

A woman with long blonde hair and a man are shown in a close embrace in a forest. A brown bear is visible on the left side of the image. The woman is looking directly at the camera, and the man is looking slightly to the side. The background is a lush green forest.

SH

CAN'T BEAR IT

CELIA KYLE

Can't Bear It

Strange Hollow

Celia Kyle

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This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents and dialogues in this book are of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is completely coincidental.

Blurb

Meg is a lioness on the run. After being used and semi-abused by her pride for more years than she cares to count, she's leaving the pride life behind and heading to Strange Hollow. A new life, a new home, awaits her there and she can't wait to begin anew and settle down to make little lions of her own. Only, the one man who qualifies for the job also has a tiny little problem. He's a man-slut.

Jacob loves his slutastic behavior and wouldn't have it any other way. Men, women, either, both, they all do it for him. Until he meets a certain curvaceous lioness who changes the rules and makes his bear want something he's never wanted... a mate.

Chapter One

Sex had become a chore. Maybe not a *chore*, but it wasn't something Meg looked forward to either. She had her choice of males, three to be exact, though the eldest of the lions was able to overrule her if he desired. And then there was the fact that the three men she could choose from also serviced her sisters. And cousins. And aunts. Oh, there were a couple of women in the pride who'd migrated from other groups as part of a "lioness exchange" in order to ensure there was no in-breeding. But the fact remained. The dick that entered her had probably been inside one of her family members. Recently.

Ick. Ew. Gross.

"Margaret!" Great. Her Aunt Nia. "Margaret! It's your turn, dear heart."

Meg sighed and brought her legs closer to her chest and rested her forearms on her knees, her chin then settling on her forearms. She stared across the street, watching the pigeons flutter and fly around the fountain, pecking at the seeds dropped by the old man who lived down the street. How she envied the birds. Their monogamous nature meant that they'd only mate with each other as long as they lived. She longed for the same treatment, regardless of how odd it made her.

Pride ladies did not object to sharing. They bore the children they were gifted with gladly, and then surrendered them to another pride or they joined the ranks. A lioness definitely didn't look outside the pride for sex. Ever. A lioness gave birth to lion cubs. Period. End of story.

Her feelings didn't matter. They never mattered.

"Margare—Oh! There you are."

Meg tore her thoughts away from her heart's desire and plastered a smile on her face before turning her attention to Nia. "Hey, Aunt Nia."

Her aunt harrumphed. "I've been calling for you, Miss Margaret. It's your day and Lincoln has a mid-afternoon meeting. Marcus has a dinner date with some woman he's thinking of bringing into the pride, and Nicholas wants to do his morning run. They'd like you to come in and make your choice so they can get on with their day."

Her choice. Right. She held back her snort of contempt. Barely. Out of the three of them, Meg preferred Nicky, but she knew he wasn't attracted to her plus-sized frame. "Lincoln please."

He'd be a wham, bam, please don't get your juices on my Armani man. She could always count on him to be no-nonsense about the mating. It was a job to him, just like running Lion Inc, the pride's investment firm. Hell, one time he hadn't even ended his phone call and had just taken her across his desk without breaking his concentration on the call or sounding out of breath. That took talent ... and indifference.

Tears burned Meg's eyes and she blinked them away. No sense in wallowing in her sorrow. She'd done enough of that since waking.

Her aunt stroked her head, her fingers sifting through her hair just as her mother had done before leaving her for another pride. "Oh, Margaret, I know this is hard on you, but the men work hard to care for us all. It's for the good of the pride. And your gift will only strengthen us."

Her gift? How about her ra—No, it wasn't like that. She went almost willingly.

Almost. "I know, Aunt Nia, I know. Let Linc know that I'll be in shortly and we can dispense with the mating. He should make his meeting without a problem."

Her aunt patted the top of her head like a person would pet their loyal dog. Good girl, Megsy. Who's a good girl? That's right, Megsy's a good girl. Then they'd toss a Frisbee and she'd trot off after the toy. Just like a good, obedient little puppy. Or lioness. Do as you're told, Margaret. For the good of the pride, Margaret. Your will is secondary to that of the pride.

"Good girl."

Meg pulled away from her aunt's touch and returned her chin to her forearms.

Her aunt cleared her throat. "I know this is hard..."

"It doesn't matter. I'll do my duty."

"Very well, then. I'll go let the men know of your choice."

Meg listened to her aunt's feet padding across the dried leaves and twigs, the dead foliage cracking and creaking with her every step. Deep down, Meg's lioness stirred.

