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Eber's
Angel

Kate Hill

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Lost in a South American jungle, Drew, a wildlife photographer, is shocked to find a sexy yet savage creature trapped in a quicksand pit. Part man and part beast, it looks ferocious yet something in its beautiful green eyes compels her to help him.

For over five hundred years Eber reigned as leader of his Prowleryn tribe. Now he has turned over leadership to his son, Joshi. While traveling alone in the wilderness, Eber stumbles into quicksand and is rescued by a human female.

Eber has spent most of his life hating humans. Since the death of his wife, who was killed by hunters, there has been an emptiness in his soul. He never dreamed a human could stir his lust or touch his heart, but Drew does the impossible. Unable to resist the beautiful photographer, he finally comes to terms with his grief and learns to love again.

Chapter One

Drew considered herself a hunter, even though she'd never killed. She was always searching for the perfect wildlife shot, which explained why at the moment she was lost in a South American jungle.

If she'd paid closer attention to her guide and less to the almost magical pull of her camera lens, she wouldn't be in such danger right now. Panic nearly set in, but she forced herself to remain calm and focus on finding some indication of which way to travel.

She heard a cry -- something between a feline shriek and a human bellow. Her heart skipped a beat. Dangerous animals stalked this wilderness, yet she'd never heard any beast sound quite like this.

Over and over the cries tore through the jungle. Drew sensed desperation in that voice. Overcome by curiosity, she ventured toward, rather than away from the sound. She pushed herself through a tangle of vegetation into a clearing. Her eyes widened.

Buried chest deep in quicksand struggled a creature unlike anything she'd ever seen. Its face looked both human and feline. Though built like a man, it was covered in a leopard pelt. Its sinewy arms and long, clawed fingers stretched toward the overhanging branch of a nearby tree, but it couldn't quite reach it. The harder it fought for freedom, the deeper it sank.

Torn between pity and fear, Drew realized this beast would soon die a horrible death. It paused for a moment, its chest heaving. Clearly it was losing strength. She had no way of knowing how long it had been trapped there, fighting for freedom.

At that moment it caught sight of her. Drew momentarily forgot to breathe. Even from a distance she saw keen intelligence and sensitivity in its greenish-yellow eyes.

It didn't utter a sound, but something in its expression told her that even if it could speak it wouldn't ask for her help. If this creature understood pride, if it sensed its own mortality, she couldn't leave it to die.

She was probably risking her life. Once free, this creature could tear her apart. Its -- his -- powerfully muscled body, clawed hands and gleaming fangs marked him as a predator. She didn't have a weapon to defend herself, yet she approached.

He watched her warily.

"Easy," she said, her heart pounding. She slipped off her backpack and gear and placed it on the ground. "I just want to help you. Can you understand me?"

Except for a low growl, he didn't reply but stared at her.

She stepped closer, careful not to get too near the pit. How could she reach him?

She pulled off her belt and tossed it to him. He grabbed hold and she tried to heave him out. Lord he was heavy, and with the pull of the quicksand she wasn't sure she could free him. He tried pulling himself out, but only succeeded in dragging her closer to the pit.

"No, don't!" she said and released the belt.

He fell deeper into the quicksand. A low moan of despair escaped his throat. Again their gazes locked and the expression in his eyes tugged at her heart.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm sorry. Maybe I can bring the branch closer to you."

She jumped up and after a couple of tries caught hold of the overhanging branch. She pulled down as hard as she could while the creature in the pit stretched his long arms upward. He caught hold of the branch and it creaked beneath his weight. Inch by torturous inch he dragged himself higher, his claws sinking into the bark. The branch looked close to snapping.

Drew bit her lower lip. He had to make it this time. He had to!

As he emerged from the quicksand, she stared in fascination. Beneath the smooth, leopard like pelt, he had the form of an athletic man -- a lean waist, long legs of chiseled muscle, and a tight, perfect ass. He was also completely naked.

Finally he reached the side of the pit. Only when he grasped her ankle did she realize she'd stayed far too close to this creature.

Now that he had her, what was to stop him from tearing her to pieces? He looked partly human, but would he react like one?

She gave a sharp cry as he tugged her to the ground. Instead of harming her, he collapsed on top of her, still panting from his narrow escape, his big, rock-hard body half draped over hers.

Drew lay frozen, her heart pounding. Beneath the layer of sand and mud, his pelt felt smooth and his body quite warm.

After a few moments, his breathing evened out and he lifted his head to stare into her eyes.

Drew swallowed, unsure of what to do. She wondered if he could talk. There was only one way to find out. "Can you understand me?" she asked.

He didn't reply, but continued watching her. Those wide set greenish eyes were intelligent. She sensed he knew what she said but was unable or unwilling to respond, at least not in words.

He pushed himself to his knees, and when she tried to rise as well, he placed a hand on her stomach.

Drew's pulse raced and she remained still, half raised on her elbows. She glanced at the large, hairy hand, waiting for his claws to tear through her clothes and flesh. Though firm, his touch didn't hurt and after a moment his hand moved slowly up her torso. As it passed between her breasts, her nipples tightened and tingled. Finally he paused, his hand curved lightly around her throat.

"You're not going to hurt me, are you?" she continued softly, her voice steadier than she felt.

He tilted his head slightly to the side and his eyes narrowed.

"Listen, I saved your life, now let me go." She tried to edge away, but his grip tightened a bit on her neck. She swallowed hard, but spoke calmly and sternly. "Let me go."

His hand left her and she stood. He rose with her and she realized just how tall he was. He had such broad shoulders and his muscles were well developed. If not for the black and tan pelt and the feline cast to his face, she would have sworn he were human.

"I have to go," she said, then muttered, "Not that I know where. I'm completely lost." Her gaze locked on his and she edged away. Just when she thought he might let her leave, he growled, grasped her by the waist and hauled her over his shoulder. He slung her backpack over the other shoulder.

Screaming, Drew pounded her fists against his muscular back and taut buttocks. She tried to kick her legs, but he held her fast. The strength in his long, lean body was more animal than human and despite her struggles, she knew she couldn't fight him. Her blows must have annoyed him because he growled more savagely and shook her a bit, but she continued fighting until exhaustion overcame her. Panting, her head pounding from her dangling position, she lay like a rag doll.

He carried her for what seemed like miles before he entered the mouth of a cave, partially concealed by vegetation. Inside they traveled down a corridor so dark that Drew was unable to see. Finally the corridor opened to a rocky chamber. Light shone in through a hole in the top of the cave. Her captor lowered her onto a bed of leaves covered by an animal skin. She expected a foul stench, but instead it smelled earthy and faintly musky -- not at all unpleasant.

Glancing around, she noticed a leather bag and several wooden bowls half filled with colorful dyes by the bed. Toward the center of the cave a fire pit surrounded by rocks contained the ashes of wood. Jungle scenes of naked people, great cats and other animals covered one of the rock walls.

After a moment the numb fear wore off and she leapt to her feet only to be once again hauled into the beast's embrace. His arms wrapped around her and their gazes locked. Those greenish-yellow eyes bore into her, sending a shiver through her that wasn't completely one of fear.

"Get your paws off me," she said in a tone that usually sent men running.

But this wasn't a man.

She kicked him hard and he grunted and pushed her onto the bed. He covered her body with his, pressing her into the leaves. She'd expected him to react in anger, but those penetrating eyes continued staring into hers, wary yet calm. Purring softly, he tilted his head to the side in a manner she was beginning to find rather attractive.

"What do you want?" she asked, frustrated. Was this his way of thanking her for helping him out of the pit? If so, she could live without his gratitude.

That purring echoed in her head, making her drowsy. Damn, she could scarcely stay awake. Those greenish-yellow eyes swallowed her, and at the moment she didn't mind being devoured. Before she knew what was happening, that soft purring lulled her to sleep.

* * *

Even after his spell sent the woman into a deep sleep, Eber remained atop her for a moment, riveted not only by her beauty, but by her willingness to save his life. She was *human*, by nature his enemy, yet she had helped him out of the pit where he surely would have died.

It had been decades since a woman had captured his interest. After the murder of his beloved mate, he'd had no interest in taking another. He'd left the duty of producing offspring to the younger males of his tribe, such as his son, Joshi, to whom he'd recently turned over leadership.

Eber had led his tribe for over five hundred years. When humans had driven them from their native Ireland, he'd taken them to Africa where they'd lived for the past two centuries. He'd preserved the ancient magic of his ancestors and battled humans and other species for the safety of his tribe. He had raised his young and shared a life with his mate. Then he had watched her die. Destroyed by human hunters for her pelt.

Shortly after death, Prowleryns liquefied and faded, so the human trash who'd killed her hadn't gotten the benefit of wearing or selling her beautiful coat. The vengeance he'd taken on her murderers hadn't satisfied his fury. It still festered inside

him. His hatred of humankind had grown, hardening him against even the pleasures coveted by his species -- love of the tribe, family and freedom.

The tighter humans closed in upon the wilderness of the world, the less freedom Prowleryns as well as other beasts enjoyed. Humans had no respect for anything. They were a savage, self-centered lot. Or at least *most* humans were. There were some exceptions, such as Joshi's mate, Chante. And now this human female had shown compassion by rescuing him from the quicksand pit.

He also noted that unlike most of her kind, she carried no weapon. No gun with which to destroy animals. All she was armed with was a camera.

Interesting.

Actually, everything about her was interesting. Despite his better judgment, he found himself drawn to her. She had smooth brown skin and wore her black hair rather short. Though her wide set, thickly lashed eyes were now closed in a magically induced sleep, he knew them to be a luscious dark brown, almost black. Looking into them, he'd felt a tightening in his heart and groin that he hadn't experienced since before his mate's death.

