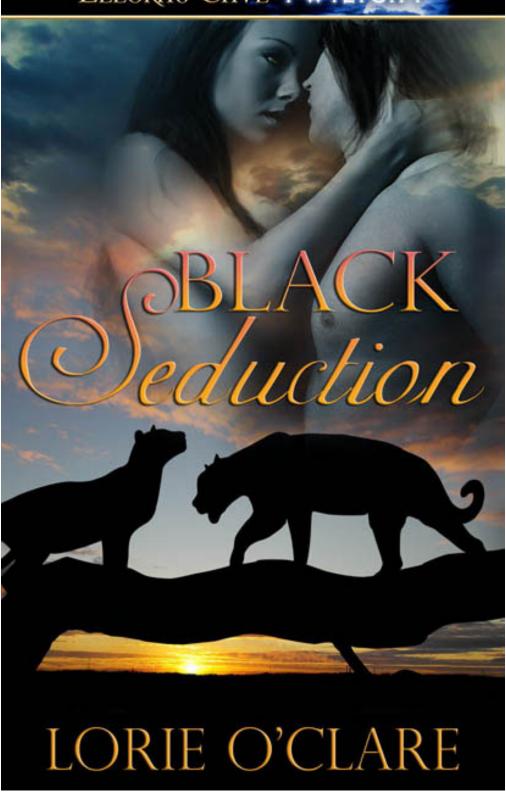
ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Black Seduction

Lorie O'Clare

Black Jag, Book One

Raul VicMoran and Angela Kalucian will not tolerate what Colony is doing to their kind, the jaguars. One of the leaders in the community is making arrangements with the humans to sell their services as mercenaries. Hired killers. To hunt, capture and eliminate someone else's prey. The level of humiliation is too strong to endure.

After fleeing Colony, Raul and his two male littermates travel through the mountains, south into the desert and finally the jungle as they work their way to Central America, where the only other known colony of jaguars live. Raul and Angela's love for each other blossoms during their trials and ordeals while traveling. Angela also comes to respect all three VicMoran males to the point where she feels protective of them. Raul knows in his heart, without any doubt, Angela is his female. No one will ever challenge him for her. But for one night, in the complete blackness of the heart of the jungle, all three VicMoran males will share Angela, truly bonding the four of them together for life.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



Black Seduction

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Edited by Mary Moran Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication May 2010

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BLACK SEDUCTION

Lorie O'Clare

To My Beloved Readers,

The first thing I must say is how grateful I am to all of you for enjoying my world of lunewulfs, Cariboo lunewulfs, Malta werewolves, leopards and owls. I'm writing this note to you because we're about to embark on a new species, one not quite the same as the others we've come to love.

For those of you who are just joining us, welcome to a world so much like our own yet different. Please join me in this world where loyalty means more than a paycheck, where tradition is valued as much as our laws are, and where bloodshed resolves a crime instead of a courtroom. This isn't some fantasy world existing in a realm we've never heard of. This is our world, our towns, our streets, our neighborhoods.

We've run with the lunewulf across Canada to Prince Charles and we watched them spread out, with some of them settling in Minnesota. We absolutely drooled over the Cariboo lunewulf when they came down out of the Canadian Rockies. We were thrilled to watch the Malta werewolf mold the elements to their liking when they fled the Malta Islands and settled their dens in Colorado. We met the leopards just outside Seattle and ran with their litters from Fountain Hills, Arizona, up to Wheeler's Point, Minnesota. And it was an incredible journey, flying with the owls in Banff.

Every species has their qualities and their flaws. We're now meeting a species, the black jaguar, whose path has been forcibly altered throughout history. Black jaguars are one of the deadliest species on earth with the power to latch on to a skull with their teeth and kill their prey with one swift clamp of the jaw. These deadly black beauties are also known for their unpredictable tempers. Many have howled that the unusual nature of the jaguar is because they are naturally unstable. Those cruel enough to voice it have accused them of inbreeding, but the jaguar's history predates all others. They are proof how those will talk when they know little of the truth.

I don't want to give all the details away before you have a chance to enter into the black jaguars' world. What I will say is, due to the complexity of their bloodline, I found it necessary to take a slight jump back in history. With every one of my shapeshifter books the time frame has always been current. If you've read from the beginning and through each book, one series after another, you'll see how the time line continues, one book after another. In order to fully understand what brought the jaguars to the predicament they are in now, we're going to jump back in time a bit.

Allow me to welcome you into the world of the black jaguar, a species dealt a tough hand but more than determined to play it out until the end.

Good hunting!

Lorie O'Clare

Chapter One

Angela Bernard stared at the small town below. From where she stood on the cliff, Telluride, Colorado, looked like a child's creation. Almost-straight roads, crisscrossing each other from one end to the other, and square houses, lined up neatly on both sides. Tiny cars moved along the roads.

What would it be like to walk among them, witness firsthand how they lived?

Several pebbles rolled down the incline besides her. She glanced up the cliff, sniffed the air then returned her attention to the rest of the view down the mountain. No one should be able to find her here. Arguing with her littermate put her in a foul mood. Some alone time, a hard run over the mountain, and possibly she would be able to sort out the nightmare threatening to explode and destroy her world. In spite of the beautiful scenery, her fight with Natasha still annoyed her.

"For once I wish you would see the big picture," her sister had snarled. "The world is closing in around us. We attack or become extinct."

"How will buying our meat already dead in a store, instead of killing it fresh, help us to grow?" Angela wouldn't buy into the insanity. "We moved from the jungle to the mountains. Now you would suggest we move from the mountains into their cities?"

"Humans will help us survive. We don't have to live among them, but we will live off them." Natasha used her condescending tone and it had made her sound even more annoying than usual. "Humans accepted werewolves. They will accept us. And we're better. Not to mention, we've got something to offer them."

"Why would you want to trust your future to half a person?" Angela got tired of trying to reason with Natasha. "If they learn about us, they will panic. You know as well as I do they've tried burning out the werewolves, ostracizing them. Better or

worse, nothing we offer them will make them trust us. They will try killing us as soon as they know we exist."

"It depends on how they learn about us." Remembering how cold Natasha's tone had sounded still chilled Angela's blood.

Angela shook her head, wishing she would quit thinking about how insane her littermate was becoming. Moving to a squatting position, she inched nearer the edge of the large boulder where she perched. Sometimes she hated her littermate. Natasha might be older by a few minutes, but somewhere along the line she lost her ability to smell out the reality of a situation. Angela got so damn tired of Natasha smelling so angry. Moving to the Rockies from Central America was supposed to make their litters stronger. Possibly losing their parents when they were teenagers and relying on each other to grow up put a dent in Natasha's rational thought patterns.

As if they would be able to associate with humans. They were *panthera*, apex predators—black jaguars. They were hunters; powerful, deadly creatures who craved the attack and thrived on the kill.

Humans wouldn't understand them.

In another ten minutes or so the morning sun would be high enough to warm the rocks under her feet. It was an ideal spot for sunbathing. Angela stared at the bustling little town below her. It was a human community. They were a species who relied on others, on jobs instead of the land to support themselves. They bought food instead of hunting it. And they relied on the best talker, instead of the best fighter, to lead their people. They were a species who were half of a whole. Humans.

Another pebble rolled furiously down the incline next to her. Several more followed. Angela looked up and spotted Raul VicMoran lifting himself onto a boulder several yards from her. What was he doing on this side of the mountain?

She went to her hands and knees, pressing her palms against the cold, smooth rock underneath her. Her nipples puckered in the cold morning air and she exhaled, watching her breath form a cloud in front of her face. Colony, where all jaguar litters

lived, was buried on the other side of the mountain. As many times as she came here, escaping her littermate's tirades, no one had ever followed her. But today, when too many outraged emotions already charged her blood, she didn't need to be tempted by one of the best-looking males in Colony. She was pissed off, disturbed by her littermate's sudden craving to embrace humans, and raw inside from fighting with her. The simplest of confrontations right now and she would attack.

And if she tried attacking Raul, she would touch all that muscle. He would take her on willingly. But fighting him might take her places she shouldn't go right now. No—wouldn't go right now. The last thing she needed was some male interfering with her life.

Although fucking him sure would release the charged emotions ripping her insides apart.

If the breeze changed directions just a bit, he would smell her. He would pick up on her anger, her confusion and other emotions. And it was those other emotions that he would focus on.

Lately, Raul wasn't taking the words "go away" very well. Worse yet, lately she wasn't minding his advances. Now wasn't the time to cloud her mind with sexual cravings. Too much weird shit was going on.

She chewed her lower lip. The longer she watched him, the more her feelings for her sister dissipated. Angela had run to this part of the mountain to get their fight out of her head, but not to replace it with thoughts of Raul's naked body pressed against hers, his hands on her, his mouth... Crap!

Her scent changed and she cringed. Convincing Raul she wasn't interested would be impossible when he smelled lust on her. But damn it, Raul didn't look like he used to. And they weren't cubs anymore.

Raul put one leg forward, searching the mountainside. Roped muscle pressed against his jeans. His black hair lifted from the back of his neck with the breeze, and she focused on his firm jawline as he sniffed the air.

Angela thanked the breeze for moving in her favor. She stretched out on the boulder, shifting her attention to the town at the base of the mountain. Her sister didn't know what she was talking about. Their life was perfect at Colony, buried in the Rocky Mountains, with humans not interfering or interacting in any way. It would be best to keep it that way.

Thinking about Natasha helped curb the sudden arousal that quickened inside her. Raul's scent drifted toward her and she looked his direction then leapt to her hands and knees as she stared into dark green, probing eyes.

"Do you always lie so unprotected?"

"I'm very well-protected," she purred, proud of her relaxed-sounding tone, and brushed long strands of black hair over her shoulder.

"Really." Raul leapt from one boulder to another, creating tiny avalanches as pebbles chased each other farther down the mountain. "And who protects you, my little cat?"

"I protect myself," she hissed, moving slowly to her feet. "And last I checked, I'm not your little cat."

"I might decide to change that." He leapt again, landing on the same boulder where she stood.

Angela stepped backward and felt the edge of the rock under her foot. She balanced herself quickly, itching to extend her claws and slap him for being so damn cocky. The corner of his mouth tilted and his lips parted, revealing slightly sharper teeth than they were a moment before.

"Son of a bitch." She shifted her weight on the edge of the boulder. It was a long drop to the next ledge down the mountain, one she didn't plan on experiencing. "No female will ever be yours if you try killing them instead of seducing them."

"I thought you could protect yourself," he said, his voice growing deeper. "Or maybe you like living life dangerously."

"I like living." She pushed her hands against his chest, but she might as well try moving the mountain.

"You shall live and be protected." Raul grabbed her wrists.

Raul flirted with all the single females in Colony. Most didn't fight him. Or, at least according to the howlings, he got a piece of tail whenever he wanted it. Angela had no intention of being another scratch on his bedpost. If he thought she'd teeter on the side of a boulder while he copped a feel, he could just go growl around some other female.

"I think you underestimate me, Raul," she grumbled, lowering her voice just enough to make her point.

At the same time, she jerked free of him, hating being at a disadvantage. The edge of a boulder on the side of a mountain was most definitely a disadvantage. She twisted her hands, barely managing to slip out of his grasp before leaping around him. Breathing in his scent, laced with arousal, fogged her brain momentarily.

She hit the ground, landing in the shadow from the large cliff above it. The sudden cooler air didn't ease the heat still tingling in her hands after touching him or the fire she couldn't seem to put out, smoldering deep inside. Damn him for sniffing her out and creating sensations inside her she didn't have time for right now.

"I'm not going to just fuck you," she hissed, bracing herself and preparing for him to leap. She didn't have time to turn around though.

Raul landed right behind her. Strong hands gripped her waist and suddenly the chill from the shady area disappeared. The warmth inside her swelled and spread, growing hotter until she trembled as his muscular body pressed against her backside.

"Who said anything about just fucking?"

What kind of feline trembled from heat? No male turned her on like this. Raul might be good-looking and a distraction at times when she watched him with his littermates, but Angela wasn't one of those stupid females who fell for a line and a smoldering look. If Raul didn't already know that, he was about to find out.

"I did. I'm not some feline who will lift her tail and then not care when you pounce on the next bitch."

He pressed against her backside, hard and packed with bulging muscle. His strong arms wrapped around her, not too tight, but with determination that showed he didn't plan to let her go easily. "I already know this."

"Good. I'm glad we understand each other." She tried moving out of his arms, but he didn't budge. And his scent—damn. He drowned her with his rich smell of arousal.

"Why are you out here alone, Angela?" he whispered against her ear.

She grabbed his hands that were clasped against her waist. Prying him loose didn't appear an option.

"Why are you?" she countered, unwilling to disclose that she came here often.

"I followed you." He didn't hesitate in admitting it. "I wanted to be alone with you."

"If you think for one moment that I'll put out..."

He flipped her around so quickly that her feet left the ground. His face was inches from hers when she looked into his eyes. "I know you will," he said in a slow, gruff drawl, his eyes burning with fire that fed the flames inside her. "I can smell how much you want me, how curious you are about me. Times are changing, and I'm acting now. You, my little cat, won't be hunted by any other male."

"You've got it part right." She relaxed in his arms and even rested her hands over his forearms. Roped muscle twitched against her fingers, a reminder of how easily he could overpower her. "I won't be hunted."

The corner of his mouth twitched, and the focus of his attention shifted from her eyes to her mouth. That small window of distraction would be all the opportunity she would have. Being hunted didn't appeal to her, but that didn't mean she didn't know how to attack.

Digging her nails into his arms, she felt her fingertips pierce his flesh. His expression changed, but she didn't take time to dwell on what emotion surfaced. Instead she used the strongest muscles in her body, her legs, and jumped, turning at the same time. She made it up to the next ledge, scurrying over rocks that tilted under the sudden impact.

"If you don't want to be hunted, then don't run." Raul pounced on top of her, forcing both of them to crash onto a slanted rock and then tumble to a rocky path covered with small pebbles and bristly plants.

Angela let out a very unladylike grunt. "Get the hell off me," she hissed, more aware of the many places his body pressed against hers than she was of the tiny pebbles underneath her, threatening to puncture her skin.

Raul wrapped his arms around her then lifted both of them to their feet. "If you want me to hunt you, I will, my little cat."

"I'm not your little cat."

He grabbed her hair, pulling it and forcing her head back. There wasn't time to focus on his face before his mouth claimed hers. His fingers twisted in her hair, tugging, pinching. His aggression turned her on and stole her breath. His lips moved over hers, every inch of him demanding she submit and comply with his nonverbal request.

She opened her mouth, ready to turn her head and cry out what she thought of his demands. No one would ever make her submit. His hand clamped down harder behind her head, and his other hand grabbed her arm, holding her firmly while he dipped deep into her mouth.

He tasted like fresh meat, with a mixture of something sweet, possibly fruit. Her insides fluttered then tightened while prickles of desire washed over her. He was hot, aggressive and strong. Qualities she already knew existed in Raul, but never tasted. And his scent, fresh and alive, smelling of the outdoors with something more carnal and dark laced through it. Her insides quickened then ignited in flame.