Hunt game? it wondered.

No. It's Nia. We'll have Lincoln to contend with shortly.

Her lioness growled and snarled.

Yeah, she felt the same way. Regardless of how impersonal she wanted these encounters to be, she truly longed for the love that was supposed to accompany coupling. As cliché as it sounded, she wanted her one true love to actually *make love* with her. Daily, hourly ... forever.

Meg rolled to her feet and followed in her aunt's footsteps. Except, regardless of her larger size, she navigated the yard on silent feet. Something no one in her pride was able to do. Quiet as a mouse wasn't just a saying for Meg, it was life. Like a true lion, she could creep and crawl and not make a sound.

She walked to the front door, her head held high. Just because she wasn't looking forward to the next few minutes didn't mean she had to be as meek as a mouse. She was a lioness of the Atlanta pride.

Lincoln was waiting for her. "Margaret. I've been waiting." He glanced at his watch. "Let's get this finished, shall we? The office called and they want to move up the meeting." His phone rang. "Hello?" He held out his arm, gesturing for her to precede him.

She didn't say a word. She couldn't. Tears stung her eyes, gathering on her lower lashes. Meg couldn't blink them away this time, so she wiped the back of her hand across her eyes and prayed that Linc was too involved with his call to notice. The moment she crossed the threshold of the mating room she unsnapped her jeans and lowered the zipper.

Linc remained engrossed in his phone call. "Yes, yes, I'll be there. What's the price on GM now? Uh huh."

Meg wiggled her pants over her hips, tugging her panties down with the cotton material and dropping them to the ground. She stepped free of the jeans.

"Right." Linc frowned at her and made a circling motion with his hand, encouraging her to turn around. "No, no. I don't want any shares."

Of course. She forgot. Linc preferred not to look at her as they fucked. Meg put her back to him and laid her chest on the mattress, putting her ass at the perfect height for Linc.

A single finger slipped between her labia, rubbing up and down before disappearing.

A moment later she heard the telltale click and squirt of the lube bottle and the finger returned, coated in cool lubricant. Of course she wasn't wet. How could she be when she'd only settled on him moments ago?

The phone call continued, drowning out the sound of his zipper being lowered. "How's Ford holding up?"

Meg crossed her arms and rested her head on them. Out of the corner of her eye she could see Lincoln, Armani pants undone, shirt jacket and tie still in place. With the exception of his partially flaccid cock hanging out, he looked ready to engage in a corporate takeover.

"Decreasing? Maybe we should scoop up a few... Uh huh." Lincoln stroked his prick, and she watched as he encouraged it to hardness.

Great. It was *that* time.

Lincoln wasn't bad looking, and had he actually *tried* when they were forced together, she imagined he could be a decent lover. He'd always been no-nonsense with her, though.

Meg re-settled her head and flattened her back, presenting her ass and pussy to the man behind her. Prepping herself made for a quicker "transaction." She relaxed her muscles, getting ready for his invasion.

The head of his cock probed her entrance, slipping and sliding in the lube he'd liberally applied before he finally found her pussy. He pressed forward, his dick sliding into her slickened passage with relative ease. He didn't even moan or grunt. "Oh, yeah, we should definitely invest in that project."

Lincoln pumped his hips, shifting back and forth as he worked his cock in and out of her. In and out and in again, he drove his dick into her. She didn't even pretend with him anymore. It wasn't as if he faked love or even affection for her. Why should she?

"Shoot me the specs as soon as you've got them. I'd like to review the reports personally. Hold a moment, will you?"

A low beep reached her ears, and then Linc was gripping her hips, pumping faster and harder, increasing his speed with each passing moment. He grunted with each thrust, pounding into her from behind until he gasped, his cock embed in her pussy. Now he did seem to respond to her, his hips jerking. One, two, three last pumps and he groaned. She could feel his prick pulse within her, and she lay passive, waiting for him to finish.

Lincoln pulled free and snapped his fingers at her to get her attention. She turned her head just enough to see him motion to the bedside table. Baby wipes. Right. She pushed herself up enough to snag them from the nightstand and tugged two free. One for him and one for herself. She hated having spunk trailing down her thighs.

She handed one to him and he wiped himself clean before tucking his flaccid cock into his slacks and zipping up. From coming to zipping took less than a minute. He pressed a button on his phone and picked up the call where he'd left off.

"Sorry about that. Juggling my briefcase. Heading out the door now..." And he did exactly that, leaving her alone in the mating room.