This tall, lean muscled woman had curves that quickened his heartbeat. He longed to see her without the cover of human clothes. The image of her sprawled naked on a bed of soft leaves while he licked every inch of her sexy body flashed through his mind.

His hands, braced on either side of her head, tightened on the animal skin as he dipped his face closer to hers, wanting to taste those full, kissable lips. Then he stopped and pulled back. He rose to his feet and growled softly, scrubbing a hand over the top of his furred head. What was he thinking? This was a *human*.

Though his kind had recently been forced to mate with select human females simply to avoid extinction, Eber hadn't been able to bring himself to have sex with anyone since Clare's death. Even for a creature with an extended lifespan, nearly a hundred years was a long time to be celibate.

Looking at this woman awakened decades of sleeping desires. Glancing toward her again, he drew a deep breath. His cock swelled and ached with almost unbearable need, and he realized he was trembling a bit.

This was crazy. Though he was a master of ancient magic, he almost felt as if someone had worked a spell on him. Not that it wouldn't be deserved. He had placed such a spell on his own son, practically driving him into the arms of his human mate.

Not that Joshi hadn't expressed total satisfaction with his bride, but Eber still felt some guilt over what he'd done.

At the time he'd initiated the mate mark spell, he'd been in the initial throes of grief. Clare had just been murdered and Eber wanted to make humans pay for the suffering of Prowleryns. He had worked a spell on a human hunter, ensuring that one of his descendants would be bound to a member of Eber's bloodline.

When Joshi and the woman fated to be his finally united, Eber knew it was time for him to step down and reevaluate his life. Joshi had the intelligence and strength to be a great leader and Eber's heart swelled with pride for his son. Yet he knew the best thing he could do for Joshi was leave Africa. The younger man needed the freedom to establish leadership on his own.

Now that his tribe was secure in Joshi's care and the younger Prowleryn had recently fathered triplets -- all female and a great blessing to their tribe -- Eber would only be in the way.

Though it had been years since he'd walked among humans, Eber integrated himself into their world just long enough to travel to South America where one of his oldest friends ruled a tribe of rainforest Prowleryns. He had been given permission to stalk this wilderness and take the time he needed to sort out his life.

Wandering this unfamiliar forest while lost in thought proved to be as dangerous for a Prowleryn as for any other species. He hadn't noticed the quicksand pit.

The last thing Eber had expected was to be rescued by a human. Now here she was and instead of hatred or resentment, he felt curiosity and desire.

The woman moaned softly and began to stir. Eber's mind raced. How should he handle this?

* * *

Drew awoke slowly. At first she thought the day's events had been just a strange dream. Then her vision cleared and she glanced around the cave. Her heart raced and she sat up quickly. She rested on the same bed of leaves covered in animal skin. The scent of earth and the faint aroma of a burned out fire mingled on the air.

Where was that strange but beautiful creature who'd carried her here? Or had she imagined him?

Damn. She felt almost hung over, except without the headache and nausea. Still, her memories were that murky.

She had the feeling she was being watched. She glanced sharply over her shoulder and gave a little gasp at what -- or rather *who* -- she saw.

A naked white man squatted in the shadows, yet even the dimness couldn't hide his perfect body. Long limbed with broad shoulders, the man was all lean muscle. From his position there was no missing his long, thick cock and sizeable balls that brushed the floor.

A tangle of short brown hair covered his head and his piercing greenish eyes studied her carefully. The hungry expression on his ruggedly handsome face with its razor sharp cheekbones and strong jaw line dusted with a sexy five o'clock shadow made her heart beat even harder.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

The way his gaze slowly swept over her suggested that maybe she shouldn't have asked that question. He looked like he wanted a hell of a lot more than she wanted to give. Or maybe not. Even sitting there in silence, he oozed sensuality.

He stood and she noted just how tall he was. Moving with the grace of a great cat, he approached and circled her, those predatory eyes never leaving her. She wished she had some kind of weapon in case she needed to fight him off.

He stepped toward her and she held up her hand and leveled her fiercest glare upon him. "Back off." At least she sounded more confident than she felt.

He tilted his head slightly to the side, a look of amusement and curiosity in his eyes. "Why did you save him?" he asked in a deep, smooth voice. That was the kind of voice a woman wanted to hear whisper sexy words in her ear.

Him. The creature.

"Why? Is he with you?" she asked. For some reason it would fit if they were together -- a primitive man living in a jungle cave with a cat creature.

"In a manner of speaking. Now answer my question. Why did you save him?"

Normally she'd have told this guy where he could shove his questions, but she sensed that telling him to kiss her ass was the wrong thing to do. "Would you have preferred I let him sink?"

Another faint smile touched his finely drawn lips. "No. I can definitely say I wouldn't have preferred that. What are you doing alone out here?"

"I could ask you the same question, but I'm not sure I want to know the answer."

"Typical of your kind not to want to learn about someone or something you don't understand."

"Oh, I think I understand you pretty well, mister." She swept her gaze over him, from the top of his tousled head to his long, dirt stained feet.

"The big questions is, what do I do with you?" he said, more a thought spoken aloud than part of an actual conversation. He drew a deep breath that expanded that amazing chest even more. This time his expression wasn't amused, but lustful -- almost sinister. "I can think of several things I'd *like* to do with you."

"In your dreams, jackass."

"I've had some pretty licentious dreams, but none with a partner as luscious as you."

He reached out to touch her face and despite the way just looking at him made her body sing, fear overcame her. He might be gorgeous and naked, but he was also crazy. She didn't need to be a shrink to diagnose that.

She doubted she could outfight him, but maybe she could outrun him. Drew had been a track star in college and still ran to keep in shape for wilderness journeys like this.

Without another second of hesitation, she turned and raced toward the corridor leading out of the cave. She bumped against the craggy wall and grunted, but kept running.

It didn't take long for her to reach the open forest. She thought she heard him behind her, but she didn't slow to look. Worst of all, she had no idea where to go.

The cry of a jaguar pierced the relative stillness. She stopped, her heart pounding. The great cat stood directly in front of her, on the trunk of a fallen tree. Its amber eyes fixed on her, it shrieked again, revealing its deadly teeth. Its muscular body tensed, ready to attack.

The jaguar sprang at her, but her naked captor leapt from behind her.

She watched in horror as his body clashed with the jaguar's furred one. A leopard like pelt emerged from the man's flesh. His face elongated and his muscles thickened and rippled. Before her eyes, his human form changed to that of an enormous wildcat.

Both cats rolled in the dirt, their powerful back legs kicking at each other. The larger man-cat threw the jaguar several feet and the frightened animal crouched, hissing.

The man-cat stood, its tail swishing in annoyance, and growled a warning. The jaguar turned and fled.

Panting both from her run and shock that had her adrenaline flowing, Drew stood her ground. There was no point in running. Not from a creature like this. She was in his territory.

He rose onto his hind legs and his form shifted again so that when he turned, he appeared just as she had first seen him in the pit -- a human body covered in a leopard pelt and a face something between man and beast.

"What are you?" she asked, her voice just above a whisper.

Chapter Two

"If you truly want to know the answer to that question, come with me." He extended his long, clawed hand, palm up. She noticed his palms weren't hairy, but thickly padded with pinkish flesh.

Their gazes locked and despite her fear, something in his eyes called to her. It dawned on her that if he'd wanted to kill her, she'd be dead already. She *had* saved his life and he seemed just as human as he was animal.

"You needn't fear me," he said. "I'm not like your kind. I won't kill a woman for the pleasure of watching her die." His words, as well as the fierce look in his eyes when he spoke them, disturbed her.

That strong hand was still extended and he waited patiently, though something told her he wasn't generally a patient man.

Her breathing had calmed somewhat and she had regained control of herself. She took his hand, noting that his palms were quite callused. His long fingers folded around hers, his touch firm yet gentle.

"What's your name?" he asked, guiding her back toward his cave.

"Drew."

"Why are you here alone?"

Same question. This time she decided to answer. "I'm a photographer. I take pictures of rainforests like this hoping to help spread the message about conservation and protection for endangered species."

"A human who cares about other species. That's almost a contradiction."

"What's that supposed to mean?" she demanded.

"In my experience, humans are a vicious race who care for nothing and no one but themselves."

"Excuse me, but that's a gross generalization." His attitude irked her, but it struck her that she'd often raised the same arguments. Why didn't it seem as offensive for humans to criticize each other, but she didn't like to hear this creature insult her kind?

Hold everything! This *creature*. Here she was, walking through a South American rainforest with a being who shouldn't exist. Was all this really happening?

It seemed impossible, yet there was no denying he was very real.

"Not only do I not know your name, but I don't know *what* you are," she said. "Care to enlighten me?"

"My name is Eber."

"What are you? How can you change shape?"

He shrugged. "It's what I am. Even if I could explain, a human like you would never understand. Not truly."

"How can I, unless you talk to me? You said if I came with you, you'd tell me about yourself."

"And I will."

"So start talking."

He paused and tugged her so close that her breasts pressed against his rock hard chest. A little thrill shot through her and she wished she were naked too, so there was nothing between his sleek body and hers.

"Words aren't enough," he said, staring so deeply into her eyes she almost felt dizzy. He wrapped a muscular arm around her waist to steady her and gently cupped her face.

What was it about this man's eyes that seemed to place her under a spell every time she met his gaze?

"What else is there besides words?" she said in a husky voice. Damn. This forest just got a whole lot hotter. She licked droplets of sweat from her upper lip. Perspiration trickled down her spine. Maybe her sprint had generated all this heat, but then again

maybe not. Something told her Eber could raise her temperature in the middle of a snowstorm.