Angela tried pulling away, this time simply to catch her breath, but he pulled her even closer, smashing her breasts against his steel chest. She growled, warning him she would take only so much and then he would regret it. He growled back, tilting her head farther and impaling her mouth. She thought to move her hands, once again slice his flesh with her claws to show him that no one manipulated her. Before she could act, his hand brushed past her arm and cupped her breast.

God. He was so damn good at this. Need swelled inside her, and her pussy throbbed. An ache blossomed inside her and then grew so quickly she couldn't catch her breath.

Damn him.

"Raul," she whispered when his mouth moved from hers and traced a wet path to her neck. "Why now?" It was so damn hard to think when he nipped at her collarbone then placed gentle kisses over it. "What do you mean 'times are changing'?" She hated how she panted while trying to speak.

He moved her shirt, exposed her breast, and then sucked it hard into his mouth.

Angela bucked, feeling the piercing sensation of electricity shoot from her nipple straight to her pussy.

"Why were you out here?" he asked, and his teeth scraped over her nipple.

Her brain wasn't working right. He moved from one breast to the next.

"I came out here to think." Her breasts swelled, and she fought the urge to rub against him. "I thought I would be alone over here."

"No one else will bother you." His confidence should be annoying. But something about his soft growl, the firmness in his words, offered reassurance of a promise that wouldn't be broken.

"You intentionally followed me over the mountain."

"Yup." He created space between them, leaving her nipples cold and wet, and reached for the button on her jeans. "You and your littermate had a fight and I guessed you might be upset."

She and Natasha were always fighting. "What makes today different from another day?"

"Today you fought over the future of our litters."

How did he know about her fight with her littermate? Raul unsnapped and unzipped her jeans before she had time to react. Once again he wrapped a powerful arm around her and pressed his palm against her flesh. He slid his hand inside her jeans and curled his fingers into her moist heat. Angela staggered, the pressure inside her already so close to the boiling point his touch was more than she could handle. His grip tightened enough to keep her pressed against him. She pressed her hand over his chest, measuring the steady beat of his heart against hers while she warred with emotions and physical reactions to his touch.

She used her other hand to grab his wrist, although her fingers barely wrapped around the thickness of it. Everything about him was oversized, even the length of his cock, which was like a steel beam pressing against his jeans, and growing more and more obvious as it throbbed against her hips.

"If you want to talk about what's happening with Colony right now, then fine." It was getting harder and harder to keep her thoughts straight.

"And if I want to do something else with you?" he growled, his black hair falling around his face when he lowered his head and nipped at her neck.

Crap. She wouldn't let him weaken her resolve. "It's got to be something we both want, Raul."

He thrust deep inside her, impaling her with his finger. Angela cried out, unable to do more than dig into his shoulders and hold on.

"You're soaking wet. Smell how desperately you want me. Your scent was obvious before now, Angela."

"I don't want a one-time thing." Not now. Not when her entire world was about to blow up in her face.

"You're not getting one. That's why I'm here."

What did that mean? She moistened her lips and tried to word her response in her head before saying anything. But his fingers brushed against each other inside her, stroking her pussy walls, soothing and torturing her at the same time.

"Your fight with Natasha stirred up Colony." Raul slid his hand out of her jeans.

"Litters are taking sides. It's time for action."

He left her feeling empty, soaked and frustrated. She almost asked him to continue, not to stop. Angela ran her fingers through her hair, blowing out a puff of air, and stared out toward the mountain range, and possibly for the first time not seeing them.

"Which side are you on?" she asked, desperately trying to dampen the craving burning inside her with thoughts of Colony.

"The same side as you. Jaguars don't belong mingling around humans. I'm hearing Natasha and her followers want to make money off them."

"We can't coexist with them." She turned in time to see him drop his jeans and pull off his shirt.

"You and I aren't going to mix with humans. It's wrong, and I won't have it."

Chapter Two

The harsh aggression as he hissed his last words brought her pause. Angela stared into his intense green eyes, fighting the urge to lower her gaze as she tried to digest what he just said.

Raul grabbed her and pulled her to him. She didn't need to look down now. Every inch of his gorgeous body pressed against her—hard, throbbing, so alive and perfect he rendered her speechless.

"I believe we should always honor who we are, the gifts we've been given, and use them to make us stronger, not tarnish our reputations." He wrapped his arms around her and lifted her off the ground. "Introducing ourselves to humans, like the werewolves did, would cause fear and inevitably some would die—on both sides."

"I don't want to run from the mountains like we ran from the rain forests," she said, her voice husky. This was a serious conversation, and one damn hard to focus on when he held her so close against his naked body.

"We won't live where there's no honor. Wherever we go, you're going to be with me."

"I'm not going anywhere," she said stubbornly, even as he lowered her onto a flat, cool rock then backed away from her.

The way he looked at her, his green eyes growing dark and smoldering as he grabbed her foot and pulled off her shoe, was enough to show her he didn't hear what she said.

"And if I did, who's to say I would go with you?"

He grabbed her other foot even when she tried moving it. "Like I said earlier, that's why I'm here." He didn't elaborate but came over her, reaching for the waist of her jeans and lifting her as he tugged them over her hips.

"Why are you here?"

"To make you mine." He pulled her jeans off her.

Angela tried to grab his hands, his wrists, anything to slow his actions, but his determined expression matched his quick actions. A growl ripped from her throat as the urge to fight, attack, make him earn what he seemed so convinced he could take, raged through her with as much intensity as her desire to be taken did.

"You don't feel the need to ask?" she hissed, her voice almost as rough as her growl when sparks shot down her spine. Anger and intense desire made for a really dangerous mix.

Raul managed to get both of her hands behind her back and pinned her wrists with a solid grip. His free hand stretched over her neck. Gently, too damn gently, his fingertips brushed over her suddenly incredibly sensitive flesh.

"You're the female I want running by my side," he rumbled, his face close enough to hers she smelled his morning kill on his breath.

Inhaling it, tasting his carnal side while fingers brushed over the erratic beat of her pulse in her neck, she arched into him, willing herself to have the strength to flip him off her.

"Is that because you've been with every other female in Colony and found them lacking?" She mocked him, staring defiantly into eyes that only smoldered more from her words.

"They are lacking. But no, I haven't fucked them." Instead of kissing her mouth, he moved lower and placed his lips directly over the spot where her pulse raced feverishly. "None of them would fight like you are. My mate will have honor, a craving for life so strong and powerful she would kill or die trying to ensure her life and that of her litter."

"Your mate?" Those two words stabbed her like a sharp knife, fine-tuned and skilled enough to slice into her heart. Her insides swelled, pain and pleasure continually attacking her at the same time. "You give me as much attention as you do all the other

females. My mate would also have honor, and love me so much that in his world there would be no other females."

His mouth moved lower and he used his teeth to grab her shirt. He yanked it over her breasts, pounced on one of her nipples, and released a satisfied growl. Fiery electric currents raced from her breast straight to her pussy.

Angela howled, deciding if he took her like this, he would declare them mated. Raul needed to prove a lot more about himself before she'd consider mating with him. Showing how much passion could ignite between them didn't mean he would be a good mate.

It was getting more difficult to remain focused. But she had to give it all she could. Putting some muscle into it, Angela almost managed to throw him off her. Her aggression obviously turned him on as much as it did her. Damn him. Damn her. This wasn't how she imagined it would be.

"Why are you fighting me, my little cat?" he grumbled, and moved to her other breast. "Who is the male you'd rather mate with?"

"I didn't say there was another male."

Raul raised his eyes, causing his green orbs to flash through his long, thick, black lashes as he stared at her. "So of all the males you've fucked in the past, none of them appeal to you?"

There was no way he'd turn this around, try to make her believe she was more promiscuous than he was. His teeth scraped over her nipple, charging her insides with a need that swelled so quickly it took a minute for his words to register.

"My past has nothing to do with this. You chase after every piece of tail in Colony. I'm not sniffing after any male."

Raul pulled her off the rock with enough force she stumbled into him. He freed her hands but used enough force her body slammed into his chest. She pressed her palms against his shoulders to brace herself. His face was inches from hers when he held her gaze captive.

Before she was able to react to this new position, he grabbed her bare ass and spread her legs. "No male would ever run from you."

Raul lowered her again, coming down on top of her, this time with her legs on either side of him.

"The difference here is that when I've been pursued, I've run and managed to get away from whoever chased me." When her back hit the rock again, she pushed against his shoulders, managing to scoot into a sitting position before he stopped her. Even then, his body was too close to move her legs. "Do you think I'm going to willingly give you what I've refused to give other males?"

"Yes," he whispered, not hesitating for a moment. "I do."

His cock was right there, swollen, hard and large. The tip of it brushed against her pussy, feeling smooth and perfect. Damn him again. If she could just think about something else, anything other than how wonderful he smelled, how delicious his muscular body looked, anything—she would be able to gather the strength to fight him.

"And my little cat," he whispered, his lips brushing against hers. "You're definitely not a virgin, so don't tell me you've refused every male. You're so hot for me right now I smell your lust."

"How dare you!" It wasn't any of his damn business how many males she slept with. Not that there were all that many. The males in Colony didn't do much for her, and life was too hectic to consider mating. "We're discussing your list of conquests, not..."

He not only cut off her words when his lips seared over hers, but her thoughts melted into a confused state of fogged lust when his tongue found hers. Raul kissed with fiery passion, making her want to curl her toes, arch her back off the rock and purr as anticipation rolled over her like molten lava.

She couldn't breathe, sure as hell couldn't think, and if she moved just a little, his cock would slide right inside her. Moisture creamed against her shaved pussy lips, preparing her.

Raul ripped his mouth from hers, still aggressive yet unbelievably gentle when his free hand cupped her cheek. Her ripe scent mixed with his, filled her lungs as she pulled in a deep breath.

"Better than perfect," he mumbled, and took his time kissing her neck before adjusting himself over her. His cock pressed against her soaked entrance and he raised his head, searching her face.

Soft-spoken words wouldn't make her submit. "It might be," she purred, and then prayed he was relaxed enough or focused on diving deep inside her.

She shoved him off her, feeling her spine spark with jolts of energy that urged her to let her more primal side surface. The sensation warred with swelling need, ransacking every inch of her. Raul was easily the best male out there. But damn it, he wouldn't just pounce on top of her and decide it was her turn. No matter how turned on she was, how desperately she wanted him, submitting would only make Raul cockier. The male needed some serious training.

"But I choose who fucks me," she hissed as her arms and legs wobbled slightly.

The change was so close, too close. But allowing it to happen would give him even more power. As jaguars, a more primal law ruled. Remaining human at least allowed her to reason, not that she was sure Raul was in the mood for reasoning.

She made it to a squatting position then froze as she stared at his engorged cock. It stood erect, long and thick. Its round head looked smooth, velvety, with the smallest droplet of pre-come at the tip. She stared at it longer than she should have, noting how it looked like a small jewel. And his cock, ripe for the taking.

Raul leapt at her, coming at her with enough force that both of them slipped toward the edge of the rock. He grabbed her, twisting at the same time so his body pressed into the tiny pebbles underneath them instead of hers.

"Colony won't survive the devastation and humiliation your littermate and those supporting her are about to put it through." Raul held her against his chest, his cock still as hard as the rocks around them and throbbing to distraction between them. "My

litter won't be disgraced by their actions. I don't want you pulled into it either. We're leaving and I want you running by my side. You can do it as a single female or as my mate."

She stared into his eyes, captivated by the tiny, bright-gold flecks that seemed to spark like fireworks around his pupils. They dilated as she watched them, but he didn't move, simply held her while his words slowly took meaning.

"This isn't how I imagined a male asking me to mate with him," she confessed, her stomach twisting not only from the realization of what he said, but the truth behind them.

He moved her body, adjusting it just enough that his cock slid easily inside her. In spite of her determination to fight him, she gasped as he filled her.

Raul moved to a sitting position and glided deeper inside her. "I've watched you run to this side of the mountain for so long," he said, his voice so husky it sounded like a dangerous growl. He gripped her hips, lifting her just a bit before thrusting forward.

"Fuck!" she howled, and was pretty sure the ferocious growl came from him. "Why?" She fought for understanding, which was hard as hell to do when he damn near split her in two. "I never sniffed you out."

"Nope." Leaning forward, his arms cradled her back as he lowered her to the rock she'd just leapt from. Once again he was on top of her, and this time he lifted her legs, holding her ankles and standing over her while he turned the heat between them into smoldering flames. "No other male was going to get close to you."

It bugged her how he successfully followed her and she'd never sniffed him out. No one knew she came out here. At the same time, a warped sensation added to the heat in knowing he kept an eye on her.

His cock stroked her insides, creating a pressure that threatened to explode beyond her control. She would confront him, let him know what she thought of his methods, and make it clear nothing happened without her consent. But as he built the momentum, thrust harder, it was all she could do to hold on. And even then, as she slipped over the edge and came harder than she had in a long time, she felt her world tilting. Even without dwelling on it, she knew when everything balanced out again, life as she knew it would never be the same. Not after this. Nothing compared to this.

A low, dangerous rumble started deep inside him. Angela watched his jaw harden and his teeth grow until they pressed against his lower lip and slightly altered the shape of his jawbone. His eyes glowed like rare gems as he stared down at her. And the rumble turned into a growl. Every muscle in his chest took shape and protruded with a glorious magnificence that stole her breath.

He came hard, filling her and marking her. His cock throbbed inside her, pulsing and feeding her while she clamped down on him and milked every drop he offered. Her body quivered. Raw energy took birth, filling, consuming her until she wanted to laugh, cry, strike out and run as fast as she could.

"This isn't a one-time thing," he rumbled, his voice shaky.

She opened her mouth to answer, but what would she say? That he moved in on her too fast? That sounded rather shallow after fucking him.

No way could she return to Colony without everyone questioning if she was now mated or simply turning against tradition and becoming another easy female, willing to put out without demanding a commitment. With the few males in her past, none of them had ever come inside her. She wouldn't allow it. She was a modern female, but she would never turn her back on what made her kind stronger, more powerful than any other species on earth.

Jaguars possessed honor.

Angela despised jaguars who turned their heads from the ways of their kind and disrespected their traditions. And she hated even more being put on the spot and forced to make a decision without being given time to weigh both sides.

He never even asked her if she wanted to be his mate. Now what the hell should she do?

Chapter Three

Raul moved slowly down the mountain, watching Angela as she hurried in front of him. Her emotions warred inside her, and he'd give her space to deal with them. If there were another way, a better way, no female deserved it more than Angela.

But after what he'd learned, the despicable plans a handful of jaguars were carrying out, it was time to leave. He wouldn't be dishonored by their actions. And contacting humans, becoming mercenaries, killing for profit instead of caring about a victory, was just about the most humiliating act there was.

He and his littermates would take care of Angela. She was the only one in Colony besides his brothers who mattered to him.

"Angela." They reached the bottom of the mountain, with the sun now rising enough to make her long black hair sparkle.

"What?" She turned, her cheeks flushed from all the emotions he smelled on her.

"You're going back to my place. We'll discuss our plans once we get there."

She licked her lips, lowering her gaze to his chest before tilting her head defiantly. "Discuss things, huh?"

He cleared the distance between them and pulled her head back by her hair. "Unless you'd rather do something else," he growled.

Her eyes widened. He watched her teeth sharpen slightly while her green eyes smoldered as her temper flared.