She wiped her pussy once more and tugged her pants on. She didn't bother zipping them. The men performed when they were expected to and never when they weren't scheduled. So she basically lived in a house full of women. She padded down the hall and slipped into her bedroom, stripping as she made her way to the bathroom. A quick shower and she'd be free of his seed. Of his taint.

Then again, that wasn't fair to paint Lincoln, or the other men, in such a poor light. They did as they were told and helped maintain the strength of the pride. Men were expected to make money and fuck. Women were meant to take it. At least, that's how it was in *their* pride. And since Meg had never met another pride, she didn't have anything to compare hers with.

The scalding hot water pounded her back, shoulders and ass. She drowned herself in the water, hoping the heat would purge her without and within. She hated these days. Twice a month she was expected to submit. Twice a month since she'd turned eighteen. For almost twelve years she'd unceremoniously copulated with one of the three men. Almost twelve years and she'd never become pregnant. No one said anything, though she was sure they suspected.

Meg finished her cleansing and dressed in her trademark jeans and T-shirt. The females were used to her disappearing after the mating and she didn't disappoint them.

It was a ten minute walk to the drugstore down the street. Ten minutes up, ten minutes while she argued with herself, and ten minutes back. Thirty minutes total and the result was yet another month of being barren.

Regardless of the warnings and assurances from the drug makers, she wondered if she was truly having an abortion each and every month. Was that what the pill did? And why, after so long, did it still work for her when it was supposed to lose its potency with extended use?

The answer to those questions didn't really matter, though. The point was that twice a month she swallowed a pill and her worries of pregnancy melted away.

As the ad said, *If plan A failed, try Plan B*. She popped the small, white pill.

Chapter Two

Jacob leaned against the wall, scanning the occupants of the Cauldron for his next conquest. Love 'em ... and then love 'em some more ... and then leave 'em. That was the motto he lived, and would someday die, by.

A curvaceous brunette, stacked two times over with breasts and ass, sidled up to him, and he bit back his smile. The two of them, they snarled and fought with each other all the time. He liked to think of it as sexual chemistry. She called it overall hatred and disgust. Tomato and tomatoh. But he got to play in her sandbox either way—regardless of her personal feelings.

The sweet scent of the forest surrounded him, drowning out the beer and cigarettes and sex. “Man-whore.”

Ooh. She was feisty tonight. “Jacey.”

She snarled and turned toward him, her shoulder leaning against the wall. “You know I hate that nickname.”

He took a drag on his cigarette, blowing out the jazzing smoke before he answered her. “Yeah, I do, but I like it.” He stared at her from the corner of his eye.

Sexy didn't even begin to describe Jacinda, the town's matriarch. She had long, wavy brown hair that wasn't brown, but it was. It looked like it was almost a living thing, like her hair belonged in one of those shampoo commercials, swaying this way and that, shining. It was her eyes that attracted a man, though. Those violet eyes that glowed in the darkened club, drawing a guy in, making his cock rock-hard and ready. Yeah, he'd popped a time or two thinking about this one. Maybe more than a time or two.

She was all meat and soft cushioning too. With full breasts, fuller hips, thick thighs and an ass begging to be smacked and spanked. Of course she'd nearly broken his hand the first time he gave in to the urge to pop her one. As it was, he ached for a week. And it wasn't his prick doing the hurting.

“Keep pushing, Mr. Mc-sluts-a-lot.” She turned her attention to the other club patrons, and he shifted until his body faced hers.

“Yeah, well, you know how much I enjoy the lovely endearments you come up with for me, dear heart.” He hit the cigarette again, blowing the smoke in her direction.

She glared at him. “Look, Jacob, if it wasn't for the fact that you've got this bi-sexual slutdom thing going on, you'd be out of here in half a heartbeat.”

Yeah, yeah, he knew the drill. “Uh huh. And who's moving in that needs to be protected from little ole me, Miss Jacey?” He opened his senses, wondering if the fresh meat was somewhere in the club. Nothing unusual, so he returned his attention to Jacinda. She never gave him the “slut” speech unless she *didn't* want him going after a new resident. He'd get his claws in them, though. Eventually, all the single residents wanted a piece of the bear.

Jacinda stared at him. “She's sweet and has been sexually abused enough, Jake. Leave her alone and focus on your boy toys for a while. She doesn't need the shit storm you'd bring into her life. She wants peace and quiet. Not loud, raunchy sex.”

