bunch of innocent folks killed. Hoaung had seen to that.

So, Evan had changed his plan. He'd been stockpiling drugs, illegal tranquilizers that would be hardcore enough to take out a were-elephant, if there was such a thing. When he had everything in place, Evan planned to drug all of the animals to death, or at least into endless sleep, and to blow the place sky high.

He'd been stockpiling explosives, too.

It wasn't as hard as everyone thought, especially when a man worked for the worst sort of scum around. Things fell off trucks easily enough.

Now his plan had to change again. Killian I'm-a-werewolf-not-a-pet was not like the others. Not at all. He had all his faculties, his body wasn't broken, and he was the hottest thing Evan had ever seen. That lean, long body was fine, if a little fuzzy, and the man had the prettiest gray eyes, set deep in a tanned face. The dark brown hair set everything off, making Evan want to run his fingers through it.

Kinda ridiculous.

Still, he had to re-think everything now. He had to get the control to the collars, which he thought was universal, at least. He had to get Killian dressed and maybe get him some uppers. Evan had seen the cloudiness in those gray eyes, the deep confusion that the tranquilizer darts left.

Evan had seen that in his mother's eyes, just before they came and took her away.

Sighing, he rolled his head on his neck before straightening, trying to look like he was making his usual rounds. He wasn't a security guard, in the double-knit uniform, plastic badge sense of the word, but he was supposed to check the security equipment frequently, and it would be a good story for whoever it was that was following him.

He turned just in time to see Martin, Hoaung's second in command, round the corner.

"You weren't talking to the new prisoner, were you?" Martin asked immediately, beady eyes roving over him. The man had a sort of lizard-like wiliness that left Evan uneasy.

"Sure." The cameras would prove him a liar if denied it. "I get a kick out of it, you know? He's harmless that way." Evan motioned to his neck, like he had a collar on.

"He's also earmarked for Hoaung. Leave him alone. Got it?"

"Sure. Sure. Sorry." He held his hands up in front of him, loose and relaxed.

"Good. Just remember that."

Nodding, he watched Martin head off, already calculating how he would get past the cameras.

Now all he had to do was find Hoaung.

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The fight was the worst thing Killian had ever seen.

It had been bad enough to get his naked ass dragged out of the cage to play space princess to the little Asian guy's sheik or pasha or whatever. Sitting at someone's feet like a lapdog did nothing but piss him off. Too bad every time he got a good rage worked up, the damned collar went off like a bad Star Trek prop, and he got zapped.

Killian really thought that would be the worst of it.

Then the window before them opened, the glass soundproof and shatterproof and taking up the whole wall. The reasons for all that weren't immediately apparent, but when armed guards with Kevlar suits released two collared werecats into the room, Killian thought he knew what was going on.

"Don't want to smell all the pheromones and blood, huh?"

The man holding the chain attached to his collar never said a word, just hit the shock control on Killian's collar, sending him flopping around like a landed fish.

The werecats were sluggish, skinny and hollow, but it wasn't long before the collar zapping had worked them into a frenzy, and they were ripping and tearing at each other. The utter silence made it seem like a macabre version of why cats paint. All leaping and red streaks.

Christ. That was going to be him soon. He knew it with a dead-level certainty that sent his guts twisting, his mouth sour and dry.

What the hell had he done, to get in this mess? He'd been minding his own business, having a heck of a full moon weekend at the cabin at the lake when someone had taken him down with a tranq. It had been like a Wild Kingdom show. Or maybe an episode of that vamp slayer show...

He closed his eyes when one cat ripped the throat right out of the other. It was a fact of life, if you were fighting for territory or food, but for this?

Well, Killian sure hoped that Evan cat had been serious about getting him out of there.

He didn't think he could take too much of this shit.

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The actual uniformed guards had passed thirty seconds ago. That meant Evan had fifteen minutes to get to that damned controller.

He broken into the booth up in Hoaung's wing of the house and accessed the private security cameras. He knew where the bastard kept his controller. It was in a safe box in a recessed wall panel, but it wasn't locked or anything. Shit. It would be a piece of cake.

Evan moved down the hall, staying on the inside walls, his face turned inward. It might not fool anyone for long, but right now no one should be watching. The guard only checked twice this time of night. And there would only be a tape to review if he screwed up, and then they'd know who he was anyway.

The last camera was around an awkward corner, and Evan knew he had to take it out, not just avoid it. Just in case someone changed their routine. It never hurt to be too careful.

He put a plastic, adhesive disc up against the lens of the camera, moving as fast as his body would let him, which was pretty fast, thanks to his mom. He made a dash for Hoaung's private rooms then, knowing the man was still dealing with a buyer who wanted a breeding pair of werewolves.

That kind of business always happened late at night.

He made the door, the wall, and the recessed panel without any kind of incident, and before he knew it he had the controller in his hands. All he had to do was get the hell out of Dodge, get Killian and blow the place up.

He hit the door to Houang's suite and slipped out into the hallway. His foot had no more hit the tile when an alarm went off, the deafening whoop-whoop making him cringe.

Yeah. Piece of cake.

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The alarm blared through the building, red lights flashing, and all of the animals around him in their cages went crazy. What the fuck? He was trying to raise his head, the drugs they'd pumped into him when he'd objected to the head honcho trying to touch his balls still lingering.