"I'd rather you learn I can make my own decisions." She struggled in his arms until he let her go then leapt to the next boulder before racing away from him.

Raul followed her, but not fast enough to catch her. Not that he couldn't. He let her run back to Colony. Now to inform his littermates.

Ran and Rafe didn't like what they were sniffing out any better than he did.

Raul straddled his bike, which he'd left at the base of the mountain, and drove into Colony slowly, noting who was at their den and who visited them. The litters were forming sides, creating alliances that didn't smell good. Everything they knew, the lives they took for granted and the home they'd always enjoyed would end soon. No matter his efforts or how many litters sided with him, the damage was done.

Knowledge of jaguars would alter the world completely, and they would suffer the most.

Raul pulled into his driveway, more than a little put out when no one was there. His bike rumbled to a stop and he climbed off, grabbed his phone and stalked to his front door. Cursing his big fingers while pushing the buttons on his phone—God, he hated cell phones—he placed his call.

"Rafe," he snapped the moment his younger brother answered. "Where are you?"

Laughter and music flooded the phone line. "What's wrong, Raul?" Rafe laughed. "Some female declaw you?" Shrill laughter followed. Rafe was preying on the local females.

Raul scowled. "Not even close. Find Ran and the two of you get home." He glared at his empty den, moved into the kitchen and grabbed a cold bottle of beer out of the refrigerator. "Angela is on her way here too."

"Really? She's here."

"What?" He gripped the bottle, feeling its cold sweat drip down his fingers. "Get her and bring her here."

She tried to show her independence by not listening to him. She would soon learn he would never tell her to do something that would hurt her.

"What's going on?" Rafe moved somewhere there was less noise, his tone growing more serious. "The litters are all talking about new opportunities that will put Colony on the map and make us all very rich."

Raul growled out loud. Snapping the lid to the beer off with his fingers, he brought the moist bottle to his lips and gulped greedily then exhaled his aggravation. Angela's scent covered him and he took a slow, deep breath, filling his insides with her rich aroma.

"Grab Angela and your brother and return to the den now. We need a litter meeting."

"Angela is suddenly part of our litter?" Rafe sounded serious.

Raul didn't answer him. She would be, but an announcement right now would get his younger brother too excited. They all needed to think clearly.

"Bring our litter home." He ended the call, knowing his younger littermate wouldn't disobey him, unlike feisty little cats with sultry curves and a defiant attitude he almost hated putting on a leash.

Raul took another long drink of his beer and leaned against the counter. Rafe's words lingered in his mind as he stared into his empty living room. *Part of our litter*. Years of happiness hung in the air around him. The smells of his brothers, their good and not-so-good times, all happened in these rooms. They weren't the perfect litter. Growing up without a mother and losing their father ten years ago almost to the day, times weren't always easy. But Raul made sure his younger littermates always knew what the security of a litter meant. And the three of them lived good lives.

Whatever it took, they would fight to keep their litter strong. Colony would do what it would. Raul knew fighting to control all the litters was an impossible task. They were divided. He'd mulled the possibilities of killing Natasha. Getting her alone wouldn't have been too impossible a task. But even if she died, her ideas were like a virus, and the infection already spread so that it stank with its greed and power-hungry stench. Colony was no longer an honorable home. Their litter would return to the rain forest. And yes, Angela would be part of their move.

The front door opened and closed with a bang.

"Colony has gone insane!" Rafe looked ready for a good fight, and might have found one if he hadn't been ordered home.

"Communication with humans has already started," Ran announced as he headed to the refrigerator. Leave it to Ran to know the inside happenings on matters. "There's talk of a few jaguars leaving Colony to handle some special projects we've supposedly arranged with the humans."

Rafe stood by Angela, who looked around their den, taking everything in. He touched her shoulder and she glanced his way, remaining relaxed and indifferent to his hand on her. "Ran, get our guest a beer," Rafe ordered.

"Thank you." She smiled at Rafe and sauntered through the living room as if she'd done it a hundred times before. "Most won't talk to me," she said when she offered Ran the same soft smile as she accepted the beer. "I did learn the Hunter litter plans to leave Colony."

"What were you doing talking to the Hunter litter?" Raul demanded.

Angela finally acknowledged him, but not with the same charm she bestowed on his littermates. Her expression sobered as she met his gaze. That's when he saw her hesitation and concern swimming in her suddenly troubled expression. He didn't hesitate in brushing his fingers through her long, thick hair, the need to comfort and protect her hitting him harder than he'd ever thought possible.

"These are my kind too," she whispered. "We aren't like the lunewulfs with packs scattered all over this country and world. We are here and in the rain forest. But now we're breaking apart. I have a right to know where the other jaguars plan to go."

Someone shouted outside and Raul pulled her against him even as he looked over her head toward the windows. A fierce roar followed and Angela jumped.

"We're going to fucking kill each other before anyone can go anywhere," Rafe snarled.

Raul was at the door first, although Rafe and Ran quickly approached from either side. The shouting escalated and as he stepped outside, Raul fought the urge to insist

everyone else stay inside. All he managed to do was keep Angela by his side when she would have pushed her way around them and run into the street. As it was, Rafe pranced ahead of them, almost dancing, as if he couldn't wait to take the first punch.

"You can't do this!" Maria Kalusian ran out of her home across the road, her black hair looking more streaked with gray than usual. "This will destroy our litter!"

"Enough!" Miguel Kalusian ignored Raul, who approached quietly, and instead turned his attention on his mate. Their oldest son Nik glanced warily at Raul and his litter before turning his attention to his parents when his sire continued speaking. "There are only so many ways to explain this to you, Maria. I'm not destroying our litter but making it stronger. You'll thank me for this."

"I don't thank corpses," she spat, spinning around and marching into their home. She slammed the door loud enough for the litters surrounding them to easily hear.

Raul noticed a few others stood outside now, watching with curiosity and hesitation. No one would invade a private dispute in a litter, but all would cautiously watch and wait for a fight.

Miguel grew up with Raul's father, and the older jaguar turned back to his task of organizing items in the back of their SUV.

"Take your litter home," he ordered when Raul crossed the street.

"What are you doing?" Raul wasn't a cub anymore. His respect for Miguel hadn't faltered, but he took orders from no one.

The older jaguar squinted at Raul, glancing at Rafe and Ran, and finally settling his gaze on Angela. "Why is she with your litter?" he growled.

"Tell me what you're doing and I'll tell you why she's here." Raul kept his tone deep, quiet, more than aware of other litters lingering outside their dens, sniffing the air and aching to learn the meaning of the outburst they just witnessed.

Miguel glanced at his oldest son and Nik straightened, a silent show of respect. Whatever action Miguel decided, Nik had his tail.

"I don't care about the female that much." Miguel grunted, finishing his task and closing the back hatch to the vehicle.

He turned, his stout chest puffed out and arms flexed while he fisted and unfisted his hands. Miguel was a large jaguar, still deadly in his prime, but never one Raul ever crossed paths with in the past. Something in his scent was off kilter today though.

"You're leaving your litter then?" Raul challenged, barely giving Nik a glance when the male, who was about his age, stiffened and took a step toward him. Raul kept his attention on Miguel, who stuck his arm out to stop his son. "If you'd asked, you know all of us would willingly watch over your mate and protect what is yours in your absence," Raul added, Rafe and Ran grunting their agreement behind him.

Miguel pierced Raul with hard green eyes, eyes that over the years held a fatherly look about them, but now glazed over with something that didn't set right. Something cold, determined, almost obsessed.

"I won't be gone long." Miguel searched Raul's face and inhaled sharply, more than likely trying to learn Raul's opinion of him without asking. Finally, the older jaguar exhaled and ran his fingers through thick, black hair. "There are a few of us selected," Miguel began, lowering his voice in a conspiratorial tone. "Males who are still in their prime, still quick and capable of killing with a moment's notice." He looked at his son pointedly. "No younger males were chosen, for obvious reasons. The mission is dangerous, although I'm confident we'll return soon, but we won't risk our young."

Nik growled, but with a wave of his father's hand silenced. "Our mission will change the view of jaguars throughout the world," Miguel suddenly boasted. "And all of us will know wealth like we've never dreamed of having."

Raul fought the sudden craving to leap on the older jaguar, to attack quickly and prevent what was about to happen. How dare Natasha and her inept followers launch her idea without consulting the rest of them! And he didn't misunderstand the meaning behind Miguel's boasting. He was heading out on a trial run, an experiment to see if jaguars and humans could work together. Except the jaguars would be doing the

humans' dirty work, cleaning up messes and eliminating those the humans decided no longer needed to live. There was no honor in this kind of killing, not when they attacked under orders. Not when it wasn't their fight!

"We'll keep a protective eye on your den while you're gone," he said quietly, forcing calmness into his tone.

He turned, ignoring the wary look Miguel gave him before nodding. The older jaguar expected him to argue or question him further. If anyone wanted to know where his litter's loyalties lay, all they needed to do was ask him. There wasn't any honor in fighting with a male or any jaguar too sick in the head to not know when they'd lost their integrity.

"Why the hell did you do that?" Rafe slammed his fist against the closed front door the moment they were all back inside their den.

Raul turned slowly, smelling everyone's anger, but even so, taking his time to study each of their faces. Rafe glared at him, and Ran's expression was pinched as he scowled at Raul. Angela crossed her arms over her chest and stared at the floor, her face shrouded with her long hair. He walked over to her and she looked up, her eyes haunted. Raul brushed her hair behind her shoulder, watched her lick her lips and suck in a breath. His scent smelled so good on her, but at the moment, it was tweaked with her spicy anger.

Miguel had pissed all of them off. Good.

"Showing our claws right now won't stop this from happening," he stated, taking his time, pulling his gaze from Angela to look at his littermates. "Natasha has supporters and contacts outside of Colony. Before we attack, we always learn how large our enemy is."

The silence following was charged with energy thick with aggressive anger. He looked down at Angela and she stared up at him, concern clouding her pretty eyes.

"Our enemy is large," she whispered loud enough he sensed his littermates' tension grow. "Natasha plots better than she attacks. And she always prefers someone else baring their claws instead of her."

"Sounds like you don't have a high opinion of your littermate." Rafe's tone wasn't condemning.

Angela straightened, shifting to pierce him with a defiant expression. "There was a time when I'd kill to protect Natasha," she told him. "And I would today, if she would see her mistake. No one in Colony would ever curl their lip at her, I'd see to it, but only if she stops this."

"I've heard jaguars are agreeing to sell themselves to humans." The disgust in Ran's tone was obvious. Several small strands of hair fell loose from the short ponytail he always wore at the base of his neck, and his sharp features looked even harder when Raul turned to look at him. Ran's attention was on Angela though. "What do you know about what is going on?"

"About the same as you, it sounds," she admitted easily. "I need to find out though. If there's any chance of preventing those males from heading out of here, I'm going to make it happen."

Before Raul swung around to face her, Angela moved to the door.

"No," Raul ordered. "Attacking and killing our own kind won't stop this. Humans already know about us, plans are already made. If we attack and stop them from leaving Colony, humans will then see us as unstable. They will attack."

"Then humans will die," Rafe snarled.

Raul glared at his littermate. "What kind of fight would that be? Would we attack another species simply because they don't have honor? Their downfalls aren't our problem." He glanced over at Ran as he tried to figure out the best way to handle things. "This isn't our battle, not anymore." He sliced his hand through the air, finalizing the argument. "We're leaving tonight, before the disgrace clouds Colony with its disgusting stench."

"Where are you going?" Angela stiffened, the pointed look she bestowed on him earlier on the mountain tightening her expression once again. The look in her eyes stated clearly she wasn't budging unless she decided she wanted to.

"The rain forest," he said quietly, unwilling to argue with her in front of his littermates.

He didn't have to.

"What do you mean, where are we going?" Rafe demanded, moving to stand in front of her. "My littermate reeks of your scent."

His hostile energy wouldn't fall out on Angela though. Raul stiffened, ready to toss his brother aside if he got too mouthy. Rafe ignored him, putting his fists on his waist and giving Angela an interested once-over.

"Raul put his mark on you." Rafe lowered his voice, looking deadly as hell. "I never thought you were like some of the other females."

"Rafe, leave her alone." Ran stepped in and stood next to Angela. "It's bad enough for her with her litter torn apart. We have each other."

Angela put her hand on Ran's arm, and Raul swore Rafe growled under his breath. It didn't surprise him his littermates would already be protective of her. Their scents were wrapped around each other, strong and fresh, bonding them together. They would attack anyone to protect her, just as they would to protect him. But that they would challenge each other for her honor. It filled him with pride. This was what a litter was all about.

"Angela has us too," Raul informed them, garnering curious looks from his brothers and a wary one from Angela. He reached for her, pulling her against him and securing his hands at the small of her back. "We need to know who is leaving and who is staying." He glanced down into those deep, green eyes and his cock stirred. "Besides the Hunters," he added.

"I'll go sniff around," Rafe said quickly, grabbing the beer Ran had opened and downing it. "I need to burn some energy anyway or I won't stop running when we hit Central America."

Raul didn't say anything when his littermate bounded out the door. It was best to let Rafe work off his aggressive nature in his own way. Rafe wouldn't turn stupid, at least he hadn't shown that cub side of him for a few years now.

"Maybe I'll trail him," Ran suggested, focusing on the back of Angela's head and then offering her an easy smile when she twisted against Raul and looked at him. "Rafe is hot-headed and quick to bare his claws, but he's got a big heart. Usually his growl is fiercer than his bite."

"That's how it is with most males," Angela purred.

Ran actually blushed and blessed her with a cub-like grin. Angela shifted again and her ass brushed against Raul's cock. It was rock-hard in the next second and he was damn glad she stood in front of him. She also stilled quickly.

"Not all," Raul whispered, lowering his head and pressing his mouth against her thick, smooth hair.

Ran chuckled. He reached out and touched Angela's cheek. "His growl is worse than his bite too," he told her, and gave Raul an impish grin.

"Like I said," Angela said smoothly, too confidently.

His littermates weren't helping a bit in taming her. "Head on out," Raul said gruffly, ending this little exchange before it could start. "Both of you be back by nightfall. We'll be ready to head out then."

Angela stepped out of his arms the moment Ran closed the door behind him. "What exactly is going on here?" she said, walking away from him and combing her hair with her fingers.

"Colony isn't fit for us to remain here." He focused on her ass but smelled her wariness. She was aroused but cautious. Angela wasn't stupid. She would sniff her

surroundings carefully, and when she gave her loyalty, it would be strong and impenetrable. He prayed her love would be as strong.

"That's not what I mean." She shook her head and turned, her gaze dropping down his body before returning to his face. "This. You and me. Raul, why did you wait until now to try to mate with me?"

He didn't smile. Her expression was so serious, so worried. And as much as he ached to clear the distance between them, he crossed his arms over his chest and held his ground.

"I have mated with you. You are mine."

Her exasperated sigh told him she didn't agree. He considered ways of explaining how things would be.

"Angela," he began quietly. "Think of the males you've been with in the past. Lars Ramone when you were eighteen."

Her irritated expression turned quickly to surprise, but then she narrowed her gaze, opening her mouth to speak. She wanted to know him, and she would.