What was she thinking? He wasn't even human, yet he spoke like a man. He walked like one and he was sure as hell built like one. Actually most men wished they were built like him. His leopard pelt was strangely sexy, as was his bestial face.

"I'll show you," he whispered, his lips almost touching hers.

Drew's eyes closed halfway and her heart pounded with anticipation. He was going to kiss her and she *wanted* it.

He released her abruptly and stepped back. She staggered a step, but caught herself quickly. "I'd rather you show me the way to the nearest village."

"I avoid human settlements."

Her eyes narrowed. She'd had about enough of his attitude. "Listen, I saved your life. You owe me."

Wow. That was the wrong thing to say.

His eyes blazed and he growled, a soft yet deadly sound. "*I owe you?* Your *species* owes mine. You've hunted us to near extinction."

"The only hunting I've ever done is with a camera. I'm no killer and I'm no coward, which is more than I can say for you."

This turn of the conversation completely took him aback. His hairy brow creased and he looked shocked. "What?"

"You heard me. How much courage does it take to try to intimidate an unarmed woman? Look at you. Fangs like a lion. Muscles like a gorilla and a supernatural creature on top of everything else, but you're standing here trying to push me around. You sure as hell might be a coward, but I'm *not*. If you don't want to talk to me, if you don't want to offer me the same courtesy as I gave you by pulling you out of that pit, then you can kiss my ass."

He grinned. That amused look once again sparkled in his eyes and he said, "That's actually quite tempting. May I?"

"May you what?"

"Kiss your ass, human?"

Oh shit. Now the temperature had really started soaring.

"You'll find my kisses very satisfying." Again he stepped so close that their bodies almost touched. Her tight nipples strained against her cotton shirt, stretching toward him.

Spellbound by his eyes, she didn't move except to draw a sharp breath of pleasure as he lightly grasped her ribs and slowly trailed his hands upward to cup her breasts. His thumbs swept over her stiff nipples, teasing them through her shirt.

This time his mouth covered hers in a tender kiss that deepened as she swayed toward him. Eber held her close and Drew's only choices were to accept his embrace or fight him. At the moment she had no intention of refusing him. His kisses made her feel too good. She tingled all over and her pussy throbbed. She felt wetness against her panties and her clit ached for him.

Drew slid her arms around him and felt his hair recede. Her eyes opened partway and she saw that he'd changed to his human form. No sign of the wildcat except in the soft purring deep in his throat. It was an incredibly sexy sound, unlike anything made by a mere human.

When the kiss broke, she leaned heavily against him, her forehead resting on his powerful shoulder. He held her, lightly caressing her back and hips. Then he cupped her ass.

Again he kissed her. His hands kneaded her bottom while his tongue traced the shape of her lips, then thrust between them. Drew opened to him completely. Her tongue met his and for several moments they teased and thrust against each other while their hands roamed over each other's bodies.

She had an advantage since she was clothed and he was not. Damn, he felt good. Beneath his warm flesh, his muscles were hard as steel. Aside from the ridges of some old scars, the skin on his back and ass was smooth. And what an ass! Prominent yet tight, they were the best buns she'd ever felt. She kneaded and stroked them. Unable to resist, she swept a fingertip along the indentation and he gasped.

"Hell, what the fuck are you doing to me?" he breathed against her lips.

She opened her eyes and found him staring at her with such intensity that it felt as if the entire world ceased to exist, except for him.

"What are you doing to me?" he repeated. "I should hate you."

"Why? What do you have against me and humans?"

"You really want to know?"

"Hell yes, I want to know. If I didn't want to know I wouldn't have asked. I want to know why you're kissing me one minute and cursing the next. I want to know how you got to be what you are and I want to know why whenever I look into your eyes I feel like I've been on a tequila binge."

"All right, human. Remember. You asked for it."

Before she knew what was happening, he'd once again picked her up and slung her over his shoulder. This time she didn't protest. She had the feeling that being carried off like this was actually a compliment from a creature like him.

He brought her back to the cave and placed her on her feet in front of the wall full of those strange paintings. "You asked, now I'll show you," he said.

He stood behind her and whispered some words in an unfamiliar language. He extended his arms on either side of her and swept his hands in a circular motion. He continued whispering the words. The circles he made with his hands grew larger.

Drew blinked as the cave paintings melted into each other. Colors swirled like a brilliant whirlpool in front of her eyes. Then a dreamlike vision appeared. Magnificent cat creatures -- Prowleryns -- wandered green fields. Shifting easily between man and beast shape, they hunted, played, mated and raised their young. They walked along a sandy shoreline and frolicked in the seawater. A beautiful red haired female laughed and playfully beckoned Drew to chase her. Then Drew realized that the woman wasn't calling to her, but to Eber.

These were *his* memories. Somehow he was transferring them to Drew so that she shared these experiences not as an onlooker, but as someone directly involved. Curiosity overcame the fear she'd initially felt and she immersed herself in the images.

The redhead ran backward, laughing. Her full, bare breasts bounced with every step, the pink nipples straining and her flesh glowing with mist from the sea. She changed fluidly. Her human face became more feline and a reddish brown pelt covered her from head to toe.

Drew, or Eber, neared her. They reached for her, but she slipped from their grasp, shifted to a full cat form, and raced down the beach.

A feeling of exhilaration and deep love flowed through Drew. She felt her body changing. Her muscles rippled like liquid metal and with a burst of inhuman speed, she chased after the sleek red feline.

When she and Eber caught up to the beautiful female, their bodies locked and they tumbled onto the damp sand. Waves of love and utter happiness, more powerful than the ocean waves, broke over them.

The image shifted to an emerald field. Humans armed with swords and spears closed in upon two Prowleryn cubs and another female, this one tan and black. She stood between the young ones and the hunters, hissing a warning.

Drew's heart pounded with terror and rage. She knew what those humans intended. She had to stop them, but she was too far away. Still she ran as fast as her four strong legs could carry her. Her paws flew over the dewy grass, but she was too late. A hunter had already slain the female with a spear. Others moved toward the cubs who mewled, staring at the dead feline. A tall, dark haired man dressed in a knee length tunic lifted his spear toward the cubs, but Drew-Eber pounced on him from behind, breaking his neck.

Spears pierced her flesh and Drew cried out in pain.

Again the image shifted. A small group of Proweryns, including the redheaded female, boarded a wooden boat. They drifted at sea for what seemed like ages. Their journey ended on the shores of Africa. Even without his memories to guide her, she would have known that beautiful continent anywhere. Growing up, she'd spent much of her life there, due to her parents' careers. Drew's work had also taken her to Africa

several times, yet Eber showed her a part of it she had missed -- the secret world of the Prowleryn.

He and his tribe traveled deep into the jungle. Eber guided them through the unfamiliar terrain where they met many new animals, some savage, though none as savage as man. Their paths crossed that of a native tribe of Prowleryns. Like most of their kind, they were quite territorial. Their leader, a brown and black spotted male, told Eber to leave their territory. Not wanting to invade, Eber guided his tribe to a new area where he met yet another tribe of Prowleryns unwilling to share their land. This time he fought the leader -- a powerful tawny feline evenly matched with Eber in size and strength. Their battle would have resulted in the death of one, if they hadn't tumbled into a cascade. When Eber washed ashore, his injuries from the battle caused a fever that nearly took his life.

His tribe located him and did their best to care for his injuries as well as find food while avoiding resident tribes. Before Eber had fully recovered, the leader of yet another tribe approached, this time in peace. He had also lost members of his tribe to human hunters and realized that in order to survive, Prowleryns needed to band together rather than squabble amongst themselves. He convinced several neighboring leaders to allow Eber's tribe to settle on a plot of nearby swampland. Hunting was good there, and the tribe was far from human settlements.

For years they lived in peace. Then man came again. The age of the Great White Hunter emerged and Prowleryns as well as many other species declined.

In the cave dwelling she and Eber shared, the redheaded woman gave birth to a beautiful male cub whom they called Joshi. The boy had a rare white pelt and was as handsome as his father.

Five years later, Eber-Drew and Joshi played in a clearing in the swamp. In their feline form, they rolled around the ground and climbed the low hanging branches of a tree.

Then Eber's keen hearing picked up the sound of men.

His mate had gone off for a run on her own, as was her custom.

A feeling of dread overcame Drew-Eber and he ordered Joshi home and tore through the jungle. Catching his mate's scent, he followed it through the trees, but he was too late.

A tall, pale man with a trimmed brown beard stood near her body. The stench of his smoking gun mingled with the pungent aroma of her blood.

Overwhelming grief broke over Drew-Eber, then pure rage. Not caring that other men stood nearby, they tore through the trees and pounced on his mate's killer. More shots rang out. More pain, but none as horrible as the agony of losing *her*.

Bleeding from multiple wounds, Drew-Eber collapsed atop her body. Thinking him dead, two men -- one with white skin, the other with ebony, approached. With a final burst of strength, Eber rose and swiped his claws across the throats of the two humans, then leapt into a nearby tree. More shots rang out, but he avoided them.

From the corner of his eye, he saw his mate's body liquefy and seep into the ground. A mourning cry escaped his throat and another shot rang out. Injured in body and soul, Eber made his way back to his tribe.

The wounds from the humans' weapons nearly killed him. Two thoughts made him cling to life -- Joshi, and revenge.

Again a whirlpool of colors churned before Drew's eyes. This time the blurriness wasn't only from Eber's magic, but from her tears. The cave wall solidified, the pictures once again lifeless.

She turned to Eber and saw so many emotions in his eyes that she wanted to comfort him, but how could she? How could anyone make up for what humans had stolen from him? "Eber -- I..."