Jacob stepped into her space, chest to breast. “You sure you couldn't use a nice round of loud and raunchy. I could give you what you want, Jacey baby.”

She shoved him away from her, disgust evident on her face. Jacob just laughed. How he loved pushing her buttons.

He smiled, feral-like. "Yeah, yeah, leave the new baby alone until she gets her feet wet. Got it, Miss Jacey." He saluted the town's ruler and turned away from her, dismissing the woman from his thoughts. He still had prey to hunt for the night.

Jacob pushed away from the wall and wove his way through the Friday night crowd. Bodies shifted and slid out of his way, recognizing a predator on the prowl. He surveyed the bar's occupants. A head above most of the other patrons, he could see everyone with ease. Only his brother bears were as tall and wide as he, and they weren't anywhere in sight tonight.

He took in a deep breath, searching for the body that'd be receptive to him this evening. There was always that subtle scent of forest and plains that accompanied a person that a bear would welcome and embrace. Sometimes it was there and sometimes ... not.

The air conditioner kicked on and the elusive smell he'd been searching for blew past. Someone, somewhere, would be open, willing and wanton for him. He just had to find the right man ... or woman.

He prowled the dance floor, not bothering to hide his intent. He nuzzled more than one attractive neck, searching and hunting his pleasure for the night. Bodies writhed and ground against each other. Sex on the dance floor. He was more interested in sex in a bed, against a wall, in a bathroom stall. Somewhere with a modicum of privacy. Or at least a door. Maybe.

Jacob slid past a lithe body, long hair hiding pointed ears, with a sweet ethereal face. Fae, but not. The woodsy scent came from this man. Yum. He hadn't been with a male in a while. Even a woman's ass couldn't compare to that of a male. The hard planes, muscles that were strong and hard, pushing and pulling. Yes, this man would do nicely.

He snuck in behind the dancing man, his groin pressed against the stranger's ass. The closer he got to this man, the harder he became. His cock throbbed, making itself known in his jeans, pushing against the fabric.

He licked and nuzzled the man's neck, teeth scraping the pale, almost glowing skin. "Hello, beautiful." He nibbled the man's earlobe, tongue tracing his ear.

The man's hips stilled for a moment before they resumed their gyrating motion, ass pushing into his groin. Then he moaned. "Jacob."

Oh, he'd know that voice anywhere. He remembered now. Sometimes it took a moaning, groaning voice and the sound of his name, but he always remembered his past lovers. He'd lost count, but at least he remembered their names.

"Avery." Sweet, eager, lustful Avery. "Come with me, Avery." Jacob wrapped his arm around Avery's waist, his palm landing on the hardened cock hiding behind the man's zipper. "You know you want to."

The man spun in Jacob's arms, a thigh insinuating itself between his legs. He played along, grabbing Avery's ass, pulling him close, erections rubbing while they rode each other's thighs.

Avery leaned forward, and Jacob leaned down for the shorter man. "Want, Jacob. It's been too long."

"Come on, baby." Everyone was "baby." Made sex easier. He didn't have to remember their names while he came deep inside their mouths, pussies, asses.

He twined his fingers with Avery's and led him toward the back of the club. Alleyways. They made for great sex. Gritty, dirty, hard and fast. All of Jacob's favorites.

The back door, black to blend in with the walls, swung open easily on silent hinges. Not that anyone in the club paid them a bit of notice. Nor would they had the door been rusted shut and Jacob plowed into it as a bear. They were caught up in their own little worlds of sexual conquest.

"This way." He drew Avery away from the back door, deeper into the shadows toward the end of the alleyway. Darkness enveloped him, hiding them from curious eyes. He pulled Avery forward and pushed the man against the brick wall. Before the smaller man had a chance to blink, Jacob was on him, tugging and pulling and stroking every inch of his body he could reach. Smooth, taut skin rippled and bunched beneath his hands.

He crushed their lips together in a fierce mockery of a kiss and took possession of Avery's mouth. He licked and tasted every inch of the man's mouth, savoring the woodland flavor, the fresh spring rain and new fallen snow. Tongues dueled and fought, discovering ... *rediscovering*.

Avery clawed at him, nails digging into the skin of his arms, shoulders, back, and Jacob reveled in the man's need. His cock throbbed and ached and he rolled his hips against the smaller man's, needing the extra pressure, the pleasure.

Avery tore his mouth away. "Want, Jacob. *Need*."

Jacob's bear agreed wholeheartedly. He wanted and needed just as much.