"He took your virginity yet you wouldn't talk to him the next day. In fact, you attacked when he tried again. You left a nasty scrape down the side of his face." He shook his head, remembering her fiery defiance blossoming so early in her. "Then a year later, it was David Hunter. You actually left Colony to fuck him for the first time."

"What were you doing? Stalking me?" she cried out.

"Just made sure you were safe," he explained, willing to ride out her irritation until she understood. "I didn't stop him."

"You kicked his ass three months later when he was talking to Elisa Romero," she countered, wagging her finger at him. "Just because he talked to some female you were fucking, you copped an attitude. And now this, insisting we're mated and that I'm leaving with you."

"I kicked his ass because he fucked Elisa and he was running with you." His voice was a bit too clipped, and he inhaled slowly, willing himself to remain calm until Angela saw the way of it. "I've never been with Elisa," he added, his tone quieter, softer.

She let her gaze drop, it was obvious in her expression that she was turning back time in her mind, replaying events. "All of that was years ago," she said without looking up. "And it doesn't explain your actions today."

"I've always watched you, Angela, allowed you to run, enjoy being young. And I've always known you were meant to be my mate."

"How did you know that?" she challenged, tilting her head and piercing him with a disbelieving gaze.

She placed her hands on her narrow waist and puffed out her chest. Her nipples were hard little pebbles and her breasts full and round. Angela didn't have any visible scars. Her tanned skin complemented her thick, long, black hair and her green eyes. It was her sensual look that undid him, not the strong scent she released that was now buried in his skin, or the lasting aroma of his come on her body.

He cleared the distance, stopping inches in front of her and lifting her hair from her shoulder when she didn't back up or change her stance.

"I knew it when you attacked Maria Gonzalez for lying about being pregnant."

Her jaw dropped and color washed over her cheeks. "It's not right to trap a male," she whispered.

"Nope." He wouldn't tell her he had already smelled Maria's lie when she tried to tell him three years ago he had mated with her. "You refused to mate with John Hunter when he started sniffing after you once his littermate David finally took the hint you didn't want him."

She looked wide-eyed at him. "I never told anyone about that," she hissed. "John told you I turned him down?"

"You were standing outside the bar and he told you that you were the best female in Colony and he would only be seen with the best."

She shook her head in disbelief.

"I was sitting on my bike, just a couple of cars down," he explained. "If you looked, you would have seen me. I almost offered you a ride home but knew it wasn't time yet."

"Time for what?" she asked, her voice thick with emotion.

"Time for us." He lowered his head and brushed his lips over hers. When he straightened, her lashes fluttered over her eyes before she glanced back up at him. "I wanted you to see that we were meant for each other. If events happened differently, I would have taken more time, let you come into the knowledge on your own. But Colony isn't right for us anymore. It's time to leave. And leaving without you isn't an option. Nor would I have you running with me and my litter and not be mated. That isn't the honorable thing to do."

"Ran and Rafe have flirted with me more than you have."

"They've always protected you. Both of them have always known that I wanted you for mine."

"You've already told them this?" She looked surprised.

"There isn't much we keep from each other. This is a tight litter, Angela. And one that you'll fit into perfectly."

Chapter Four

"How much longer?" Angela asked.

Ran glanced up from his work, his green eyes so similar to Raul's yet sparkling with a mischievous glint Raul didn't possess. "Perfection takes time, little female," he purred, winking at her before returning to his task.

Rafe paced the living room behind them. He was the antsy one, Angela decided, who was ready to leap without question at the slightest altercation. She looked over her shoulder at Raul, who stared out the back door, which stood open and filled the room with the cool, night mountain air. This was a good litter, and one she wished she could take her time getting to know. In spite of Raul's admission of caring for her for so long, it was all still muddled in her brain. And with so much else going on, there wasn't time to sniff Raul out the way she wished she could, the way he had with her.

It didn't take much sniffing to know he was easily the best-looking male in Colony. His black hair hung straight just past his collar. Broad shoulders and his barrel-like chest made him one of the larger male jaguars in Colony. He held his hands on his waist, which was thick yet tapered down from a muscular back. The jeans and t-shirt he wore showed off muscles that rippled and bulged throughout his body. His tight ass and thick, long legs added to the aura of power emanating from him.

Angela caught Rafe watching her, and took in his stance with a quick glance. As tall and powerful-looking as Raul, Rafe also possessed the distracting good looks. Something in the way he carried himself, in the dark, piercing way he watched the world around him, made him look so different. Shooting a side glance back toward Raul once again, she took in his powerful stance, the way his legs were slightly spread and his hands on his hips, as if he were the king of his mountain and simply deciding who would live or die that night.

"Comparing notes," Rafe whispered.

Angela turned, meeting his hard, green eyes. "Does that bother you?"

"Not at all." His grin was as cold as his stare. "I'd love to hear what you find."

Angela smiled back, ignoring Raul as he approached behind her. "The female who wins your heart will kick your ass. I'm not sure there is a female smart enough for Ran. And Raul..."

She paused when his hands came down on her shoulders. No jaguar intimidated her—not male or female. She looked over her shoulder and forced her heart not to pound in her chest when his gaze smoldered.

"Raul has it all figured out. His female will need patience. Lots of it."

Rafe snorted and Raul growled.

"I think I've got something," Ran announced, his excitement creating sparks of anticipation in the air.

Immediately Rafe and Raul closed in around Ran. Raul's hand slid possessively over her shoulder. She waited through the moments of silence along with the others while Ran continued muttering, talking to the computer as if he could sniff out the proper way to work the programs.

Raul moved closer behind her and his hard body pressed against every inch of her backside while his fingers tightened slightly over her shoulder. Her insides quickened, and drinking in a deep breath of air didn't help. In spite of the mixed emotions surrounding her, the way Raul and her scent smelled so similar, an erotic combination of both their natural aromas, made it damn hard to focus on matters at hand.

"I really can't take all of the credit." Ran leaned back in his chair, folding his hands behind his head and grinning smugly. "If it weren't for some of the males bragging up their successes with communication with humans, I never would have eavesdropped and learned about their website and forum."

"What did you find?" Raul demanded.

"It took awhile to find it. Angela helped a lot too. She knew the name of the website her littermate's been frequenting."

"I just overheard her mention it a few times," Angela said quickly as a morbid thought created panic inside her. What if Raul chased her down so quickly simply because he wanted to destroy Natasha? She hid her sudden panic, refusing to allow the thought to develop, at least not for now.

"Tell us what you found," Raul growled, his baritone vibrating through his fingers and sinking deep inside her. His aggravation smelled stronger than her sudden sour emotions and she did her best to continue hiding her frantic line of thinking. There would be time later to figure everything out.

"Well, I cracked her passwords." The sparks in Ran's eyes over his excitement made them appear like rare gems. "Again thanks to Angela offering personal information about her littermate until we came up with the right combination. The forum offered the most information and was the hardest to break into. The stuff on here is enough to make a male want to curl his tail between his legs."

For the first time she could remember, Ran's expression grew sober. His excited smile faded and his eyes darkened, almost dulling as he stared at his oldest littermate before lowering his gaze and meeting hers momentarily.

"Seven males left Colony last week. Five of them returned, which according to the posts here was a tremendous success."

"What did they do?" Rafe asked.

"They ran to different locations. Each one of them was assigned a target to eliminate. All targets were successfully terminated, and all money paid for services was transferred into a house account. Apparently though, two of the males were killed while eliminating their targets. It doesn't offer details." He turned his attention to the laptop and pulled open what looked like an invoice. He tapped the screen with his finger.

"What the hell is it?" Raul moved next to Angela and leaned against the table where Ran worked.

"It's an invoice for ten thousand dollars," Rafe hissed through his teeth, his fists hitting the table on the other side of Ran. "And it appears to be for the use of Miguel Kalusian. Airfare expenses are also included. Looks like he flew to Washington. They don't even allow jaguars to run to their kill but put them in airplanes, human flying cages," he snarled, looking as if the change would consume him any moment.

"Ten thousand dollars." Raul made the words sound like profanity. He straightened, combing his hair with his fingers while his face turned into hard angles of outrage. "Print that for me and anything else you find on there. That bitch is selling us out. And I doubt it's for new fucking roads or schools for our cubs."

"I can print all of this, but there's more. Five more males left today. Apparently as soon as the kill is confirmed, money will deposit into this house account," Ran said, sliding out of his chair and taking the laptop with him.

"An account that I'm sure my littermate has access to," Angela grumbled out loud, despising what her sister was doing to their kind.

Someone pounded on the front door and Angela jumped, the small hairs on the back of her neck quickly standing to attention while her teeth extended slightly. Sharp sparks shot down her spine, the change demanding its right to come forth and protect her and those around her. She pressed her lips over her teeth, watching warily while Raul moved to the door.

He turned to Ran. "Go hide the laptop. We won't mention what we've learned so far." Glancing at her while whoever stood on the other side of the door pounded again, Raul didn't flinch but turned his attention to Rafe. "Take Angela back to my room for right now," he ordered sharply.

"If I'm a secret within your litter, then I'm leaving," she growled, glaring at his dark, intimidating expression.

Raul only took a moment to stare her down, but then turned without further comment and pulled open the door. Rafe stepped in front of her but she quickly moved to his side.

"Why did it take you so long to answer the door?" Devon Romero practically filled the doorway as he glowered at Raul.

"I wasn't in a hurry to have company." Raul matched the hostile growl, his vocal inflection changing slightly with his last words. Obviously keeping the change under wraps proved a slight effort for him too.

Devon looked past Raul and his lips parted when he pierced Angela with a nasty sneer. "What the fuck are you doing here?" he growled. His anger was so thick, cutting it with a knife would only increase its foul stench.

"Someone's tapped into a personal website that belongs to Natasha." Robert Gustafan appeared alongside Devon, making his presence known. His thick frame forced him to stand sideways as he pressed as close to the entrance of Raul's home as he dared. No male entered another male's home without consent, unless he wished to die. "Come here, Angela. Now. I'll talk to you outside."

It was almost impossible to ignore Robert's command, having grown up knowing him as one of the head counsel leaders and dominating alpha males of Colony. She hesitated though, their smells reeking so furiously with outrage her instincts wouldn't allow her to move. She opened her mouth, ready to tell him there was no way she would go anywhere with him until he changed his attitude.

Raul spoke before she could. "She's not going anywhere," he growled. "What the hell is this all about? You come to my den, stinking up my air with preposterous accusations. What do you want with Angela?"

"We're checking all the dens." Devon straightened, obviously feeling the importance of his call. "It's imperative all litters cooperate with Colony right now or severe measures will be taken. There aren't many jaguars in Colony with computer skills sharp enough to break into a password-protected website. But if they already had

the password—a password that didn't belong to them—that is a crime comparable to theft."

"Cooperate with what?" Raul asked, obviously ignoring the rest of Devon's accusations.

"There will be no challengers right now." Robert puffed his chest out, reeking of his own self-importance. "Colony is at a shifting point and any rebels will be silenced."

"Silenced?" Raul stepped forward, growling and suddenly looking larger than he did a moment ago.

"Get out of the way, Raul," Devon growled, his incisors pressing against his human lips and making them twist in an odd shape when he sneered. "We're going to talk to Angela, and you're not going to stop us."

"Like hell!" Raul leapt so quickly he became a blur.

"Raul!" Angela screamed, and darted toward the doorway, feeling her bones bulge against her human muscles.

She jumped to the side when Rafe flew out the door, jumping onto the mound of male flesh and muscle while screams and fierce howls suddenly violated the night.

Raul showed amazing strength, considering he attacked two males, both of whom were older and stockier than he was. His favor was youth, pure aggressive power. And it wasn't one on two for very long. Rafe jumped in to assist his older littermate. She barely made it out the door when Ran was right behind her, practically pushing her to the side. He dove into the air, ripping his shirt off and tossing it to the side as the howl that escaped his mouth wasn't quite human.

Angela's insides burned. The words exchanged were terrifying, revealing the truth surrounding Colony as being so much worse than she guessed at first. And it was almost impossible to stomach it could be worse.

"Your litter will die tonight," Devon howled as he managed to jump to his feet and square his shoulders. His hands were fisted and his face not quite human. Cheek bones

curved differently now, pressing his nose out a bit farther. Outrage filled the air and made it nearly impossible to keep his less-aggressive form.

"Do you think you can decide the future of Colony and the rest of us will belly-up to your sick ideas?" Raul sounded so calm that it made him appear more terrifying. "You don't speak for all of us, Devon. And you sure as hell don't speak for my litter."

"Anyone not in agreement with Colony prospering will die." Robert looked from Raul to her, and then at Ran and Rafe. He glanced up and down the street and spotted others hedging closer, sniffing out the trouble and deciding if they should interfere. He raised his voice, speaking louder. "No more will jaguars slink through the mountains. Never again will we run from our homes because humans have made the land uninhabitable. As of tonight, we go on the map as the most powerful predator on the planet. From this point forward, every species alive will be at our bidding."

Rafe and Ran growled, positioning themselves to leap. But Angela moved faster. She darted around them, fearing tonight was the night of reckoning. There wouldn't be any talking out this situation. One side would win and the other would die.

"By selling ourselves to humans and doing their dirty work?" she yelled. "We aren't making ourselves the best species on the planet. We're turning ourselves into slaves, killers who will wipe out scum humans decide shouldn't walk this planet. Do you really want us to be at the mercy of humans?"

She glared at Robert, and even though she saw Devon's huge, dark frame lunge at her from the side, the cries from other jaguars on the street, yelling their support and confusion, distracted her a moment longer than she had. She ached to hear who defended her, to know once and for all where each litter stood. Devon plowed into her, forcing the air out of her lungs and hitting her with a stinging impact that sent her flying sideways.

She didn't hit the ground though. He scooped her into the air, sending her legs flying out underneath her like a rag doll. Angela landed on his shoulder, her stomach immediately churning from the stench of his emotions and body sweat.

She twisted, kicked, pounded and scratched. Devon didn't react. He took flight, starting to run down the street with her flapping like a rag doll on top of him. It was as if he won a round and raced through the streets, showing off his prize.

"Put me down!" She was no fucking trophy, especially not for this asshole.

He grunted, or possibly laughed, but simply tightened his grip when she twisted. If she changed, he would too. And she wouldn't be able to overpower Devon in her fur, not when he was already holding her. He would kill her instantly.

And death wasn't on her itinerary for tonight.

Glancing up, she stared at the street behind her, and at Raul, Rafe and Ran who quickly gained distance as they chased after them. There were others too. Litters were everywhere, running toward them or watching, but everywhere. They were right earlier when they said Colony wouldn't be the same after tonight. But she thought it was her littermate's actions that would destroy everything, not hers.

Raul gained speed and the determination and anger lining his dark features were terrifying. Her blood sizzled in her veins, igniting fire that rushed down her spine and made it damn hard not to transform into her fur. So much aggression and fury were too much for her human body to handle.

"You aren't going to ruin our chances," Devon howled, his growl fierce as he cut off the road and raced between two homes on the outer edge of Colony.

"I haven't ruined your chances," she screamed, turning to try to pound his head, do anything to make him drop her. "But I won't be part of your insane plan to turn us into killers for hire."

More than just Raul and his littermates chased them, and she wasn't sure they were all running to help her. It would be a bloodbath. They wouldn't have to worry about humans. They would destroy themselves.