"There's nothing you can say," he said, his lips curled. Despite his sharp tone and frozen expression, raw grief gleamed in his eyes. Conjuring these vivid memories to share with her must have been incredibly painful.

"Why?" she whispered. "Why show this to me?"

"I don't know," he replied, his eyes narrowing as he studied her. "I don't know."

"I'm sorry," she said and reached out to caress his face.

He grasped her wrist and she thought he would push her away. Instead he held her hand to his chest. She felt his warmth and his heart pounding against her open palm.

What was it about this man that touched her so deeply? By rights she should be terrified of finding a creature like him, yet she knew from his visions he wasn't simply a beast. He had a human soul combined with the noble spirit of an animal.

Maybe he'd wanted to punish her with those visions, but he'd only succeeded in bonding himself to her. Whether or not either of them wanted that connection no longer mattered. It had been forged and nothing could change that.

She moved closer to him. Their gazes locked and as she tilted her face toward his, he dipped his head toward her. Their mouths locked in the deepest, most passionate kiss Drew had ever experienced. There was no hesitation, no tentative, getting-to-know-you play of lips, but a hungry exploration of two people who *needed* each other.

Their tongues stroked and caressed each other and their hands roamed over one another's bodies. The man felt as fine as he looked. Now that his pelt had receded, his skin felt mostly smooth, except for some places roughened by old scars. She caressed his broad shoulders and trailed her fingertips down his spine and over his lean waist. Then she cupped his ass. It was rounded and tight, the muscles like steel.

Eber's hands roamed over her. He caressed her hair and back and kneaded her ass. Growling softly he broke the kiss and moved back just enough to unbutton her blouse.

Somewhere in the back of her mind she knew she should stop him, but she didn't want to. It was as if some kind of magic had overtaken her. She ached for him like she'd never ached for any man before.

As if sensing how much she wanted him, Eber cupped her soft mound through her pants. She thrust against his palm and moaned, closing her eyes and arching her neck. Eber kissed her throat. He lapped it with slow, teasing strokes and tickled it with the tip of his wet tongue. Then he cupped the back of her head and gently bit her lower

lip. The way he touched her, powerfully yet tenderly, made her pulse race and her mind cloud with passion.

Eber's sexy scent grew stronger, arousing her even more.

Drew shrugged off her shirt and reached behind to unfasten her bra. She wanted to feel his lips and tongue on her breasts. Just thinking about it made her quiver.

No sooner had she discarded her bra than he cupped her breasts and lifted them. He lapped her nipples. Every warm, wet flick of his tongue strengthened her desire.

Eber groaned and sucked one nipple deeply into his mouth. Pleasure so keen that it was almost painful darted through her. Not only was this man as sexy as hell, but he knew exactly how to touch her.

"You're so beautiful," he said and released her breasts only to unfasten her trousers and slide them over her hips. They fell to her feet and she kicked them off while he caressed her strong thighs.

He sank to his knees in front of her and slid her panties down to her ankles. Before she had a chance to step out of them, he tore them apart and tossed them aside.

Grasping her hips, Eber turned her around and kissed her bottom, then he turned her again and nuzzled the thatch of hair between her legs. He licked her clit over and over, using just the right pressure. It felt so wonderful that she knew it wouldn't be long before she came. Blood rushed to her clit and it swelled beneath his lapping tongue.

"Oh damn," she breathed, threading her fingers through his hair and rocking her hips against him.

He held her snugly, guiding her motions so that she could gain the most pleasure from the steady rhythm of his tongue.

Drew's heart pounded and her breath came in short gasps. Her entire body tensed and tingled. It wouldn't be long now... One, two, three long, wet strokes and the climax struck like a lightning bolt. "Oh, Eber!" she cried, moaning and panting.

Her legs shook from the pleasure and if not for his strong hands supporting her, she probably would have collapsed.

His talented tongue didn't stop until the last pulsation. Then he guided her onto her back.

Satisfied, yet longing for more, she watched through half closed eyes as he spread her legs and slid his hands beneath her ass. He kneaded the full spheres while he lapped her inner thighs, licking higher and higher until he thrust his tongue deep into her pussy.

He growled softly and Drew moaned, her passion rekindling. After thoroughly exploring her pussy, he turned his attention to her clit again. By now it was so sensitive that it took mere seconds before she came, this time even harder than before.

"Shoot, one more like that and I might pass out," she panted, a smile tugging at her lips. "I think it's time for some payback."

Placing her feet on his shoulders, she pushed. Though a strong woman, she couldn't budge him an inch. He grinned, his gaze locked on hers, and stroked her calves. After a moment he allowed her to push him onto his back.

Eber stretched out, his arms folded behind his head, making his thick biceps bulge. He spread his long, powerful legs and Drew settled between them.

The sight of his thick, hard cock pleased her. Obviously arousing her had turned him on. Now it was time to return the pleasure he'd given her. It wouldn't be much of a chore. She could scarcely wait to taste him.

Clasping his velvet skinned shaft, she took the head between her lips and flicked her tongue over it. She licked and sucked his crown as he had done to her clit and the motions drove him wild.

He grasped her head, not hard but snugly. His hands trembled, but he didn't squeeze her. Instead, he caressed her hair, his motions quickening as his pleasure grew.

Drew kissed the base of his shaft, then swirled her tongue around the shaft. She lapped her way up its length, then took the head into her mouth again. This time she sucked harder and faster while intermittently flicking her tongue along the underside. Eber growled incessantly, not an angry sound but one of unfathomable pleasure.

With a suddenness that made her gasp, Eber grasped her shoulders and pressed her onto her back. Bracing his hands on either side of her head, he held himself above her. Muscles bulged in his powerful arms and his gaze was so intense that Drew thought she might come just from looking into his eyes.

The tip of his cock pushed into her drenched pussy and she gasped with pleasure.

Eber said something in a language she didn't understand, but she liked the sound of his voice and the look of ultimate pleasure on his handsome face. He entered her with frustrating slowness and Drew clung to him with arms and legs. Her soft, wet flesh hugged him. It felt so good having his cock buried deep inside her.

She shouldn't be doing this. She scarcely knew him. Yet a magical haze consumed her, mingling with her overwhelming desire for him. His cock pulled out almost to the tip, then spiraled back into her. Over and over he thrust until she burst in another orgasm. The next one followed almost too quickly, nearly taking her breath and making her throb with pleasure so intense that she cried out.

He didn't stop, but quickened his pace, his breath coming in harsh pants and his muscles straining.

"Eber, oh!" she gasped, trembling all over as another climax built.

He growled again, then arched his neck, his hips driving into her. Drew came again and seconds later she felt him join her.

Finally he collapsed on top of her, breathing heavily in her ear.

* * *

Eber's strength slowly returned and he glanced at the female sleeping in his arms. Her eyes closed, she looked completely relaxed and thoroughly content. Her soft, smooth skin felt wonderful against him. The musk from their lovemaking lingered on the air and he inhaled deeply as his cock twitched to life again.

What was wrong with him? What had possessed him to show this woman his most private thoughts, let alone mate with her?

He couldn't deny his attraction to her, or the fact that when he looked into her rich brown eyes, she reminded him of Clare. She had been a strong woman, but kind and compassionate. While sharing his memories with Drew, Eber had glimpsed into her soul and knew she hadn't lied about her concern for wildlife. Unlike other humans he'd known, she *cared*.

Her physical beauty had nabbed his attention, but it was the look into her soul that drew him to her. It had been so long since he'd connected with a female on such an intimate level.

After Clare had died, only one female remained in their tribe. As leader, Eber had the right to mate with any single female in the tribe, except for his own daughters of which he had none. Yet after Clare, he'd had no desire to mate with anyone -- until now.

One of the few Prowleryns left who practiced ancient magic, Eber had used those skills to show Drew his past, but in the process something had happened. For the first time his own magic took control of him. He had been unable to resist making love to Drew.

Had it been the magic that prompted them to mate, or had it been something even older and more primitive?

She stirred, a faint smile touching her full, beautiful lips. Her long eyelashes lifted and she tilted her face toward his. Their gazes locked and for a moment neither spoke.

Then her brow furrowed and she blinked, as if awakening from a dream. "I don't believe this," she said, pushing herself to a sitting position.

She crossed her arms over her gorgeous breasts, hiding her spiky brown nipples from view. Eber recalled how they'd felt against his tongue and he longed to lap and suck them again.

"I don't either," he said, his voice practically a growl.

"Excuse me?" she demanded, raising an eyebrow. "What don't you believe?"

"That I did this with a *human*."

"Well, I did it with a...whatever you are."

"Prowleryn," he said, leaning so close that their noses touched. He didn't bother keeping the annoyance from his voice. "After what I shared with you, you know exactly what I am."

"I admit, you gave me some pretty keen insight about who you are, but don't insinuate that I'm the kind of woman who would just lay on her back for any man...Oh lord in heaven," she said, a look of shock on her face. She stood and paced the cave. "What have I done? We had no protection... nothing."

He narrowed his eyes. "Protection?"

"Haven't you ever heard of sexually transmitted disease? What about pregnancy?"

"I don't have any diseases and I can't catch any from you."

"What?" If looks could kill he'd have died on the spot from the glare she leveled upon him. Placing a hand on her hip, she said, "I don't have any diseases."

"Then there's no problem."

"What about babies?"

"I don't mind if you birth my offspring."

"Am I hearing right? *You* don't mind? What about *me*?"

"The way you were clinging to me, I got the impression you liked mating with me." He leaned back on his elbows, his long, muscular legs apart, giving her a full view of his semi-erect cock and balls.