Jacob stepped back just enough to spin Avery around, pressing the man's chest against the red, roughhewn brick. Oh, how he envied the scratching sting the brick was sure to give Avery.

The other man went along with Jacob's rough treatment, shifting and moving exactly as he desired. Within moments Avery was posed exactly as Jacob desired, legs spread, ass out, chest forward and arms wide against the wall.

Jacob reached around his lover and unsnapped the man's jeans, stroking the hard prick that nearly jumped into his hand. Long and thick, the tip was covered in pre-come, showing without words just how close and ready Avery truly was. "Ready, baby?" Avery whimpered. Ah, now he remembered. Sweet little Fae didn't say much when they got close to kick-off.

Jacob pumped the dick in his hand from root to tip, the musk of sex and sweat filling his nose with each and every stroke. With one last squeeze, he abandoned that heavenly cock and popped the button on his own jeans and slipped the zipper down, anxious to free his own dick. His cock popped free, eager, hard and ready. The cool night air chilled the pre-come leaking from the head of his dick and he couldn't wait to slip inside Avery's warmth.

He dug in his pocket for a condom and the small packet of lube he pocketed before leaving the house. A quick tear and slip and he was sheathed in latex. "Baby, you ready for me or do you need some slick?" Because if he remembered correctly ...

"Ready. Always ready." Avery panted, pushing his ass back toward him.

Avery had to have been a Boy Scout in a past life. The man always came out with his asshole pre-lubricated. It was better than any condom Jacob could ever buy.

Before Jacob had a moment to say the words, those small hands yanked and pulled on Avery's pants, baring that perfect ass for him. Avery tipped his hips, exposing the

puckered hole and the glistening, clear substance surrounding his opening.

“Oh, baby.” Never had there been a more perfect sight. That smooth furrow, pink and winking at him with Avery’s every breath. Just gorgeous. He wished he hadn’t been so eager, wished he hadn’t been so hurried and ready to fuck this man. If he’d taken some time, he’d be able to bury his face between those ass cheeks and lick and nibble that hole for hours on end.

“Come on, Jacob.” Avery whined—so pretty. “Fuck me, already.” The smaller man turned his head to look him in the eyes. “Or I’ll find a bear who can.”

Oh, little pushy bottom. He’d have to make some time for Avery after tonight. The man was just cruising for a four-hour fuck session with Jacob. Cruising. He’d be happy to oblige. Later.

Jacob placed his hand in the center of Avery’s back, forcing the man’s cheek against the stone wall. With his other hand, he grasped the base of his cock and placed the tip of his dick at Avery’s hole. Avery’s heat kissed the head of his dick, winking and begging him to press hard and deep. Holding his breath, he pressed forward, gasping while the man beneath him moaned.

Halfway in he paused and eased back before pushing forward once more. In and out. Two inches forward, one inch back. Jacob was large by Were standards and was fucking huge when compared to men. He wanted Avery to ride the sting, not endure pain.

The slick heat enveloped his cock the deeper he went, the scorching temperature coaxing his pleasure higher with each thrust and retreat. Like a velvet glove, Avery wrapped around him, milking him and stroking him with his inner walls. The musky scent of their sex surrounded them, filling his nose and lungs with that deep earthy scent that clung to males.

In and out he plunged, riding the sweet bit of Fae ass that opened for him, pounding, balls slapping against Avery’s with each and every thrust. Forward and back and forward again, he sunk into Avery. The man moaned and groaned, panting light and breathing heavy, lost in the pleasure of their coupling.

When the Fae started rocking and thrusting back against him, Jacob let loose, burying himself to the hilt with every shift forward and nearly coming entirely out with each shift back. Each breath meant an increase in pace, in force. He rode Avery hard, pumping and fucking and just flying and feeling.

His orgasm built from his toes. Tiny muscles tightening and spasming. Getting ready to jump off the cliff of pleasure and stop just short of pain. Those electric shocks of ecstasy shimmied and slid along each of Jacob’s nerves, gliding up his body, along his spine, and then settled back around his groin.

His body tight, muscles bunched and working hard, Jacob reached around Avery’s waist and grabbed the pulsing prick. He pumped the man’s hard cock. “Give it to me, baby. Give it.”

“Oh ... oh!”

Warm spunk covered Jacob’s hand, and that tender ass clamped down around his cock. He continued his punishing pace, urging his orgasm closer and higher. He needed this, wanted it, had to have it.