"There will be no opposition to our plan. This isn't a fucking democracy," Devon growled, pinching his nasty fingers painfully into her skin as he continued running.

Her hair flew over her eyes. She twisted again in spite of Devon practically squeezing the life out of her with his powerful biceps. When she looked up through watery vision, fighting to see through strands of hair that hindered her vision, not even the darkness blocked her view of Raul's hardened look. He was so close she could reach out and touch him.

And she tried. Devon actually managed to run faster when they hit the incline. And if he gripped her any harder, he would break ribs.

Where the hell were they going? Into the mountains? If so, possibly she could escape in her fur. Racing over the rocks and losing him would be a hell of a lot easier than outrunning him on flat ground in the valley.

Others obviously thought the same thing. In spite of the dark, and her hair falling over her face, she spotted several drop to all fours behind her and leap onto the rocks as their torn clothing fell to the ground around them. There was no way of knowing if they were trying to help rescue her or assist Devon, knowing she would be more agile on the rocks since she was smaller and lighter than he was.

There wasn't any way to free her hands and move her hair from her face. She tried until she was sure she would break her own bones if she continued. But staring into Raul's determined expression as he raced behind them, confusion warred with fear inside her. Raul was honor-bound. If anyone risked being killed, he would fight to save them. No matter who they were. As much as she wanted to believe he raced to protect her because he cared for her, doubt still plagued her.

Devon leapt onto a rock, and she lost sight of Raul. "No," she screamed, and then felt air leave her lungs when he jumped again and her middle crushed down against his shoulder. "Raul," she cried, although she doubted anyone heard her.

A large black shadow leapt over the top of them. Angela barely noticed it before it flew out of her line of vision. She twisted furiously, enduring the piercing pain that ransacked her body from the urge to change and the restriction of Devon's arm crushing her midsection. Breathing was almost impossible. Devon came to a quick stop, almost throwing her forward. At the same time Raul slammed into Devon's backside. Angela felt the pain of the scream as it wrenched from her throat. Hands were on her, yanking her from Devon's arms.

Devon stumbled forward, cursing loudly. At the same time, a jaguar screamed its outrage. Angela could barely turn around as she was sprung free from her human prison.

"Don't change until I tell you to," Raul ordered into her ear.

She wasn't able to meet his gaze. He shoved her into Ran's arms and pushed past her, pouncing on Devon so quickly the large man fell hard into the jaguar in front of him. Skin and fur tangled as rumbling growls and human screams filled the air.

They were barely up the mountain, with no clear path, just rocks jutting out of the earth everywhere. The ground wasn't even, and on two legs, keeping balance was distracting if not damn near impossible, especially when her legs quivered worse than a newborn cub's.

Angela lunged forward, forgetting about Ran until he pulled her back against him. "Stay put," he whispered in her ear, although his hold on her wasn't half as punishing as Devon's had been. "Everything will be okay. I promise."

She shoved her hair out of her face and gulped in the frigid night air. It was the first time it dawned on her how cold it was outside. Even with Ran's warm body pressed against her backside, it was suddenly so cold that she shivered uncontrollably.

Ran wrapped both his arms around her. "Don't worry. Raul will be triumphant. He always is when he fights for something that matters to him. And you matter a lot to him."

She shifted, glancing over her shoulder and up at his strong profile. "Trust me," he said, not looking down at her.

She turned her head back to the fight, which grew with intensity by the minute. Did Ran know what he was talking about? She couldn't picture Raul discussing her with his littermates, but they were close. Not anything like her and Natasha.

Ran rubbed her arms, and she worried he sensed her unstable emotions. There was nothing worse than someone viewing her as anything but strong.

But emotions poured into the air, angry and violent. It was hard to say whose emotions were the strongest. Everyone was tense, ready to drop to all fours if needed. Some already had. And the fight in front of her was a mess of black fur and furious howls.

Devon changed, his clothes ripping off his body when he turned into a large black jaguar. Raul didn't hesitate but ripped his shirt off and quickly unzipped his jeans.

Angela struggled against Ran. "Let me get his clothes," she cried, twisting in his arms until he let her go.

The second she grabbed them, Ran lifted her backward, once again tucking her in closely against him.

Rafe shifted from foot to foot. "If that motherfucker drops one bit of blood from my litter, I'll rip his throat out."

Jaguars didn't fight in packs. They were lone killers, and one of the deadliest beasts on the planet. Her kind could shatter a skull with their jaw, clamping down and ending a life with one powerful bite. In spite of feeling confident Raul would triumph over the larger jaguar, who was older and stockier, there were many surrounding them.

Would they jump in and attack once Devon fell?

Raul moved quickly and effectively, leaping on Devon and screaming his warning seconds before his long, deadly teeth flashed in the darkness. What moonlight there was flashed against the white incisors moments before they sank into flesh. Their black fur and the dark shadows made it impossible to see who hit the ground first. But the crash of bodies against the rocks shook the side of the mountain.

Raul raised his head. Devon lay still on the ground. The metallic smell of blood filled the air. Raul's green eyes scanned everyone surrounding them, and the moment of silence didn't last long enough. Someone leapt to the ground from a perch above them and sent Raul rolling down the rocks.

"No!" Angela screamed, freeing herself from Ran and running into Rafe's backside.

"We follow his orders," Rafe hissed, grabbing Angela before she could scurry past him and jump in to help Raul. "Let's go, now!"

Angela didn't understand. And Ran turned, meeting his brother's gaze with a worried look that turned Angela's stomach upside-down.

"What orders?" she asked, her mouth suddenly so dry the words barely squeaked out. "He didn't give me any orders."

"He'll follow us." Ran almost made it sound more like a question.

"You know he will." Rafe sounded confident and already dragged Angela away from the others and deep into the shadows where larger rocks made the ground even more uneven.

"What are you talking about?" She struggled to free herself. "He might need our help."

"No one in Colony can outfight Raul." Rafe's confidence increased, and at the same time, he dragged her around a corner of rocks and heaved both of them up to another ledge.

But all of Colony fighting against him, if that were to happen...

She didn't want to think about it. And she didn't get why Rafe continued to pull her away from the others.

"What are you doing?" She turned, pushing against his chest until she was free. "You wouldn't fight to save your own littermate?"

But the moment she turned, Ran grabbed her arms and pulled her into a tight embrace. When she struggled, he clasped his hand over her mouth.

"Don't bite, little cat," he whispered, continuing to move with Rafe.

Were they both insane? Their litter didn't strike her as one who would turn on their own. And Raul needed them. She let her teeth grow and tried biting his hand. Ran grabbed her hair and held her tighter, giving her a firm shake.

"Raul told both of us that if Colony turned on our litter, we were to take you and run to the next mountain south of us. There aren't any humans there. We wait for him there. He'll join us soon."

His words didn't sink in, and they made no sense. Why would they run to the next mountain? And who said Colony turned against them?

"He never said anything about this to me." She continued struggling, baffled by their behavior. She doubted she was heard with her mouth covered and when she tried biting, they moved out of her way but kept a firm grip.

No matter how hard she struggled, Ran and Rafe kept her with them and moved faster than she thought they would be able to with her protesting until they were at the top of the mountain. Angela could only watch, speechless, when Ran slowed, leapt up on some large rocks and disappeared only to appear a moment later with a large, verywell-stuffed backpack. Rafe stood next to Angela, the two of them watching as Ran adjusted the straps on his shoulders and situated the stuffed backpack in the middle of his back. Rafe stepped forward, helping until they had the pack secure. Without even a growl, they turned to continue their journey, as if this short respite to grab what she could only guess were supplies had been a well-planned-out part of their run. They didn't slow as they descended down the other side. As the darkness increased and the silence around them grew, Angela kept looking over her shoulder. But she didn't see anyone. No one followed them from Colony. And Raul wasn't anywhere in sight. There were only the smells of the three of them.

"Don't worry. He will find you." Ran brushed her hair from her face and loosened his grip on her.

"I don't get you two." They were too far from Colony by now. If she ran from them, in her flesh or fur, they would catch her. "When did Raul make this plan you keep mentioning?"

"This morning, before he went to get you," Rafe said without looking at her.

Lorie O'Clare

"He predicted all of this would happen this morning?" And obviously he was that confident she would go with his litter.

"It was clear terrible things were about to happen with Colony." This time Rafe did look at her. "We would have left sooner, but he was determined to get you."

She was silent for a moment. "He's talked to you two about me?" she finally found the nerve to ask.

Rafe simply snorted.

"Angela, Raul's loved you for years." Ran's words sliced straight to her heart.

If he died because of these two, she would see to their deaths herself.

Chapter Five

They leapt at him from every direction. Worse than cubs who were eager to pounce and fight, these were adults with claws fully extended and teeth bared for the kill. Raul threw one after the other to the side, flinging them like limp meat. He struck, sank his teeth deep into warm flesh and released. One after another.

And it was wrong. So damn fucking wrong. Half of Colony would die tonight. And for what? Greed? Craving something that would never happen? Or was it simply the blood lust running rampant, the urge to kill lodged deep inside them surfacing, burning with fever and making them all crazed?

There was only one way to stop it.

In the madness, he didn't know where Angela was. His littermates would obey him though. They were honor-bound, just like him, and understood when he laid down the law. Rafe and Ran would protect Angela, and he would join them soon.

Leaping in the air to meet his latest challenger, Raul grabbed the male by his neck, making the puncture quick and merciful. The male's artery gave way against his teeth. Blood poured over Raul's tongue, clinging to his fur and filling the air with its fresh, pungent, metallic smell.

Raul threw the body and it landed against several other members of Colony. Everyone was in their fur, and the growls and heavy paws prancing over rock were louder than a fucking avalanche.

He lunged and stopped in front of several of them. *Is human money worth dying for?* he growled.

Raul stared into their cold and disillusioned eyes. Raising his head, he dared the next one to approach but wouldn't attack. It was time to wash the blood from his paws and his coat.

It's not my place to tell you what to do. Live with your dishonor, but it won't be mine. He curled his lip, staring into cold glares of those he once called friends.

Raul and his litter would have nothing to do with killing humans, earning their money by shedding blood. This wasn't the way of the jaguar, never had been. No matter the century or how modern times were, Raul would live by the same means his sire and sire before him lived. Off the land. The strongest surviving.

He growled again, shifting his gaze from one to another. These were males and females he'd grown up with, hunted with, laughed with. But it was time to leave them and their demise. When no one else approached him, Raul turned slowly and began climbing the mountain.

It didn't surprise him no one followed.

There were injuries. Raul worked his way up the mountain, knowing his littermates and Angela would be a good distance ahead of him. Anxious to catch up, he put some muscle into his efforts. Before he reached the top of the mountain, pain lanced down his right shoulder and into his front leg. The black-velvet sky surrounded him when he reached a wide cliff and stared ahead of him. He took a break in his trek, sitting on the flat rock that held just the slightest of inclines.

A long incision ran from his chest down his front leg. There was another puncture wound, which had hit dangerously close to his left lung. But close didn't matter. As it was, the wound was simply an irritation. And other than a few additional scrapes, it appeared he would live.

What hurt more than the lacerations and puncture wounds was the intense heaviness weighing down inside him when he thought about Colony. The place was no more for him and his littermates—or for Angela.

Angela.

The years he waited for her, allowing her to come into maturity, enjoy her youth. He never stopped her from sniffing around other males, or other males from sniffing around her. Not once did he interfere while she changed from the hot teenage female into a sultry young jaguar.

If greed and deceit hadn't destroyed their home, Raul would have handled matters with Angela differently, given her time to get to know him, showered her with his kill and won her heart. As it was, he prayed with time she would love him as much as he loved her.

I did the right thing. Raul growled, silencing the birds that flew overhead, and pulled his attention away from the thick blackness in the sky. He licked his wounds, cleaning them thoroughly and feeling the weight of exhaustion swell in his muscles. No matter his sudden desire to curl up against the rocks and sleep for a few hours, he needed to get to Angela.

He finished cleaning his wounds and forced himself to stand. He ached. His injuries burned. For a moment his vision blurred. But if he waited much longer, slept, or even rested, it would be harder to track the three of them.

Raul leapt from the ledge where he took his respite and landed easily onto the next large boulder. His muscles screamed in protest but he didn't slow his pace. Angela was safe with Ran and Rafe. His littermates would kill to protect her and die ensuring her safety. In turn, he would take care of all of them. It's what he did. It was what he would always do.

* * * * *

Angela ran on red alert. The cold, night mountain air chilled deep into her bones. She didn't argue when Ran and Rafe stripped out of their clothes and dropped to all fours. They would be a hell of a lot warmer in their fur.

And they covered a hell of a lot more distance on four legs instead of two. Angela put speed into it. Instinct demanded it. Not only did she run over land foreign to her, but she ran with two single males. The knowledge prickled over her skin, keeping her

tense and far from cold. Ran and Rafe would protect her, and she would willingly fight to save their lives. They were Raul's littermates.

They said he loved her. Something inside her stirred at the thought. Was it love? She'd always admired Raul, fantasized about him. But all this was so sudden. She wasn't sure what it was she felt.

When they reached a plateau lodged between two mountains, Angela started worrying Raul wouldn't be able to find them. Mountain creeks swelled in places, the bubbling water roaring as it rushed past them, indifferent to their plight. The water would wash out their scent and possibly throw Raul off on which way they headed.

They slowed, sniffing the air and taking in their surroundings. Angela also picked up on their curiosity and lust, although she couldn't tell which one of them released the scent.

How dare you dishonor your littermate, she growled, lowering her head and glaring at both of them. He fought so we could escape and is probably injured. If you have an interest in me, you tell him about it, not me. Take me on without him here and I'll kick your ass.

Rafe straightened, raising his head and looking down at her with glowing green eyes. Ran carried the backpack on his back, which held their clothes and apparently a few other items from the way it bulged in places. He slowly swished his tail, looking ready to accept her challenge. She wouldn't rely on Rafe to defend her if Ran decided it was time to play.

She turned and ran from them, keeping close to the bubbling water. They were both right behind her, and surprisingly, neither one tried to mount her when she stopped by a fallen tree.

Perfect. Hopefully Raul would be able to follow their scent this way. Knowing she weighed the lightest, she wasn't the best candidate to run over the huge trunk that created a makeshift bridge first. But at the same time, her size wouldn't collapse the trunk and make it so the other two couldn't cross.

Angela stepped forward then jumped to the side when Rafe leapt at her and growled.

What the fuck? She cringed at the sign of her startled howl. These males weren't going to tell her what to do. Quickly raising her head, she took a step closer to the fallen trunk.

You're not going first! His spitting hiss, mixed with a nasty rumbling growl, made his point clear. He leapt at her and would have knocked her sideways if she didn't jump out of his way. And away from the fallen log.

Ran stepped forward, making it so she would have to move around him or plow into him to get back to the trunk. Rafe then moved to the makeshift bridge and stepped onto it.

She watched the water rush underneath and the wood shift under his weight. It appeared to have been there for a while and was possibly used by other animals that made this hidden plateau their home. Either way, Angela didn't realize she held her breath until he was halfway across and the sound of wood cracking forced the air out of her lungs.