Goddamn it, what was going on?

He dragged his ass up the hard way, hanging on the bars, staring out into the red gloom. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, and Killian needed a damned drink. Water, tequila. Didn't matter to him one way or the other.

That had him laughing. Like he was ever going to have a shot of liquor again. Hell, he hadn't eaten in two days.

The clang of the collar around his neck surprised him, and Killian blinked down at the floor stupidly. The collar lay there, the blinking green light indicating it was live extinguished.

Damn. That was unexpected. Grinning, Killian reared back and threw himself at the bars, the cage actually bending under what he figured was a weak effort.

He gathered himself, but the cage door opened kind of like his collar had, and Evan leaned in, grinning madly. "You coming with?"

Oh, fuck, no one had to ask him twice. He nodded, his legs a little unsteady when he stood upright.

"You need a little something to boost you, man?" Evan held out a little packet, one with a pre-filled syringe.

"Yes." He hated to take the damned stuff, whatever it was, but adrenaline wasn't going to get him too far. Even if he shifted. "You're bleeding."

"They shot at me." Evan didn't seem too phased by it, so they must not have hit him. Much.

"Well, as long as you're good to go."

"I am." Evan waited for him to push the needle into his hip, then held out a hand. "We have fifteen minutes."

"Fifteen minutes to what?"

"You'll see." Pulling him along, Evan led the way out of the big room with the cages, and Killian realized

they'd been shouting to be heard over the alarm. He hadn't even noticed.

Hopefully no one else had, either.

There were shifters everywhere, in all states of animal and human, furry muzzles and human hands trying to pluck at them. Evan kept them moving, kept their progress of the forward kind, which was good. Killian might have stopped to help.

A black-red stain was spreading on Evan's shirt, right up under the right shoulder blade. The smell of blood was maddening, making him want to bring the man down. He was so hungry... So hungry.

"Come on, man. No time to stop and munch on me."

"Yeah, yeah." Okay, so maybe he'd been reaching, his hand turning into a claw...

Evan laughed, the sound of gunfire startling and urgent all of a sudden. Killian put on a burst of speed, not wanting anyone else to get shot on his account. Especially not him. He dragged Evan through a set of doors and down another hall, and this one had windows.

Hot damn.

"Stand back," he told Evan, letting his body change, letting the wolf come out, just enough. He heard Evan grunt, the sound one of awe or fear or disgust. Hell, he knew he was horrifying this way, half man, half wolf. Didn't matter. It got them through the window.

They rolled along the ground, which sloped sharply away from the building, and Evan scrambled up, hauling ass away from the compound. They were out, and no one followed, so Killian didn't see the hurry, but he brushed reinforced glass off his shoulders and followed, his body shrinking back into shape.

"Three minutes," Evan said, panting, starting to slow down, his motions becoming uncoordinated.

"To what?"

"Need to go farther."

It looked like Evan was slogging through mud, so Killian picked the man up and ran, putting as much distance between them and the building as he could.

The explosion still knocked him right off his feet.

He dropped Evan, who flopped like a rag doll, arms and legs limp as anything. The man rolled one eye toward him, a tiny grin appearing. "Told you. Said you'd see."

Then Evan promptly shifted into a long, gold-colored cat and passed out cold.

Well, damn. Who knew the guy could do that?

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*Six Months Later*

Killian rolled over in bed, coming up hard against a fine, furry body.

Hmm.

As much as he liked Evan as a cat, he wanted to see the man's skin. Especially the skin on his ass, which would hopefully still bear the imprint of Killian's hand.

You never knew with Evan. Since he'd never shifted before they met, the man didn't have a lot of the basic shifter characteristics, like healing faster as a cat.

Or in Killian's case, a wolf.

He reached down and gave Evan's tail a very hard yank.

Evan sprang up, claws bared, missing his thigh by inches.

"Baby! Watch it!" Damn, that had been close.

Golden eyes blinked at him, the change in color from Evan's usual blue always so stunning. Then the cat melted away, leaving the man behind. "Then don't pull my tail."

"It's so pretty, though." Laughing, Killian leaned in for a kiss, feeling a little jazzed. "You ready to take out that circus today?"

Amazing, how he'd gone from living the quiet life to doing the environmental, uh, crusader thing. That sounded so much better than terrorist. Besides, he only went after folks who killed or maimed or captured his kind.

"I am. I got the neatest thing..."

"Don't tell me." The man was just crazy about his bombs and shit. Killian was way more the shift and smash type.

"But, lover! You want to share."

"No, I wanted to see your ass." Turning Evan over, Killian checked that ass out and found it lacking in

color. He gave it an experimental slap.

Evan jumped. "Gonna get me all revved up."

"Well, that's the idea, baby."

They had a lot in common. Old movies. A love of canned chicken. Evan needed to be beaten and Killian needed to do it. It worked for them.

"Do it again, huh?" Evan wagged his ass, just like a dog wagging his tail, which was funny as hell, since Evan was the damned feline. Still, it was sexy as hell, that tight ass just waiting for him, ready to be smacked and spread and fucked.

Not that he was going to do any of the above right away. Nope. He just reached out and pinched Evan's butt cheek, hard, right on the underside.

Evan yelped. "Please, baby."

Killian chuckled, leaning in close to whisper, "Only if you sit up and beg."

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