Staring at his masculine attributes, she felt that wonderful stirring in her pussy. Her nipples tingled and her heartbeat quickened. Already she wanted his cock inside her and his arms around her again. "Sure, I liked it, but that doesn't mean I want to have kids with you."

He rose to his feet and advanced on her. Drew's first thought was to back away, but she held her ground. No man had ever intimidated her before and she wasn't about

to be intimidated now. Even if this particular man had the ability to change into a great cat.

"You've shared my memories, so you know my kind are in danger of extinction. We've been forced to mate with humans --"

"*Forced?* Nobody forced you to kiss my ass, and I mean literally."

"Woman, you're deliberately twisting my words. I didn't say I was forced to mate with you, even though it felt like some sort of madness had overtaken me. I don't think I could have kept my hands off you if I wanted to."

"So it's my fault you find me irresistible?"

He chuckled and cupped the back of her head. Gazing into her eyes, he said, "I never dreamed a human could be like you. You'd be a fine mother of my race. Brave, beautiful, and with an understanding of other species I never imagined a human could possess."

If any other man had suggested she be his incubator, Drew would have kicked his ass, but she sensed that coming from a Prowleryn male, his words were the ultimate compliment.

"Eber, we scarcely know each other. I have a life of my own. I can't be a mother of your race." Even as she spoke the words, the image of their lovemaking flashed across her mind. She recalled his memory of his mate and their child. What would it be like to see such love and pride in his eyes for her and a child of their own?

With her good looks and outgoing personality, Drew had never been short on admirers, but none had been Mr. Right. For the first time the idea of a long term relationship appealed to her.

"You're right," he said.

This change of conversation took her by surprise. "I am?"

"Yes. Of course you are. I don't know what I was thinking. You're *human*. There's no way this could ever work. I know why this is happening. I'm being punished for initiating the mate mark ritual that bound my son to his human mate."

Chapter Three

Drew could scarcely believe what this...*beast* had just said. She reached for her clothes and pulled them on while glaring at him. "If anyone's being punished it's me," she said. "What did I do to deserve making love to a guy who coughs up hairballs?"

Eber was too lost in his thoughts to pay attention to her. So he was more like an average guy than she'd thought.

He paced the cave like a caged animal, his handsome face tense and a far off look in his eyes. "I hate humans."

"You could have fooled me. Do people you hate always give you a hard-on?"

Again he paused and stared at her. He shook his head. "I don't hate you, but you are human."

"What do you really know about humans?" she demanded.

"Enough." He glared.

"Not all humans are like the ones who killed your wife, just like I'm guessing not all Prowleryns would hold hostage a woman who saved their lives."

"I'm not holding you hostage. You're free to go."

"Really? That would be nice, except I have no idea how to find my way back to the village. I got separated from my guide and --"

"I'll take you to the village. I know where it is."

His offer made them pause. They stared at each other, Eber standing with his arms folded across his broad chest and Drew seated on the floor, pulling on her boots.

"That's probably the best thing for both of us," she said.

"I agree."

"Fine."

"Good."

"Let's go then." She finished tying her boots and stood.

Eber bent and reached for her backpack. He headed for the cave, intending to carry the pack for her, but she reached for it. At the moment she didn't want anything from him except directions to the village.

The closeness they'd shared just a short time ago vanished as they trekked in silence through the rainforest. Eber traveled swiftly, but she knew he could move even faster if not burdened by her human limitations.

She'd never dreamed of meeting such a magical creature, or one who touched her so deeply. Eber fascinated her, but he also stirred her anger and confusion. Worst of all was the fear that she might actually be pregnant by him. If so, what would she do? Though she'd been adamant about not wishing to mother his race, how could she disregard a child of his when she knew his people were on the verge of extinction?

The idea of being a single mother was frightening enough, but the thought of having a Prowleryn baby was almost too much to handle.

After walking for nearly an hour, they reached a part of the forest that looked familiar to her.

They paused by the trunk of an enormous tree and Eber pointed down a well trodden path. "The village is that way."

Drew nodded and glanced at him.

He caressed her cheek lightly and said, "If you're worried that you're carrying my child, let me alleviate your fears. You're not pregnant."

"How would you know?" she snorted. "More magic?"

"Yes, actually. It's one of my gifts."

"Before I go, tell me, if Prowleryns have such strong magic, why haven't you destroyed humans?"

"I'm one of the few Prowleryns who still practice the ancient magic and my powers are limited. I can share thoughts, perform the mate mark ritual, detect pregnancy and have a few other skills, none of which give me any special power

against enemies. I protect myself and my tribe with tooth and claw. A noble method of defense, but one that has little effect against the vile weapons of your world."

"I'm sorry you feel that way about humans, Eber," she said, speaking with heartfelt sincerity. "And I apologize for what those men did to you and your people."

He took her hand and kissed her palm. "Goodbye, Drew. Now I know at least one human I could never hate."

Eber released her hand and Drew headed down the path. After a few steps she paused and looked over her shoulder, but the Prowleryn had disappeared. A strange, sad feeling came over her. Sighing deeply, she continued toward the village.

* * *

Once Drew started down the path toward the human village, Eber grasped a long hanging branch and pulled himself into a tree where he changed to his feline shape. Silently he followed her, hidden by vegetation, until she reached the settlement. Satisfied that she was safe among her own kind, he returned to his cave.

He felt her absence more keenly than he imagined possible. They had only just met, yet they had already shared a lifetime of memories and intense lovemaking. Her delicious scent still lingered in the cave, and he longed to feel her in his arms again.

Never had he imagined feeling this way about a human.

Still tired from his struggle in the quicksand and emotionally drained by reliving his past through the use of magic, he curled up on his bed of leaves. Still he found it difficult to rest. His thoughts shifted from Clare to Drew. Since his mate's death, he hadn't desired another woman until now. He had assumed that one day he would take another mate and didn't feel that in doing so he was betraying Clare's memory. If the situation had been reversed, he would have wanted her to mate again. He'd cared too much about her to wish her a lifetime of loneliness and he knew in his heart she had felt the same about him. Yet he had never intended to take a human mate. *That* seemed like betrayal, to mate with the species that had destroyed Clare.

But Drew hadn't done the killing. Despite her courage and flippancy, he had looked into her heart and soul and knew she wasn't capable of such pointless slaughter.

Finally Eber drifted to sleep. In his dreams, he fought Clare's attackers, but again they shot him and he sank into a black pit. Before the darkness swallowed him completely, a hand reached for his. He clung to it and slowly emerged from the pit. His gaze locked with Drew's.

Eber awoke panting. His heart threatened to beat through his chest.

Still in his cat form, he rose and paced the cave. Darkness had fallen. Usually he enjoyed the night, but sadness overcame him and he wished Drew were here.

He could go to the Prowleryn village. He would be welcome there and have the company of his own kind.

No. That would be weak. He wasn't a child who feared being alone in the dark. Yet this wasn't fear he felt, but loneliness. Until meeting Drew, he hadn't realized just how lonely he'd been during these past years. Anger had kept him from submitting to softer emotions. It had nearly driven him away from the person who meant the most to him in the world, his son, Joshi.

Luckily, his son was both strong and compassionate. He seemed to understand how Eber felt. He'd even said he was grateful for Eber's magic guiding him to the woman he loved. Knowing that eased his guilt somewhat, but nothing relieved his loneliness, except what he'd shared today with Drew.

He should have tried to keep her with him, or at least made plans for them to meet in the future. Now he feared he would never see her again.

* * *

Drew walked through the rainforest, her stomach clenched. Maybe she'd made a mistake, but after two days in the village, thinking of nothing except Eber, she knew she couldn't leave without seeing him again.

Never in her life had she gone after a man. Men came to her, not the other way around. But Eber wasn't a man. He was a Prowleryn who had been hurt by humans time and again. Why should he trust her?

Using a machete, she chopped her way through the thick vegetation. This time no guide traveled with her. Despite warnings from the villagers, she'd left the settlement alone.

It had been a stupid, dangerous decision. One she already regretted. She thought she knew the way back to Eber's cave, but what made her think he'd still be there?

She paused, panting and wiping sweat from her face. The smart thing would be to turn around. That's exactly what she intended to do. Return to the village before she got herself killed.

She turned and gasped as she nearly smashed into Eber's broad chest. Her heart skipped a beat, partly from surprise and partly from the excitement of seeing him again. The man was as fine as she remembered -- tall with stunning green eyes and a body of lean muscle.

He grasped her wrist and tugged the machete from her hand. "What are you doing here?" Eber demanded. "Didn't you learn last time the rainforest is no place for you to be wandering alone?"

"I'm not the one who had to get pulled out of a pit of quicksand."

His brow furrowed in annoyance and he repeated, "What are you doing here?"

"You can't expect me to ignore what happened between us or forget that I met a Prowleryn."

"Human curiosity?"

She narrowed her eyes at him and shook her head. "Eber, you showed me your memories. How can you expect me to forget that? Have I been easy for you to forget?"

A look of defiance gleamed in his eyes and he lifted his chin. For a moment she thought he was going to say, just for spite, that she was very forgettable.

To her surprise, he said, "No. I've thought about you quite often, human."

"Then we should do something about it."

"Such as?" He approached and slipped an arm around her waist.

A smile touched her lips and she wrapped her arms around his neck, pressing her body against his long, hard one. "Looks like you already have some good ideas."

"I warn you, if you come with me I won't let you go as easily as last time."

"I'm counting on it," she whispered against his lips.

Eber covered her mouth in a heated kiss. Without breaking the kiss, he slid off her camera and backpack and dropped them nearby.