Ran didn't stop her when she hurried to the edge of the bank. He was right there next to her. She smelled his fear and felt the sudden urge to step into him, brush her body against his and assure him with her touch his littermate would be fine. Before she stopped herself, Angela moved closer to him. The look on his face, with his green eyes wide and his mouth open, although he didn't pant, was enough to tell her what he thought of water. Taking a shower or hot bath in human form was one thing. But large bodies of water in general didn't appeal to jaguars, especially in their fur.

There. He made it. Her rumble, deep in her throat, made Ran swish his tail. He pushed against her, a friendly, happy action, although when her gaze met his, the shade of his eyes darkened.

I'm next, she told him, her growl short and quick as she moved around him and headed to the log.

Ran didn't stop her and she jumped onto the log, instantly feeling it move slightly underneath her and balancing herself before continuing across the water. Sprays of water jumped up to sink into her fur around her ankles and legs as she kept a steady pace and walked over the trunk. She kept her focus on the other side, watching Rafe's attentive face come into focus as she got closer.

She heard the slapping of water against rocks and her heart jumped. In the dark, it was harder to tell how close the water was underneath her. Which probably made this an easier journey.

She prayed Raul wouldn't have too rough a go of it if he didn't reach this spot before daybreak. Jumping to the other side, she shook her fur, drying off after being sprayed with the cold mountain water. Rafe's large, warm body pressed against hers and he ran his thick, long tongue down the length of her neck. He looked away quickly when she backed up and focused on his face.

Already Ran hurried across the fallen log toward them.

Shit. Don't be an idiot and fall off the damn thing. Angela focused on Ran and ignored Rafe as she growled.

Ran didn't look down. He didn't look to either side. He was a large, black force moving closer and closer over the water in the dark. The roar of the water seemed to grow louder when she noticed the log shift against the bank in front of her.

Hurry. Hurry. The rumbles emerging from Rafe seemed to encourage his younger littermate.

There wasn't any way Ran heard him though. His green eyes bobbed in the darkness and Angela saw his tail jerk at odd angles as he struggled to keep his balance. The log shifted again, rolling just a bit. Maybe no more than an inch. But it was enough.

Angela hissed, every muscle in her body tensing when Ran rolled to the side with the log. The water underneath him seemed to roar faster. Ran howled, digging his claws into the log and holding on, when suddenly he appeared to be running sideways on the log as it rolled and the end of it moved on the bank. Don't use your claws! she howled furiously, jumping to the edge of the bank and bouncing against the side of Rafe when he hurried forward with her. Keep moving forward and don't slice the damn thing in half! she roared.

Rafe leapt on the end of the log and steadied it, although the sound of splitting wood turned Angela's insides to ice. She shook with nervous anticipation as she hurried to Rafe's side, willing Ran to be closer to them. He looked up at them, his body curled over the top of the log, and the fear and panic in his eyes made her shiver.

Keep moving. Rafe's low growl sounded like Raul for a moment.

Angela looked at him quickly, but although his body brushed against hers, all of his attention was on Ran. His fierce profile brought an image of Raul to mind. If Ran destroyed the log, Raul wouldn't be able to cross. But then if Ran fell into the water, they would all get soaked retrieving him. Just thinking about the possibility she might have to save Ran's ass by jumping into the freezing water made her insides churn. She would do it. But damn—she hated water.

And if they spent much more time here, maybe Raul would catch up with them.

She shifted her attention to Ran, not taking time to scan the darkness around them. Ran once again stood, his eyes wide and glowing as he focused on them and started moving closer. He froze when the wood split. Angela couldn't breathe, couldn't move. The log that was lodged into the ground in front of her split in two.

Part of it rose out of the earth, its jagged edges like knives, reaching out to slice whatever it could reach. She jumped, instinctively growling when momentarily it looked like a grotesque beast, trying to get out of the water and attack whoever disturbed it.

Jump! she screamed, the sound of her own voice echoing off the cliffs and steep rocky inclines surrounding the plateau.

Now! Rafe roared next to her, his deeper baritone adding to the chorus reverberating around them.

Ran leaped into the air, and Angela looked up, frozen momentarily while silently urging his body to stretch farther, remain airborne longer, until finally she regained control of her senses and darted to the side to avoid being crushed.

Ran rolled to the ground, fiercely howling and hissing as his large body shook the ground. Angela was overwhelmed with relief. She jumped onto Ran, licking and purring as the tension and stress of the moment quickly faded. She cleaned his cheeks, his neck, his shoulders before realizing she straddled him like a mother would her cub and ensured with each stroke his body was still intact.

But as he rose and shook himself furiously, spraying all of them as if they had just been caught in a sprinkler, her giddiness quickly evaporated into something more serious.

What the hell were you thinking? How can you so easily jack with a computer but not have the sense to keep moving when you're crossing a mountain stream?

Ran stood, swishing his tail, and pushed into her before she could move. His thick, moist tongue stroked the hair on her neck the wrong way, and gave her entire body chills. Rafe watched, looking somewhat amused, until Angela realized the intense emotions all of them were experiencing could too easily turn into something else.

And they were in their fur.

Telling a single male no in his fur was about as effective as telling the water in the spring to part so she could walk through it and not get wet.

Ran licked her again and she jumped out of his way, only to almost lose her footing on the soft edge of the bank. His large mouth grabbed her by the back of her neck, making her lose her balance completely when he dragged her away from the water.

Let me go! There wasn't enough anger in her scent to convince either of them she was pissed for being pulled from the water.

Ran obliged though, and she fell to her side in the soft, thick grass, her entire side instantly getting soaked from the heavy mountain dew. Neither of them closed in on

her but stood close, waiting until she stood. Ran and Rafe would protect her, as she would them. And that's what made jaguars such a powerful and committed species.

These males might want her but they respected Raul. They weren't greedy or selfish. Like their brother, Rafe and Ran were in their prime, perfect male jaguars. Any female who sniffed around these two would have to meet her approval before they got too close. That's what made a litter tight, taking care of each other.

And what her littermate had forgotten existed in Colony. The camaraderie of their community was destroyed, but it still existed in the males standing on either side of her. Raul possessed it too. Enough so to send them away, order his littermates to take her and leave the grotesque existence that no longer held honor.

Relieved the moment of panic was over, and suddenly feeling the tightness in her muscles from crossing a mountain and getting wet and cold, Angela didn't want to move. Somewhere out there Raul still traveled. When he reached the plateau between the mountains, he would need help crossing the water.

She sat, not wanting to travel any farther. *I don't suppose there's a warm blanket and coffee in that backpack on your back,* she rumbled, noting even her voice sounded tired.

Rafe looked away from her first, slowly surveying the land around them, until with a quiet growl, he walked away from them, moving slowly. They were all tired.

He was the first to start changing, with Ran quickly shaking the bag off his back and also taking his human form. Angela felt the piercing jolts of pain slice her spine as she allowed her body to alter its shape. Her muscles shifted against bone, and blood slowed in her veins when her heart struggled to adapt to a new beat. The darkness around them grew milky, harder to see into as dark shadows grew and distinct objects blurred. Her night vision disappeared and her hearing changed too, giving her the impression for a few moments someone stuffed cotton in her ears.

Before she straightened onto two legs, Ran pulled clothes from the backpack and tossed hers to her before shaking out his jeans. Although her human eyes were limited in what they could see at night, she was more than aware of the two naked men who

dressed in front of her. Both of them took moments to let their gazes travel down her body, focusing on her breasts, her hardened nipples and her pussy.

Reprimanding them or demanding they turn around would be hypocritical. She instantly noticed Ran's trim body, muscular and sprinkled with hair on his chest and legs, although not as fully developed as Raul's. And Rafe, also strong and handsome, with roped muscle stretching down his powerful-looking legs. Even in the cold, neither of them shriveled into nothing.

The cold air attacked her ruthlessly when she straightened as a human. Suddenly her hands shook so badly she could hardly put her clothes on.

"Let's find firewood and get a fire going," Rafe ordered, his voice still a bit too gravelly from changing.

Ran grunted, adjusting his sweatshirt and then trudging after his littermate. They left her alone, standing in the wet grass to fight with her clothes.

"Give me a minute and I'll help," she called after their backsides.

"You can pitch the tent," Ran offered, not looking over his shoulder but waving his hand at her.

"The tent?" She didn't know they'd brought a tent. Battling with her clothes, she adjusted her shirt, hating how it smelled like Devon, and walked over to the backpack. "Holy crap. No wonder he practically broke the fallen log," she whispered after examining the contents of the bag Ran had carried on his back. There was enough stuff here to do some serious camping.

It looked somewhat thrown together, but she found a coffeepot and coffee, utensils, and a pot as well as a few cooking supplies.

"What? No coffee?" Ran appeared back to his jovial self when he appeared a short bit later, carrying a handful of branches.

"I figured you'd at least have your kill ready for us." Rafe was right behind him.

"Dream on." She hid her smile and watched when they dumped the firewood into a pile. "I can't believe you managed all these supplies."

Rafe knelt nearby and started stacking wood for a fire. "We organized what we would take earlier this week, when it became obvious Colony chose a path we didn't agree with."

"Raul talked about bringing you into our litter sooner, but he insisted on doing it without our help, and when he could find you alone."

"Like you're going to want our help when it comes time to mate with your female," Rafe growled, although there was no fierceness in his tone.

"I had no idea," she said, more to herself, as she twisted a can opener she held in her hand and stared down at a few cans of beef stew. The smell of precooked food instantly filled their small campsite.

"He wanted to give you time to grow up and enjoy the thrill of being chased and learning about love." Ran sounded so serious.

"Raul is going to kick your fucking ass for telling her that," Rafe hissed.

"He does and I'll kick right back," Ran argued quickly. "You saw how confused she looked earlier. She's got a right to know how Raul feels. You know damn good and well he's all tooth and claw and forgets about feelings."

"I appreciate it," she said quietly, and squinted as she tried to search the darkness on the other side of the water. "I wonder how far behind us he was."

"Hard saying." Rafe pointed to the backpack. "There should be matches in there, if dipshit here didn't get them soaked."

"Fuck you." Ran pulled the tent out of its bag and then reached for the backpack, tossing it to his littermate. "Next time you can haul everything on your back."

"Might have to," Rafe muttered.

"What if he's too injured to travel?" Angela hugged her legs, letting her ass fall onto the damp ground, and stared into the darkness. "Maybe we should go back and find him."

Neither of them answered right away and she didn't look in their direction. Rafe fumbled with the fire and Ran started assembling the tent. Their silence told her enough though. They worried about their oldest littermate too.

"He'll find us," Rafe finally said. "Raul said to make it to the next mountain. We didn't make it that far, but when he reaches the water, he'll need help crossing."

Angela shot her attention to him. A cold breeze attacked and she shivered until her muscles hurt. Ran stopped organizing tent poles and pulled out a blanket then stood.

"Raul will find you. All of us. Our litter doesn't ever give up. If he is injured, when he gets here, you'll need to be rested so you can take care of him." He shook the blanket and then leaned over her and wrapped it around her shoulders.

"If he isn't here by morning..." she began.

"Then we'll go find him," Rafe finished for her, and then lit a small twig that had dried leaves on it and used it to start the fire.

Angela sipped on hot coffee after warming and dishing out bowls of beef stew for the three of them. She stared at the glowing flames while relaxing after they finished arranging their campsite. The water no longer seemed to roar but instead created a soothing sound that could easily lull her to sleep.

If she could sleep.

Both males held sticks and poked at the fire while they talked. They looked her way, their gazes strolling down her body when she stood. The smell of their interest and lust quickly drowned out the smell of anything else around them.

"I think I'm going to do some hunting," she announced, suddenly feeling antsy.

"Maybe I should come along." Ran moved to stand.

"I said I was going to go hunting. I'm not in to being hunted," she drawled, narrowing her gaze on him and keeping her expression firm.

"I'd fuck you in a second, given half the chance," Ran returned without hesitating.

"But I respect what belongs to my littermate. You may hunt alone, but don't go too far or be gone too long."

Angela stared at him, unwilling to let him see how his words affected her. She kept her expression hard, although her insides softened noticeably while a flushed heat swept over her flesh. Ran and Rafe were good males, damn good males. She would keep a close eye on any female who sniffed around either one of them. They both deserved the best.

"Keep alert for that littermate you respect so much," she growled.

They both straightened but she ignored their looks and turned before they could protest that they wouldn't be doing anything else. Leaving her coffee mug next to the other supplies, she dropped the blanket she'd wrapped around her. Immediately the cold night air attacked with a vengeance and her teeth chattered while her knees turned wobbly. It was so cold that changing into her fur might take a few minutes.

She forced herself to walk, quickly feeling the temperature drop around her even more as she put distance between her and the fire. Her spine prickled and cold, wet, thick grass soaked her shoes and the bottom of her jeans.

The prickling intensified when she breathed in the smell of another animal. Not one of their own. Wildlife, large, a predator, and nearby. Angela squinted against the darkness, the prickling turning into painful jabs as her spine crunched inside her, demanding she allow her more primal side loose.

She fisted her hand to control the change but allowed a small part forth so she could see better in the darkness. All of her senses intensified, the smell of the beast lazily sauntering toward the water hit her at the same time she heard his enormous claws rake the earth as he moved, and his large brown shadow became more distinct against the blackness surrounding them.

Angela froze when the large brown bear turned and noticed her. Just as quickly as it looked her way, it turned its attention to the water, as if her presence didn't bother him. And she knew the bear would smell she wasn't human. Her insides froze as she glanced in the direction the bear did, fear gripping her with icy-cold fingers.

"Shit. Please be you," she whispered.

On the other side of the stream stood a black jaguar, not moving but appearing tense, ready for action.

Angela's clothes almost ripped off her body as the change tumbled through her. She reached for her shirt, ready to peel it off her body, when two jaguars practically leapt over her and bounded toward the bear and the jaguar, who now squared off on either side of the water.

"Wait for me," she howled, her voice garbled when her mouth no longer held the proper shape for words. She almost fell on her side, trying to get her damn jeans off.

Blackness around her faded into more distinct shades of gray. Shadows weren't dark blurs anymore, and the cold receded while her heart pumped furiously in her chest. The bear moved into the water, indifferent to the two jaguars racing toward him. Instead, it galloped across the spring, splashing water everywhere. The jaguar on the other side didn't move.

Angela ran after Ran and Rafe. Something wasn't right. She focused on the male who stood like a statue across the spring from them. He needed to move, unless he planned on attacking. And even then, simply standing there seemed incredibly odd.

Unless...

Oh shit. Crap. Fuck! She roared in anger, pushing herself to move even faster.

If Raul was injured, hurt too bad to fight the bear, or even ward it off, he didn't stand a chance.

She hated water. Despised it. Loathed it more than anything else out in nature, especially when it tumbled and spit with an energy that would pull a creature under if it wasn't a good swimmer.

Angela didn't stop when she reached the bank where the bear slid into the water, but leapt in after him, her scream loud enough to warn the bear and every other creature in a mile radius that someone was about to die.

Chapter Six

Raul blinked and stared at the cloth ceiling above him. Brightness streamed through the pale gray fabric and he squinted, feeling the dull ache of a headache for his efforts.

"How are you doing?"

He jerked his head then focused on Angela, who sat cross-legged next to him on a pile of crumpled blankets. The tent flaps behind her weren't zipped but hung closed, enveloping them in a small, intimate world of pale grays and brightness.

"Don't try to move." She rested her hand on his leg, the warmth of her touch searing his flesh.

He glanced down, noticing other than a blanket he recognized from home, which partially covered him, he was naked.

"You're overdressed." He didn't try to stop his cock from hardening as he took in the sleeveless white muscle t-shirt he recognized as one of his hanging loosely on her torso. Firm, round breasts with perky nipples created a view that could make him believe he had died and was in heaven.

She smiled, not seeming to mind he practically drooled over the view she offered. "You scared the crap out of me last night," she offered quietly.

He reluctantly lifted his gaze to her face, saw the worry in her sultry green eyes and itched to run his fingers through her thick, long, black hair. It was down, loose, and looked as if she hadn't brushed it since she woke up. The early morning look on her was damn appealing.

"Come here," he said, his voice husky, and then slowly her words registered in his brain, which was apparently a lot foggier than he first realized. "I didn't mean to scare you."

She leaned forward, resting her hands flat in front of her and straightening her arms so her long hair drifted forward over her shoulders and almost blocked his view of her luscious cleavage as she pressed her breasts together.

His cock jumped, showing its appreciation, and stretched as it hardened farther. She hovered over him, and her gaze traveled lazily down his body. Only once did her expression change, turning a pretty rosy hue over her cheeks when she focused on his dick.

"Did all of these injuries come from fighting off Colony?"

"Colony." The images hit him almost as hard as that bear did last night.

Bear. Everything flooded over his brain with a vengeance that kicked in brutally. Fighting litters he had known since he was a cub. Climbing over the mountain while making sure wounds didn't bleed out. Overwhelmed by exhaustion and pain as he fought the urge to find a cave and curl up to lick his injuries. Taking on a few smaller predators who felt cocky and thought they might be able to take him on since he was injured. Then the bear.

"Maybe I should get you some food, something to drink." She turned toward the tent flap, the smell of her concern and worries not the aroma he wanted to inhale from her.

"No." He lifted his arm and grabbed hers. A nagging ache seared his insides, starting at his shoulder and slicing clear through to his fingertips. He clenched his teeth, enduring it, and pulled her until she fought not to fall on top of him. "You're not going anywhere. And I'm fine."

She went down on her elbows, bringing her face a lot closer to his. "I'm sure you are," she whispered, her eyes shifting as she searched his face. She didn't believe him.

"Kiss me." It occurred to him it didn't hurt as much to lift his other arm and he wrapped it around her neck, pulling her closer until her lips brushed over his.

"Raul, you're hurt," she said, moving her mouth over his. "At least I should clean your injuries again. I did the best I could last night."

"That's not a kiss." He flexed his muscles, keeping her face in kissing range, and closed his eyes as he persuaded her to open up to him.

He didn't want to dwell on any pain pulsing inside him. He would heal. And this was the best damn therapy he could think of while his body mended.

Angela stiffened as she pressed her lips to his, trying hard not to put any of her weight on him. Raul didn't want to be treated like some damn invalid. Being gentle sucked. He wanted her now, all of her, without her holding back.

He growled, nipping her lower lip, then scraped his teeth over the moist, sensitive part inside her mouth. She hissed, sucking in a breath and opened farther as her tongue dipped inside him.

Raul loved how she tasted. He explored her mouth, impaling her with his tongue and growing painfully hard when she opened up even farther for him. Her long hair brushed over his chest and shoulders, tickling and torturing his flesh. So many tiny nerve endings twitched with newfound energy as the pain from his injuries paled in comparison to the need that pumped inside him.

He barely noticed that one of his legs was stiff, and didn't want to cooperate when he shifted. Instead, he pushed his hand under her shirt and enjoyed the softness of her flesh as he ran his fingers down the sensual curve of her spine.

"Take off your clothes," he demanded, loving the thought of simply ripping them off her.

"Raul." Her tone sounded as if she might argue.

He opened his eyes, rubbing his fingers along the small of her back, then slipped his hand inside her underwear. She didn't wear that many clothes. But he didn't want anything on her right now.

Meeting her gaze, he prayed her worried look wasn't from lack of interest. "If you don't want to..."

"No. That's not it," she said quickly. "You're hurt. And I do want to be with you," she offered, her words trailing off.

His heart leapt with joy as he searched her face, praying what he saw, what she said meant she wouldn't dispute their mating. When she blushed, his confidence soared to new heights.

"The pain is from needing to be inside of you, nothing else." He used his good arm and pushed himself to a sitting position. It was hard to fight off a groan when he saw the torn shirt someone used to wrap around his upper thigh.

His memories were blurs. But someone, if not all of them, went to great efforts to take care of him. And now she sat here by his side, watching and waiting until he awakened. He would live, and right now he wanted to live with the knowledge Angela was his.

"Raul," she whispered, searching his face while her cheeks flushed with arousal. "I want you to get better."

"Take your clothes off," he said, and brushed his knuckles over one perky nipple.

Angela sucked in her breath, her lashes fluttering as she pulled her gaze from his face and focused somewhere lower on his body. Slowly she pulled the t-shirt over her head and tossed it to the side.

"You're more beautiful than I imagined." And he wouldn't tell her how often he imagined how she would look lying naked underneath him.

"You've seen me naked before."

"Yesterday morning was quick, necessary. And seeing a female take her clothes off before she changes into her fur is hardly the same as seeing her body blushed with arousal and craving my touch." He cupped her breast, not wanting to be gentle with her, but in spite of his mental argument that he would focus on injuries later, his body didn't want to move quickly.

"I'm not the only one aroused and craving to be touched," she purred, and then gently, so damn gently, brushed her fingertips down his abdomen and stopped just out of reach of his swollen cock.

"Angela," he growled, grabbing her hair behind her head and dragging her over him.

She cried out when he impaled her mouth, and his breath caught when her body pressed against his cock, enveloping it in warmth as her smooth skin prevented it from jerking upward.

If he didn't adjust her he would come before he even had the chance to show her what she meant to him.

"I'm hurting you." She moved quickly when he grabbed her hips.

"Not like you think." He wanted to go up on his knees, pull her down underneath him and adore every inch of her before sliding deep inside her ripe heat. His damn leg was stiff and numb, almost tingly, and it didn't want to cooperate. And he wasn't going to force it and have Angela get more skittish if she smelled his pain. "Straddle me, sweetheart."

"Your littermates confessed some things about you last night," she whispered, and slowly stretched and removed her underwear.

"I can imagine." He didn't want to think about them right now. The fresh scent of her desire wrapped around him and he ached to drown in it.

"They claim you've cared about me for a long time."

"I already told you that." He grabbed her arms when she stretched her legs and slowly came down over him. "Rub yourself against me, my little cat. Soak my cock with your cream."

She rested over him, the heat from her pussy devouring him. His cock swelled painfully, twitching eagerly against her smooth flesh as if it was determined on its own to find a way inside. And as much as he craved adjusting his hips, plunging deep into

her pussy, he forced himself to be still. Instead he pulled her closer, willing her to glide her moist heat over him.

"Why didn't you tell me how you felt about me?" She lowered her face to his and moved her hips.

Her pussy slid up the length of his cock. "Fuck," he hissed, hardening every muscle in his body and dwelling on the pain just so he wouldn't force himself inside her. "That's so damn good, sweetheart."

"Why, Raul?" she persisted, her voice husky with her need. She rubbed her breasts against his chest and whispered into his neck. "Did you think I wasn't interested in you?"

"I saw your interest. And I knew you were young. The honorable thing to do was wait and let you grow up, enjoy your wild days."

"Didn't it bother you seeing me with other males?"

He stared into her questioning eyes. "Jealousy is a weakness. I never doubted for a minute none of those males would keep you interested."

"Is that so," she said, a smile playing at her lips.

"Yup." He dragged his fingers through her hair and pulled her mouth to his.

She moved her hips again and this time he thrust upward, but when he did, she lifted her pussy off his cock and then chuckled into his mouth. Injured or not, he growled, slapped a hand over her ass and pushed her back down over his cock. Thrusting again, he found entrance and slipped deep inside her.

Her cry was so beautiful, sensual, and his heart swelled. He knew taking her was the right thing to do, but feeling her heat tighten around him, swell and convulse when he moved inside her, reassured him. Angela was meant to be his. It was always meant to be this way.

She moved her hands, pressing on the ground and lifting herself off him. She arched her back, running her hands through her hair. "You're pretty sure of yourself."

"I'm pretty sure of us," he admitted, loving the view she offered.

Her body stretched before him, her breasts round and perfectly shaped. A good handful, with brown nipples that puckered into hard nubs. There was enough meat on her that he didn't see the outline of her ribs, but her tummy was flat, her skin smooth. Her hips curved into muscular thighs and he reached with his good arm, grabbing her soft flesh, and squeezed while she lowered herself onto his dick.

Her eyes were exceptionally glazed with her passion. He watched her lashes flutter and then she focused on him. She lowered herself slightly as she rose, gliding over his cock, the slightest smile playing at her mouth.

"I've got that impression about you," she said, her voice cracking while her muscles constricted around his dick and she sank low again. "It's quite a gift to know how life will play out."

That wasn't how it was, but letting her see any doubt right now would raise questions in her. For Angela he would be strong, give her assurance of a good life. And for her he would fight even harder for that life to be the best it could, with honor and love.

Love.

What he wouldn't do to hear that word pass her lips.

"I'm sure about us," he reminded her, seeing that she liked hearing it. "But life, it holds mysteries. That's what makes it worth living."

If only he could move his other arm, grab her hips and take control of their lovemaking. She moved at a steady pace, not too fast, and it brought his blood to a boil. He wanted to impale her, ached to drive into her, hard and fast.

"You're definitely making it interesting," she murmured, and looked down when a cloud covered her eyes.

She regretted leaving Colony. He didn't blame her, but together they would make a new life that would be prosperous.

Her arms flexed, and her full breasts moved as she got into her motions. She sucked in her lip, closing her eyes, and inhaled while her pussy constricted and did a number on his cock. He forced himself to endure the pain. More than his own pleasure, he needed to touch her, needed more than he needed to breathe, to give her all that she deserved.

Angela rode him, fucked him willingly, and sat with him when he was hurt. She stayed with his litter, followed his orders, and showed what he already knew to be true about her. Her loyalty and honor ran true and strong, as pure as she was beautiful. The perfect mate for him. And he would give her perfection too. Or the best that he could, which he would see to it, for her sake, was damn near perfect.

"Look at me," he instructed, focusing on her face while grabbing her hips with both hands.

"Raul," she whispered, searching his face and then glancing at his injury when he moved his injured arm.

"Focus on me, my little cat," he told her, gripping her hips and pushing her down on his cock, hard.

"God!" she cried, arching her back, throwing her head back, and ignoring his comment to look at him when she squeezed her eyes closed and clamped down on his cock.

She squeezed the life out of him, coming hard and then collapsing forward, moving her hands at the last moment to slap the ground and not his shoulders. He didn't care about the pain, not with the view she offered, the pleasure she gave and received. He thrust his hips up, fucking her hard and greedily, needing more than his next breath to make her come again, to feel her cream soak his shaft, his balls, and see the pleasure on her face.

He fucked her hard and fast, gritting his teeth and barely remembering to breathe while color turned her cheeks a dark rosy hue that spread to her neck, made her breasts fuller, rounder, her nipples perkier. She sucked in a sharp breath, opening her eyes wide while her mouth formed a perfect circle.

"That is so...good," she panted, her hair falling over her shoulders, brushing against his chest.

"Better than good," he told her, his voice as husky as hers. "Come again for me, Angela. Give me everything."

The words were barely out of his mouth when she constricted so fiercely around his cock that she sucked the life out of him. So many tiny muscles massaged, tightened and gripped his shaft that he couldn't hold out any longer. She came with a shriek, loud enough that it filled his senses, saturated his mind and tore his own orgasm from him with an intensity that was stronger than anything he ever experienced before.

"You've already got everything," she whispered, collapsing over him.

He didn't mind the pain, didn't care about his wounds. He wrapped his arms around her, holding her next to him while their hearts pounded strong and hard together. She was right. He did have everything.

* * * * *

They pushed their luck, staying there any longer. Raul ignored his littermates' curious looks when he climbed out of the tent the next morning.

"Time to tear down camp," he announced, ignoring the stiffness in his body. Jaguars healed quickly and he would be fine.

"It would be nice to get back online." Ran sipped coffee, his hair falling in uncombed strands around his face. A couple of days' growth on his face made him look older, not that Raul would tell him that.

"We've got quite a journey ahead of us, and I agree. Living off the land is easier when the water isn't at sub-zero temperatures. A hot shower would fucking kick ass."

"Like you've got that much to complain about," Rafe grumbled. "Your bed isn't cold at night."

"You're right there." Raul wouldn't hide his happiness from his littermates.

"Angela makes all of this so much easier."

"She's a good female," Rafe said seriously.

"We'll let her sleep for now." Raul glanced around their campsite. "This shouldn't take long to pack up."

They made quick work of it. By the time Angela crawled out of the tent, they were ready to tear it down, and shortly after headed out.

"We'll stay in our fur for the next few days. It will make traveling easier. Once we're out of the country, and into the Sierra Madres, we can rest for a bit. But I'd like us to be in Central America within the next week."

"Then what?" Angela asked, glancing at him and then his littermates.

"I've made contact with several jaguars living in the rain forest in Costa Rica," Ran offered.

"Before we left?" Angela shook her head slowly, her puzzled expression turning concerned. "Do you think you're the only one in Colony capable of gathering information off a computer? What if this is a trap? If my littermate learns where we're headed, she would just as soon arrange our deaths as risk our spreading what's going on in Colony right now."

Ran gave her a cocky grin. "I'm good, my dear. No one intercepted my emails. I would know if they did."

Angela looked skeptical. Raul knelt down to take off his boots. "Let's head out." He met her gaze when she searched his face. He guessed she needed his reassurance. "We've lived in Colony all our lives. Do you know anyone who is that good with a computer?"

"No," she said slowly.

"We've already shared our suspicions with the jaguars in Costa Rica. They're disgusted with what's going on in Colony and welcome us to come live there. If

Natasha sets a trap, we won't be the only ones attacking back." He stood to take off his jeans, and the others followed suit, stripping out of their clothes and quickly bundling them and stuffing them in the duffel bag. He let the change surge to life inside him the moment he was naked. "To a new, prosperous life, my litter," he said while he could still speak. "May we always enjoy good hunting."

Chapter Seven

It dawned on Angela as she arched into the hot spray of water that she hadn't given Colony a thought in over a day. Not once they reached the land of her ancestors. She breathed in the humid, warm air of the rain forests. The bizarre sensation that she was coming home lifted her spirits. Enjoying a hot shower didn't hurt either.

"Are you going to stay in there all day?" Rafe's grouchy grumble didn't sway her spirit.

"Maybe," she called out, and then listened as Raul talked to his littermates, who obviously decided the two of them were left alone long enough. She finished rinsing her hair, breathing in the soft coconut fragrance from the shampoo and conditioner, and then reluctantly turned off the water.

The bathroom door opened just as she pulled back the shower curtain, and Raul handed her a towel. He still looked rugged and unshaven after being in his fur for so long, and sexier than ever.

"Rafe and Ran are complaining they want their steak dinner."