She pulled back slightly to say, "Hey, be careful with that camer --" Eber interrupted her with another kiss even hotter than the last.

He sank to the ground with her in his arms and pressed her onto her back. The earth felt cool and a bit damp, but she didn't care. All she wanted was this gorgeous Prowleryn's cock deep inside her. She wanted his moist, chiseled lips all over her body and she wanted to hear the passion in his husky voice when he cried out in pleasure.

She lay on her back and pushed her camera aside. Eber knelt beside her, his long fingers unbuttoning her shirt. He parted the fabric and bent to kiss the tops of her full breasts. His tongue dipped between them and she sighed with pleasure.

While Eber unfastened her pants, she shrugged off her shirt and removed her bra.

"These are so beautiful," he said, his gaze fixed on her breasts. He cupped and squeezed them, then he gently pinched the nipples between his thumbs and forefingers.

"I like hearing you say so," she admitted.

"They're beautiful," he repeated and kissed both breasts. "You're a striking female. I could look at you all day and never grow tired of it."

"You're not exactly hard on the eyes," she said with a mischievous grin and reached for his stiffening cock. "Neither is your hard-on." She squeezed and stroked his shaft and his eyes closed halfway. His broad chest expanded even more as he drew a deep breath.

Again Eber ripped off her panties.

"You better stop doing that," she said. "I only have a couple more with me."

"You don't need them," he said, his voice almost a growl. He lifted her legs over his shoulders and lapped her clit.

Drew gasped and moaned. His warm, wet tongue felt so good. He lapped and sucked her clit until she thought she might die from the pleasure. "Oh please," she panted, lost in a haze of sensation.

He didn't play with her this time, or make her wait, but gave her exactly what her body longed for. Over and over he lapped that tender, tingling little nub until she burst in an orgasm so fierce that she nearly blacked out.

When it ended, she lay with her eyes closed, feeling completely boneless. The next thing she knew, Eber had again tossed her over his shoulder. She noticed her backpack and camera dangling from his hand.

"Back to the cave?" she murmured.

"It'll be dark soon," he said. "The cave is safer and my bed is more comfortable than the ground."

"I won't argue."

Something about being carried around like a cavewoman turned her on, especially when Eber lifted a hand to caress her ass. His fingertip swept down the indentation and she shivered. That wonderful ache started again in her clit and pussy.

When they reached his cave, he placed her on his animal skin blanket, put her belongings on the ground, then covered her body with his. He purred like the big cat he was and nuzzled her neck. Then he used the tip of his tongue to tickle her ear.

Drew quivered and clung to him. While kissing her face and neck, he dipped his hand between her legs and fondled her, his fingers lightly circling her clit before he stroked lower and eased them into her wet pussy. Then he rubbed her clit again. The damp flesh and wonderful friction soon had her hovering on the edge.

"I need you, human," he said, his voice rough. "You have no idea how much. All I've thought about these past two days is you. I dream about you and wake up hard as a rock."

That's what it had been like for her. Last night she'd dreamed about making love with him and awakened trembling and throbbing in climax.

"Then give it to me," she panted caressing every part of him she could reach from his broad shoulders to his sleekly muscled belly.

Growling, he climbed on top of her, his eyes gleaming with animal passion. His palms flat on the ground by her head, he supported most of his weight with his steely arms as he eased his cock into her. By the look in his eyes and quickness of his breath, she knew he wanted her badly, but he treated her with the utmost tenderness.

Over and over he thrust, sparking her passion. He reached down with one hand and teased her clit while he pumped his hips. The sensations were too much and she came, her body arching beneath him. His hand moved from her clit to lift her breast so he could suck her nipple as he continued thrusting.

Almost before her first orgasm stopped, her next one began. Drew clutched his sweat slicked back and wrapped her legs around his, her heels driving into his calves. She cried out, reeling with pleasure, and his masculine cry mingled with hers as he came long and hard.

Panting, he rolled onto his back and tugged her close. She rested her cheek against his chest and listened to his thundering heartbeat slow to normal.

Stroking her shoulder and arm, he said, "I showed you my life. Tell me about yourself."

Drew moved away slightly. Lying on her side, she propped herself on her elbow. "Like I said, I'm a photographer, but my main passion is wildlife conservation."

Keen interest flickered in his eyes and he waited for her to continue.

"My mother is a scientist who works to protect wildlife in Africa. My father is a nature photographer. They dedicated their lives to helping preserve the world for future generations."

"Why is it so important to you?"

"It should be important to everybody. I don't want my children and grandchildren growing up in a world where the land and species we know now are gone."

He studied her carefully, then nodded.

"How many Prowleryns are left in the world?" she asked softly. "Since you showed me your memories, I can't help thinking that I might have seen your kind while on a shoot and not known it."

"It's doubtful," he said. "We've learned to avoid humans. When and if we're seen, we're always mistaken for big cats -- leopards, cougars, tigers. We all look different, depending on our tribe and ancestry."

"Not all humans are as nasty as you think they are. Have you ever considered communicating with us, like you're doing now with me?"

He growled deep in his chest. In his human form, it sounded even more frightening than when he appeared as the great cat.

"I guess you don't like that idea," she said.

"Most Prowleryns trust few humans. I trust none."

"You can trust me," she stated, leveling her most no nonsense gaze upon him.

"That remains to be seen."

"I saved your life. I wonder if you had come across a human sinking in quicksand, would you have done the same?" They stared at each other for several intense seconds, then she curled her lip and said, "I didn't think so."

"I protected you from the jaguar," he said in his own defense.

"Only *after* I rescued you."

"Woman, are you ever going to let me forget that?"

"Probably not."

The faintest smile flirted with his lips. "That's what I thought."

Dusk had settled over the forest and Eber tugged her into his arms. The latter part of their conversation had disturbed her, yet she understood his hatred of humankind. Even so he had a sense of honor. She had rescued him and he had repaid in kind.

"I wouldn't have been threatened by the jaguar at all if you hadn't kidnapped me," she murmured, already drowsy. It had been a long day, trekking through the forest, then making love with Eber.

"That is true, but I pay my debts."

"Is that the only reason you saved me?"

He nuzzled her neck and tightened his hold on her. At first she didn't think he was going to answer, then he said in a husky voice, "No, human. It wasn't the only reason."

"I have a name."

"A rather lovely name."

"Then use it."

He chuckled softly and hugged her a bit tighter. "Sleep well... Drew."

Chapter Four

Drew slept soundly through the night and when she awoke on that simple bed of leaves under an animal skin blanket that smelled of Eber, she'd never felt so refreshed in her life. Smiling, she stretched and tossed aside the second blanket he'd covered her with.

"Eber?" she called, glancing around the cave, but he was nowhere to be seen. She stood and wrapped the blanket around her middle.

Eber, in his half man, half cat form, stepped into the cave. He carried an armful of fruit and fistfuls of nuts.

"Somehow I thought you'd be a meat eater," she said as he squatted and placed the food in a large wooden bowl.

"I am. Like humans, Prowleryns are omnivorous. And I thought you'd appreciate this over my diet of raw meat."

"Thank you. I like it rare, but not raw." She sat cross legged and reached for an orange. The nuts looked delicious too. After last night, she was hungry and this food looked fresh and good. It sure beat the jerky in her backpack.

Eber joined her in the feast. Munching on nuts, he stared at her through narrowed green eyes. "Now that you're here, what do you propose we do?"

"Well, I was thinking that I could spend the rest of my time here learning about Prowleryns."

"And what do you intend to do with the information?" he demanded. "Are you hoping for a spread in one of your human magazines? Do you think I'll roll over for your camera so you can exploit my kind and send more humans looking for us?"

"Yesterday I put up with your insults because you didn't know me. Today you know exactly who I am and that I would never deliberately harm any species. I've probably done more to preserve various forms of wildlife than you have."

He growled softly, but didn't argue.

"I want to learn more about you to satisfy my own curiosity," she said. "I know some people couldn't handle the thought of shapeshifters living among us. I realize that sometimes in their curiosity humans cause more harm than good. But you chose to let me into your world, Eber. No one forced you to show me your life story. You did that on your own and I'd like to know why."

He closed his eyes for a moment and sighed. When he met her gaze again, she knew she'd gotten to him and something told her that was next to impossible for anyone, let alone a human.

"I can't explain it. I'm not sure I fully understand it myself, but I felt a... connection to you."

"I know," she whispered. "I felt it too."

"When I shared my memories with you, I glimpsed your soul. Clare was like you. Compassionate. Interested in everything around her. I never thought I'd find that kind of openness and honesty in a human."

She shook her head, a faint, sad smile on her lips. "You're saying I remind you of your wife."

"Yes, but that doesn't mean I'm confusing you with her. No one could ever replace Clare, just as I'm certain no one could ever replace you."

"You've been alone for a long time, Eber."

"So have you."

His words took her aback. He was right of course. Always consumed by her career and having no intention of giving up her freedom for any man, she had avoided serious relationships. But sometimes at night, she longed for someone to hold her. She wanted someone to share her innermost thoughts and touch her intimately, the way Eber had done.

"Are you saying you want to give it a shot with a human?"

He didn't reply but watched her with a thoughtful expression. Finally he said, "I want you to know my world."

"I want to know it," she said. "And I want you to know mine."

"I know yours," he snapped.

"All you know is the worst part of humanity. I'll make a deal with you, Eber. I'll spend the rest of my time here with you. Teach me about Prowleryns. When it's time for me to return home, if you've learned to trust me enough, you come with me and learn about my world."

He stared at her, a wary expression in his green eyes. His lips parted slightly, revealing the tips of his thick fangs. He ran his tongue over those gleaming teeth, then said, "Agreed."

"Good." She smiled. "Now is there someplace I can wash?"

Eber guided her to a pool fed by a gorgeous cascade. Drew had traveled all over the world to take pictures, but this rainforest was among the most beautiful places she'd seen. She loved the vegetation and the exotic creatures, though she'd never expected to find anything as magical as a Prowleryn.

She stood at the edge of the water at first, swishing her feet in it. Eber, now in his human form, leapt into the pool and ducked under.

Moments passed and Drew got a little concerned. "Eber?" she waded in deeper. When she stood waist deep, he emerged in front of her and she gave a gasp of surprise.

He chuckled and grasped her waist, tugging her close for a kiss. Sliding her arms around his neck, she stood on tiptoe and closed her eyes, enjoying the sensation of his mouth against hers.

Eber guided her toward shallow water and gently pushed her onto her hands and knees. Glancing over her shoulder, she strained to see him.

He knelt behind her, his big hands caressing her ass. Then he covered it with kisses. The tip of his tongue slid along the indentation and Drew moaned. Her head

dropped between her arms and her fingers sank into the mud and rocks. Eber's tongue teased her ass. It tickled her sphincter while he slid a hand around and fondled her clit.

"Oh damn," she breathed, her pulse racing, making her feel almost light headed.

Eber rubbed her clit and licked her ass, slowing his motions when he sensed she was about to come, then speeding them again. He teased her for so long that the frustrating pleasure was almost painful. She trembled all over and knew that soon she'd come regardless of whether or not he slowed down. After all, a woman could only take so much.

He seemed to know she'd had enough. Grasping her hips, he rose higher on his knees. The tip of his engorged cock prodded her pussy from behind, then he eased into her and pumped. One hand slid around and continued teasing her clit.

That's all it took. Drew actually screamed from the force of her orgasm. She dropped to her forearms, her ass bucking against him.

Eber held onto her snugly, thrusting over and over until he came too.

When he finished, he withdrew from her and took her in his arms. She melted against his chest and they sat for several minutes, the water lapping against them and the sound of the cascade soothing them.

She tilted her gaze toward his and they stared at each other for a long moment. Both seemed to know that their worlds had changed irrevocably.

* * *

Over the next several days, Drew saw the rainforest from a unique perspective -- that of a Prowleryn. Eber taught her about his way of life, his respect for the wilderness and his dependence on it for everything. He was a frugal hunter and was sure to use every part of the animals he killed. To him, killing for anything except survival was an act of evil and went against the Prowleryn code.

She snapped many wonderful pictures, but was careful to avoid photographing Eber, even on the sly. Though she believed some people would respect such a unique species, Eber was right in his fears that others would not. She couldn't risk exposing his

kind to those who might harm them. Also the bond between her and Eber was still fragile. He seemed to trust *her* but she knew he didn't trust humans in general.

Time passed too quickly and soon Drew needed to return to the human world to catch her plane home to New York City. From what she'd learned of Eber, she believed him to be a man of integrity, yet something told her he wouldn't honor his promise to visit her world. Though he traveled among humans at times, he generally avoided them. She knew he had good reason.

On the morning he was to guide her back to the village, he surprised her by appearing fully dressed in cargo pants, worn boots and a T-shirt. She'd never seen him clothed in anything except his leopard pelt and she had to admit he looked incredibly handsome. His tight butt was made for those pants.

"Get up," he said, playfully slapping her ass. "We're burning daylight."

Raising herself on her elbow, she grinned. "Does this mean you're coming with me?"

"I'm a man of my word."

After breakfast they headed back to the village. The residents were surprised to see Eber, but believed the story about him being a reporter who had come to write a story on rainforests.

Like all Prowleryns who traveled among humans, Eber had proper identification. Drew learned that some of his kind even had human careers. Adapting to their enemies and integrating with them had in many ways ensured their survival.

"Know your enemies," Eber had said during one of their long conversations. She wasn't sure if he'd been alone for too long or if he was naturally chatty, but he enjoyed talking as much as she did. This surprised her because she'd assumed he'd be the strong silent type.

She noticed the only topic he avoided was the location and identities of other Prowleryns. One day he might trust her enough to introduce her to others of his kind. Drew now accepted the idea that she and Eber were in this for the long haul. Already she didn't want to imagine a future without him and she sensed he felt the same. He

wouldn't be going home with her otherwise. She wondered how long it would take before he took her to meet his tribe.

A few days later, they arrived in New York City. Drew's sister, Gabriel, met her at the airport. Gabriel always had an eye for handsome men and by the way she looked at Eber, she liked what she saw. Still, mere good looks weren't enough to impress Gabriel.

Right in the airport Gab started interrogating him with her usual questions to see if as a man he was "good enough" for her younger sister, but Drew put a quick stop to it.

"What do you mean stop the interview?" Gab demanded, lifting a sleek eyebrow and touching a hand to her short, reddish brown hair.

One thing about Gabriel, she never had a hair out of place and always looked impeccable, unlike Drew who spent so much time in the wilderness that her idea of accessories were hiking boots and a canteen. Spending hours at the beautician's wasn't her idea of fun. Not when she could be out in the fresh air, snapping wildlife photos.

"Drew, I have no idea who this man is," Gab continued. "All I know is that he shows up with my baby sister who claims she found him in a South American rainforest. I want to know a few things about him. Like what he does for a living --"

"He's an independent contractor --"

"What?" Gab wrinkled her nose. "Is that a way of saying the man is unemployed?"

Drew smiled at Eber and said, "Excuse us for a minute." She grasped her sister's arm and dragged her a short distance away. Eber remained behind, a slightly amused look on his face.

"Drew, why doesn't the man have a job?"

"Just stop with all the questions."

"I can't believe you're thinking with your pussy instead of your brains. Just because the man is..." Gab glanced over her shoulder at Eber, noting his perfect chest in his tight T-shirt and those long, muscular legs poured into his snug jeans. She uttered a

pleased little grunt, then shook her head, as if wakening from a dream. Turning back to Drew, she said, "I hope you know what you're doing. Do you have condoms?"

Drew rubbed her forehead, trying to keep her patience. "In case you haven't noticed I'm a grown woman. Just be nice to my guest."

"You mean mind my own business?"

"If that's how you want to put it. How are things going with the foundation?"

Both Drew and Gabriel volunteered at a local organization dedicated to preserving wildlife. Gab was into the social end of it, dedicating time to fundraisers and public speaking. Drew did more physical work, traveling to different sites to take photos and work hands on with the volunteers who ran different parks and sanctuaries.

"Great. Our last fundraiser did well. Now if the reprimand and small talk are over, I think your man is getting a little bored standing there."

Eber didn't look bored, but he did look slightly agitated. He wasn't accustomed to all this human hustle and bustle, and he had said he disliked airports. It struck her that New York City might not be the best place for a Prowleryn.

The women rejoined him and Gab said, "Just one more question. What is that cologne you're wearing?"

"I'm not wearing cologne," he replied.

"You mean you smell that way naturally? Damn, are there any more like you at home, but with a job?"

"Don't mind her. Gab talks first and thinks later."

"It's better than thinking with my --"

"Let's get out of here," Drew interrupted. She took Eber's arm and guided him toward the exit.

She loved her sister, but sometimes Gab could be a little too much. As a grown woman, Drew was more than capable of choosing her own dates. Besides, Gab had no idea what Eber was really like. How was she to know he had been a tribal leader? Talk about a career...

When they arrived at Drew's apartment, Gab had to leave immediately for a business meeting. Drew had almost forgotten how aggressive her sister was behind the wheel, not that a person didn't have to be in New York City, but Gab took it to new levels. She shouted out her window at three truck drivers and a cabby and had more rude hand gestures than most people had in their spoken vocabulary. Sometimes it was hard to believe she was the same classy, collected woman who was such a successful spokesperson for their organization.

"Maybe we should try to recruit your sister to be a mother of our race," Eber said once they were alone in Drew's spacious apartment decorated in her favorite colors -- soft green and pale yellow. "The children would be both powerful and beautiful."

"Excuse me," Drew said, raising an eyebrow. "There's no way I'm getting into a three way with my sister. Besides, when it comes to men, I don't like to share."

Eber smiled and took her in his arms. "Neither do I. When it comes to women that is."

She chuckled and embraced him. Eber kissed her deeply and swept her into his arms.

"Let's go to the bedroom. It's that way." She pointed to a door across the room. "After all these weeks away, I can't wait to stretch out on my own bed."

"Human beds never appealed to me... until now."

"Get used to it while you're in my world. After all, I got used to leaves and animal skin."

He smiled and brushed his nose against hers. "Very true."

Eber carried her to the bedroom and placed her on the bed covered in a thick floral quilt. They quickly shed their clothes, then he joined her on the bed.

Sprawling on his back, he glanced around the room. The walls were covered in photos she'd taken around the world -- the Grand Canyon, Kenya and the coral reefs of Australia. Sheer, pale green curtains hung in front of the double doors leading to a balcony from which she had a fantastic city view.

"I like this room," he said. "It smells like you."

Drew gazed at him. She placed a hand on his broad chest and smiled. He was so warm, hard and sexy enough to weaken a woman's knees.

She circled one of his stiff pink nipples with her fingertip, then leaned closer and licked the tight nub. Moaning with the sheer pleasure of touching him, she kissed her way down his muscular belly. His cock, which had lolled against his stomach, twitched to life. She held and stroked it and it hardened in her hand, growing longer and thicker with every caress. Finally she took the bulging head between her lips and sucked on it. She teased it with her tongue and blew lightly on the tip.

"Woman, I think you found another way to drive us to extinction," he breathed.