Her tummy growled in response. "Do they have room service here?" Going to a restaurant where there would be humans didn't sound too appealing. "This room is so lovely, and the view of the ocean magnificent. When do we meet the jaguars who live down here?"

"Ran just mentioned talking to them. Get dressed and come on out."

Angela was captivated by the view through the large windows of their hotel room. Barely hearing the males talk while drinking beer, she stared outside, deciding she could live on the Osa Peninsula for the rest of her life and never want to leave.

Rafe held out a cordless phone. "You're ordering. I want my steak large, rare and with all the trimmings."

"Same here." Ran rubbed his hands together. "I've spoken with Miguel Rinero. They're expecting us soon and our new home is ready."

"It's a small home that we'll rent." Raul moved in front of her, stroking her damp hair while searching her face for approval of his words. "Once we're settled in and have a better feel for the place, we can look into buying our own land."

"We'll all live together?" she asked.

"Just until we know the area better," Raul said, and lowered his head to brush his lips over hers. "Are you okay with that?" he whispered while his mouth moved over hers.

"Yeah, I'm okay with it." She'd grown rather fond of the three of them over the past week they'd been traveling. "I'm not sure either one of them could make it on their own."

"You're right. Who would do my laundry?" Ran teased, and then jumped out of the way when she tried to swat him.

She never guessed her life would turn out so blessed. Cuddled on the couch after dinner, she sipped on the wine they ordered with their meal, and leaned against Raul's hard-packed body. He and his littermates talked excitedly about new adventures that might lie ahead. The homes they would build in the rain forest, pros and cons of humans in the area, and what females they might meet.

Her males, she thought, drifting off to sleep. Raul was right. They were perfectly matched, and his littermates would find females who would bless them too. She would see to it. Ran and Rafe deserved the best.

* * * * *

"Did you see the look on that tour guide's face when we told him we didn't need a guide?" Angela laughed, half turning and walking sideways as she glanced at the males' amused expressions.

"You really shouldn't torture humans," Raul said gruffly, although there was no bite in his growl.

Angela grinned and trotted ahead of them down the rough path that headed deep into the rain forest.

"You have to admit, his expression was humorous when he questioned our wanting to enter the forest at night." Ran was always the first to take her side.

"Like there's a better time to enjoy the forest," Rafe grumbled.

Angela enjoyed the lead, and cut off the path after they were deep in the forest. They didn't need directions. She simply let her instincts guide her, walking until the smell of humans faded and then completely disappeared.

The farther they traveled, the blacker the night became. Shapes disappeared and Angela relied on her hearing and smell to know her whereabouts. A tree root hit the toe of her shoe and she stumbled. Firm hands gripped her waist, steadying her.

"Maybe we should change," Raul suggested, his voice directly above her head.

At the same time, his hard body pressed against her backside and instantly she wanted him. What a perfect way to bless their first night in the rain forest, on the land of their ancestors. Tonight was the first night of the rest of their lives, and regardless of the hardships of humans stealing the land where once so many of them roamed freely, they would make this work. In this corner of the world, Costa Rica was still very undeveloped and the peninsula even more so.

Angela allowed tiny sparks to ignite down her spine, enhancing her senses, until the shadows surrounding them returned. "Even in the darkness, everything is so beautiful, so perfect," she mused.

"It's going to take a hell of a lot of work to build our own homes," Rafe pointed out.

"Where is this place we're allowed to rent? And what kind of payment do these jaguars want?"

"We can have the home for a year, and the amount of money I offered pleased Miguel very much. We'll be welcomed among these litters." Raul didn't take his hands off Angela but instead moved them up her back and then slowly massaged her shoulders. "There will be good hunting here."

"You did the right thing." Angela stepped away from Raul and then turned, facing him. In the dark, his expression was masked, intensified with shadows that added to his rugged good looks. But the way he looked at her with his dark green eyes warmed her heart. A heart she knew she was slowly giving to him. "I wanted you to know that. Already we're all a lot more relaxed."

"I know I did," he said quietly. "This is where we belong now."

She glanced past him at Rafe and Ran, who stood behind him. Then, giving Raul her attention, she peeled off her shirt. All three of them gave her all their attention. Her males, she thought, all of them. To protect and care for while they created their new lives.

"Are you taking your clothes off to change, my little cat?" Raul's tone was suddenly gruff.

"You suggested that we would do better in our fur."

Raul and his littermates' eyes glowed in the darkness, the change nearing the edge in all of them.

"I did, didn't I?" he murmured, moving closer and covering one of her breasts with his hand. "Something else sounds better now."

"Here? Now?" The words barely came out.

Raul lowered his mouth to hers, kissing any further protest away. Not that telling him no crossed her mind. When he lifted her and deepened the kiss, her world became one of touch and smell. The ground was soft and damp but her shoes and jeans quickly were removed.

"Yes. Here. Now." Raul moved his lips over hers, and slowly started kissing her cheek, her jaw and then her neck. He nibbled the sensitive spot above her collar bone and she arched into him, the damp air caressing her bare flesh.

His mouth moved over her skin, nipping and licking, making every inch of her tingle. Raul possessed skills she didn't know a male could have. His hands caressed her breasts and teased her nipples. His undivided attention was so incredible, so perfect. Her heart swelled along with the pressure between her legs. The scent of her arousal filled the damp air, hanging heavily around them.

She wanted to growl, to purr and arch into him. She craved rubbing her body over his, feeling his coarse hair that teased her even more. If only she'd known years ago that Raul was her perfect match, the good life could have started so much sooner.

Angela jumped when fingers pressed against her thighs. Raul's hands covered her breasts and his mouth moved to a nipple.

"It's okay, my little cat," he whispered, his breath torturing her even further.

"Tonight I will share you. But forever, you are mine."

The fingers on her thighs were gentle, teasing, moving closer to the source of her need. Her pussy inflamed and although she opened her eyes, the black night made it impossible to see anything other than shadows. Above her, a sky of trees, with branches so thick and leaves large enough that no moonlight trailed to the ground, added to the intensity of darkness.

A black night full of seduction and love would unite her with her black jaguars, in their new home—her new litter.

The hands between her thighs pressed until she opened to him. Anticipation riveted through her, stealing her breath. All the while, Raul feasted on her breasts.

"You're going to love this," he growled, and then raked his teeth over her nipple.

At the same time a mouth closed around her clit. A tongue, skilled and eager, teased the swollen nub.

"God. Oh shit!" She arched her back, almost leaping off the ground.

But more hands held her still, one pressing against her abdomen, and the other stroking her hair. They were all touching her. Hands everywhere, adoring every inch of her. Even with her eyes wide open, her arousal was so intense, her need so desperate, she couldn't focus her thoughts to allow even a bit of the change to aid her. All she saw was blackness. All she felt were six hands igniting a fire burning out of control inside her.

"That's it, little cat." Raul left her breasts and moved his face close to hers. Her nipples were wet, and the damp air tortured them until another mouth found them and offered heat that simply pushed her over the edge. "Come for me, sweetheart. Come for all of us."

She sensed their movement but forgot to open her eyes. Raul kissed her, but only briefly before he stole his mouth away, leaving her wanting more.

Lifting her head and straining to see down her body didn't help her figure out who knelt between her legs. The dark image feasted on her pussy, and she let her head drop, groaning from the pleasure of it. His tongue dipped inside her and then stroked her sensitive flesh. When he growled over her shaved skin, she shivered.

A mouth clasped on to her nipple and she cried out again, grabbing his head and holding him there. The ponytail at the base of his neck let her know Ran suckled her. Rafe was between her legs.

She forced her eyes open and searched for Raul.

"Here, my love," he said with a hoarse whisper. His fingers touched her cheek, and then round, swollen flesh pressed against her lips.

Angela opened and sucked in his dick, immediately recognizing his unique taste. She swirled her tongue around his width, taking him in deeper, and feeling her orgasm push closer to its release when he growled his pleasure. The other two males growled in unison, voicing their approval and agreement.

She grew braver and ran her hand down Ran's back, surprised to see he already didn't have his shirt on. She couldn't reach to see if his jeans were off, but his smooth flesh appealed to her. His back wasn't as muscular as Raul's. Ran was wiry, still carrying his youth, but his warm flesh under her fingers filled her with a sense of security. The youngest of her litter, intelligent and charming.

Reaching out to Raul, she stroked his hip and then reached up to tangle her fingers in his chest hair. Powerful and confident, her male, convinced of his own actions, and so secure with himself, that sharing her didn't bother him. Never in her life did she dream she would be so lucky in mating. And she was mated. Her honorable jaguar, perfect beyond description, made her heart swell until she thought she would cry.

Love never felt better.

And although she knew without a doubt the emotion warming her insides was new to her, she recognized it instantly. She purred her satisfaction while taking him in as far as she could.

Raul growled loudly, grabbing his cock and preventing her from doing it twice. "Not yet, my little cat. Tonight we'll enjoy every inch of you."

Her lips tingled when he pulled out his cock. There was a tightness in her thighs, but she didn't care. Rafe's tongue was a gift she wouldn't let go of until he stopped on his own.

"It's so good, Raul," she gasped. "Amazing."

His chuckle was deep and brusque. His mouth pressed against hers and she quickly wrapped her arms around his neck, eager to kiss and show him what all of this meant to her. Raul overpowered her though, grabbing her arms and keeping the kiss brief.

"You're the one who is amazing, my little cat," he whispered over her mouth.

His words gave her chills even though her body burned fiercely with the need ignited inside her.

His fingers moved over her jaw and he turned her head. "Suck, little cat," he ordered. "Show my littermates how lucky I am."

"You're not the only lucky one." Ran spoke for the first time.

His cock pressed against her lips and she opened for him, taking him in and exploring with her tongue.

"Oh God," he howled, and his dick grew harder instantly.

It was all she could do to concentrate on sucking when Rafe continued to worship her pussy. The pressure grew inside her, filling her, swelling until every inch of her sizzled with an urge to explode that she couldn't hold on to. Raul's hands covered her breasts and he pinched her nipple between his finger and his thumb. It was all she could take.

She cried out, grabbing Ran's cock with her hand as it slid from her mouth, and barely managed to hold on as she came in waves.

"Oh hell yeah," Rafe growled, and latched on to her with his mouth until she fought uncontrollably to flip off the ground. "God, she tastes fucking good."

"The best," Raul said proudly.

The after waves of her orgasm still crept over her. They praised her with low baritones, humming over her. And as she floated, her pussy swollen and soaked, satisfied yet aching for more, she lapped at Ran's cock and he willingly gave it to her, allowing her to suck him deep into her mouth.

"She's pretty damn good at this too," Ran announced.

"Are you going to hog her all night?" Rafe growled.

"Trust me. My little cat will wear both of you out." Raul sounded so damn proud.

She heard them shift, felt legs brush against her and fingers creep over her flesh. Then firm, confident hands raised her legs. She didn't question who entered her when Raul's hard, thick cock buried deep inside her pussy.

"Raul!" she cried out, turning her head quickly and reaching for him as he impaled her.

"You're so wet and so tight." Raul breathed heavily, keeping the speed up and driving deep inside her then almost pulling out before giving her everything again.

Rafe and Ran stroked her with their hands. She fought for balance and reached for them. Even though she lay on the ground, she swore her world toppled to the side as Raul quickly brought her to another orgasm.

"She's going to suck the life right out of me," Raul growled.

"Maybe you should let her." Rafe ran his hand down her side. "And let one of us fuck her while you do."

"Greedy bastard," Raul muttered, although he sounded anything but put out by the suggestion.

Angela felt them shift around her again, obviously not needing further instruction from each other.

"You're so good. Look at me, little cat," Raul whispered, cupping her head and lifting her to cradle her in his arm.

She opened her eyes and found his face inches from hers. His green eyes glowed brilliantly, specks of gold chasing each other and his pupils more jaguar than human. Angela lost herself in that gaze, unable to speak.

But then she quickly sucked in a breath, hissing, when Rafe pushed her feet to his shoulders and entered her slowly. He was thick, thicker than Raul, but not as long. So, although he stretched her and offered sensations she hadn't experienced before, he didn't hit the spot that Raul tapped.

"I want to see your face while my littermate fucks you." Raul looked so serious.

His black hair hung around his dark expression. Such strong, handsome features that shone with power and honor. She touched his cheek, feeling the pressure grow inside her and knowing it reached its limit not only from Rafe fucking her, but from the intensity of the look that Raul gave her.

"God. Crap." Rafe pulled out quickly, and a warm spray coated her tummy.

"My turn." Ran sounded like an excited cub as he almost jumped around her and pushed his littermate out of the way.

"Now who's the greedy bastard," Rafe mumbled. His hand brushed over Angela's leg. "I will always honor you for that, Angela," he growled seriously.

And she knew in her heart that in spite of his grumpy nature, Rafe would protect her with her life just as Raul did. She smiled at his shadow, her human eyes preventing her from seeing him clearly, and knew also that someday a female stronger than him would bring him to his knees.

Moist droplets covered her face at the same time Ran slipped inside her. Raul moved to prevent the rain drops from hitting her and brushed the ones that had from her forehead.

She sucked in a breath when Ran moved deep inside her. He was slender but long. Angela wrapped her arms around Raul, bringing his mouth to hers, and groaned when Ran hit the spot that sent her over the edge.

Raul growled into her mouth, running his hand down her body and stroking her while Ran picked up momentum. His panting was deep, and he fucked her thoroughly, ignoring the rain as it soaked her already-moist flesh.

"Raul. God." She cried out into his mouth when she came even harder, thrashing while hands gently held her in place. "Oh Raul," she gasped.

It was too much. All of them fucked her so thoroughly, feeling different, yet each good in his own way. When Ran pulled out, spraying his come as his littermate had, Raul quickly pulled away from her and took over Ran's position.

"You're mine, Angela." He drove into her, hard and fast.

She reached out, clawing at his chest, tumbling over the brink of sanity, falling desperately and barely hearing her cries while she struggled to hold on. Raul didn't let up but impaled her repeatedly, filling her, claiming her, and taking her with him again and again as he brought her to climax after climax.

She couldn't catch her breath when he leaned into her, capturing her mouth and filling it with his tongue while his cock filled her pussy.

"Raul," she whispered, moving her lips against his, feeling the rain soak his back, and running her hands over his smooth, wet flesh. Every inch of him so perfect, and all hers. For life – forever.

"I know, little cat," he whispered. "I love you too."

She opened her eyes, capturing his expression as he came. His heat filled her, soothed her pussy and satisfied her in a way she never knew possible.

"I know you do." She grinned at his confident expression. "And you always will, just as I love you."

The rain washed over them, welcoming them to the rain forest.

About the Author

All my life, I've wondered at how people fall into the routines of life. The paths we travel seem to be well-trodden by society. We go to school, fall in love, find a line of work (and hope and pray it is one we like), have children and do our best to mold them into good people who will travel the same path. This is the path so commonly referred to as the "real world".

The characters in my books are destined to stray down a different path than the one society suggests. Each story leads the reader into a world altered slightly from the one they know. For me, this is what good fiction is about, an opportunity to escape from the daily grind and wander down someone else's path.

Lorie O'Clare lives in Kansas with her three sons.

Lorie welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her <u>author bio page</u> at <u>www.ellorascave.com</u>.

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