She chuckled and sucked his cock so deeply into her mouth that the tip brushed the back of her throat.

Eber groaned, his hips shifting toward her. He tugged her up his body and she straddled him. Their gazes locked and a thrill shot through her at the intensity in his eyes.

He rolled his thumb over her clit, then he grasped her breasts and kneaded them. Her nipples stiffened and she moaned and leaned forward so he could suck them. His warm, wet tongue swept over the sensitive buds. She ached for him so badly that she couldn't wait a second longer to feel him inside her.

She straightened, rose a bit higher on her knees and grasped his shaft. She guided him into her soaked pussy. Her eyes closed, she arched her neck back and rocked, guiding their pleasure.

Eber grasped her hands and their fingers entwined. They squeezed each other's hands tightly as she gyrated on top of him.

After a few moments, the pleasure became so intense that she couldn't control herself. She rode him fast and hard until she burst in orgasm. Seconds later he joined her, his lean hips driving upward and his gorgeous face contorted in unbearable pleasure.

Chapter Five

The following day, after meeting with her agent, Drew gave Eber a tour of the city, then took him to dinner at one of her favorite restaurants. "What do you think so far?" she asked.

"It's too crowded."

"I mean what do you think of the people?"

"I'm impressed by the members of your wildlife group. I never thought humans could step outside of themselves and care about other species so deeply."

"You had too much experience with the wrong kind of humans."

"If I hadn't met you, I might never have realized that. I'll never fully trust your kind, but now I know that not all of you are savages."

Drew smiled faintly. "Well, that's a step in the right direction."

The waitress interrupted to take their orders. Both decided to have steak.

"How would you like that, sir?" asked the waitress.

"Raw," Eber replied.

The waitress gaped at him and Drew quickly said, "He meant rare. He's not from around here."

"Oh yeah," the waitress said with a relieved smile. "I thought he had an accent. Where are you from?"

"Rwanda."

After the waitress left, Drew grinned. "You take some people by surprise, Eber."

"But not you. Not even from the first."

"Oh you surprised me all right, but there was something between us I couldn't deny."

"It was the same for me."

Their gazes met and they didn't need words. Each knew what the other was thinking.

Drew had never imaged feeling this close to any man, but Eber was more than a man. Though they hadn't known each other long, she had already fallen in love with him. Strangest of all, that didn't frighten her because she knew in her heart he felt the same.

* * *

Late Saturday night, after a black tie event to raise money for the wildlife organization, Drew and Eber stepped into her apartment. Growling, he tugged at his bowtie and opened the buttons on his white shirt.

"I don't know how humans can stand this kind of clothing," he muttered.

She smiled and said, "Most men have the same complaint. Don't know many who enjoy wearing a tie of any kind."

"Your world is crowded, noisy, and polluted but quite interesting in its own way."

Raising an eyebrow, she asked, "I don't know if I should take that as a compliment or an insult, even though I agree with you."

"How would you like to go someplace more open and beautiful?"

"Back to the rainforest?"

"I was thinking about a trip to Africa. My son and several of our tribesmen run a safari business."

She gaped at him. "Hunting?"

A smile flirted with his lips. "Your kind of hunting. Only cameras allowed."

Placing a hand on her hip she narrowed her eyes at him. "And why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Because now I believe I can trust you with the lives of my people." He approached and caressed her face, then placed his hand to the curve of her belly. "Especially since you're carrying the next generation of Prowleryns."

Drew's heart skipped a beat.

Could it be true? Was she pregnant with Eber's baby? He'd said after sharing his magic with her, he'd know.

In her heart, she'd wanted to help the Prowleryns continue. The only time in her life she'd ever had unprotected sex had been with Eber.

"Drew, are you all right? Does this upset you?"

"No. If it upset me, I'd have done something to prevent it. I think I've wanted this from the first. When I found you, I knew I was meant to be with you and that Prowleryns will always be a part of my life. Now I'm sure of it." She closed her eyes and sighed.

He cupped her chin and tilted her face toward his. "Look at me," he commanded softly and she opened her eyes to meet his passionate green gaze. "Tell me what's wrong?"

"I'm just thinking about how long you live. You and my child --"

"Children," he said, once again smiling.

"Children will exist centuries after I'm gone. I'll probably never see my grandchildren or --"

"There is a way. When I performed the mate marks ritual, the passing of my blood to the ancestor of Joshi's mate ensured that she would take on some Prowleryn characteristics. If I perform a similar ritual with us, you will gain those features as well. A longer life, increased senses and the ability to heal faster."

"Will I be able to shift shape?"

"No. That is a gift one must be born with. I have heard of some magic that provides shapeshifting abilities, but it's evil and not practiced by my kind. Natural shapeshifters retain their usual mental and emotional state regardless of their form. Those changed by evil magic become savages, or so I've heard. Do you want to share my blood through magic?"

"If it means a longer life with you and our children, then yes. I do."

Eber held her close and nuzzled her neck. "Then it shall be done."

He took her hand and tugged her toward the bedroom where they both undressed.

Drew's heart pounded with anticipation and a hint of fear. Though she knew Eber would never deliberately hurt her, she wondered what this magic entailed. How did he intend to share his blood?"

Eber took her in his arms and held her to his warm, hard body. She loved the feel of their bare skin pressed close. His marvelous scent filled her with every breath and she rubbed her face against his broad, hair dusted chest.

Gently cupping her chin, he kissed her, then tugged her toward the bed.

Drew lay down and he sat beside her, caressing her face and hair.

"There will be some pain," he admitted. "I must penetrate your flesh with my teeth."

"Like the bite of a werewolf?" she asked with a nervous laugh.

"No. Werewolves are... different. I needn't bite deeply and I will be as gentle as possible. Believe me, Drew, the last thing I want is to hurt you."

"I know," she said, her voice almost a whisper.

Eber's eyes gleamed. His facial features changed, becoming more catlike. That beautiful leopard pelt emerged from his flesh and covered him from head to toe. Through his parted lips, she saw the tips of his white fangs and her heartbeat quickened.

He took her hand and raised it to his lips. Drew gasped as one fang pierced the fleshy part of her palm. He murmured words in that strange language she'd heard him speak before, then licked her blood. He sank his fangs into his lower lip and his dark red blood beaded on them, then he kissed her.

Instinctively, Drew licked his blood. He pulled away and gazed deeply into her eyes. Almost like on the first day they'd met, she floated in a dreamlike state, sharing his visions.

His love and respect wrapped around her, like a warm coat in the coldest winter. Drew grasped his forearms and tugged him nearer. Strength and energy like she'd

never felt before coursed through her and she knew it was the Prowleryn magic -- Eber's magic -- taking root inside her.

Again he kissed her and she licked his lips, but due to his Prowleryn nature, the small wounds had already started to heal.

Drew stared at him, aroused by his animalistic beauty. She realized she had come to love this look -- something between man and beast.

"Don't change back yet," she said, caressing his broad chest. The smooth pelt felt wonderful against her palm. "Make love to me, Eber."

There was no missing the pleasure in his eyes. Purring softly, he kissed her again and stretched out beside her on the bed. He cupped her soft mound and kneaded.

Drew thrust against his caressing hand, her clit tingling and her pussy aching for him. While he stroked her, Eber kissed and licked her neck and shoulder.

"Please," she whispered, her heart pounding.

He purred louder, and swirled his tongue around her ear, then he took her nipple between his lips and tugged on it. He used the very tip of one fang to scrape it gently and Drew moaned. She clutched his head and held him close while he continued sucking and licking her nipple.

Then he knelt in front of her and guided her legs around his waist. He grasped her ass and lifted her, then slowly filled her with his thick, hard cock. While teasing her with short, steady thrusts, he rolled his thumb over her clit.

"Oh, baby," she breathed, her eyes half closed. She stroked his forearm and mewled with pleasure.

Soon she hovered on the edge. A few more flicks of his thumb and she came, her pussy throbbing around his stiff cock.

Eber growled and shifted his position. His body covered hers and he thrust over and over, prolonging her orgasm, then driving her toward another.

Drew closed her eyes and enjoyed the ride. She caressed him, loving the feel of his pelt over his powerful body.

She came a second time and Eber grunted, his body tight as he thrust faster, joining her in ecstasy.

Even as she lay in the aftermath, Drew actually *felt* different. Eber's life force flowed through her. She tingled all over, though she lay contentedly in his arms.

Finally the sensations faded, but she knew that he had changed her, not only in body. He had touched her heart and her soul. Never in her wildest dreams had she imagined sharing her life with a Prowleryn.

"Before you, I was consumed by hatred," he said. "I never dreamed of making peace with any human, but you've shown me that not all are savages, like the ones who destroyed so many of my kind. I honor you, my beautiful mate," Eber said close to her ear.

She tilted her face toward his and smiled.

"And I love you," he whispered against her lips. The profound respect and affection in his eyes made her feel like the only woman in the universe.

"I love you too," she replied. "My handsome mate."

Their mouths met in a deep, tender kiss.

Drew snuggled closer to him. In his arms she felt safe, protected and loved. She knew that together she and this Prowleryn could accomplish anything. Starting a family that would mingle both their worlds was only the beginning.

Kate Hill

What do trips around the world, endless nights of breathtaking sex, and a muscular, 6-foot 3-inch, brown haired, blue-eyed significant other have to do with Kate Hill? Absolutely nothing, but she can dream, can't she? In reality Kate is a single, thirty-something vegetarian New Englander who loves writing romantic fantasies. Visit her online at <http://www.kate-hill.com>, www.myspace.com/katehillromance, or join her newsgroup at groups.yahoo.com/group/katehill. Stop by Kate's Amazon blog at www.amazon.com.