The pure unadulterated pleasure and ecstasy pulsed and bloomed, exploding from the head of his prick, filling the condom with his come. One, two, three more pumps and the pleasure he’d felt almost turned into pain. Almost...

Jacob rested on Avery's back for a moment, breathing in their combined scents, savoring the closeness of another body.

"Uh, Jacob? Can you... 'Cause I've got a date inside and he could be, you know ... the one or something."

Right. *Right*. He wasn't that guy. "Yeah, baby."

Jacob pulled free of Avery's body with a soft pop. Probably with a lot less finesse than he should have, but that was the nature of his beast. Bears got growly when they were pissed whether it was rational or not. He rolled the condom off, tied the end and tossed it further down the alleyway. Not like there were a lot of trashcans in a mostly deserted alley anyway.

It didn't matter that he shouldn't be pissed. He'd gotten exactly what he craved: some no-strings sex. Jacob was the town's "good-time" guy. He *never* wanted to be that *other* guy. Right?

Chapter Three

Meg stared at the empty soda can, tiny bubbles popping and snapping in the bottom as the minutes ticked by. She waited, wondering, planning and plotting. *Tick-tock tick-tock*. Seconds and minutes turned into half an hour and then a full hour passed.

Her ass grew numb, resting on the concrete curb of Sapodilla Avenue. Cars zoomed by, their tires coming perilously close to her toes, exhaust teasing and filling her nose. The lion inside hated this world of quick and fast machinery. Not a pride vehicle in sight, but that didn't mean anything.

She'd wait a little longer.

The phone on her hip, the newest, pinkest phone in creation, buzzed, and she pulled it from the holster at her hip. The ringtone, *The Cat Came Back*, told her it was her favorite cousin Gigi. "Heya."

Gigi popped her gum in Meg's ear, and she could practically smell the watermelon Double Bubble bubble gum. "Heya. Q-tip heads are hunting for ya. Coming home soon?" Gigi hated the setup of the pride almost as much as she did.

Meg checked her watch, the dazzling diamonds and platinum mocked her. Because who would give a twenty-something a thirty thousand dollar watch and not care, right? Wrong.

One hour and fourteen minutes. Twenty minutes longer than her last after-mating excursion. The "Q-tip heads", as Gigi often called them, were getting more and more lax with each passing absence. After a phone call, she usually had another hour before they'd physically come hunting for her. One Mercedes, a Lexus and a BMW, all in black, would come roaring down the two-lane road, their drivers hunting for little ole her. To the average onlooker, it'd appear that she'd won the hot guy lottery. Lincoln, Marcus and Nicholas were all tall, blond, built and good-looking. Not an ugly one in the bunch. At least, not on the outside.

It was time. Meg unfolded herself from the curb outside the drugstore and tossed the empty can into the nearby garbage.

"Meggie-may?"

Gigi, right. "Yeah, tell their highnesses I'll be going for a run. Then I'll be home." That'd give her at least two hours before they came hunting.

Gigi gasped. "B-bu—"

"Jogging, Gigi, geez. Not that kind of run." God, she loved her cousin, and out of everyone she'd miss Gigi the most. Tears stung Meg's eyes, but at least this time they didn't accompany lube and someone's cock. "I'll see ya in a bit."

"But, Meg, you don't..."

"I'll be home for dinner. Let the Q-tip clan know, will ya?" Before Gigi could question her or say more, Meg flipped the phone closed and tossed it into the garbage can. She'd really liked the pink too. Lincoln had especially ordered it for her.

With a shake of her head to dispel that niggling hint of regret building in her chest, she walked into the drugstore and thanked her maker that she lived in a beachside tourist trap. T-shirts and shorts lined one of the walls, along with several different styles of sandals. She figured her pride tracking chip was in her shoes, but couldn't ever be sure.

All of her old clothes had to go.

Meg bought a dazzling new top in the latest and greatest neon pink with a pair of matching shorts. Okay, they weren't great, but at least they were GPS locator free. She also snagged a bathing suit to act as temporary undergarments and a pair of sandals as well as a small chintzy purse to hold her ID and what little cash remained.

Across the street, dressed in her pink neon clothes, Margaret Montgomery, lioness of the Atlanta pride, waltzed into the First Southern Bank.

The building, backed up to the ocean, had deep cherry furnishings and floor to ceiling curtains. It lived and breathed old money. Old furniture, old tapestries and old everything else. Hell, half the staff was twice her age. But it was the type of place the pride liked to bank, and thus, that's where Margaret ended up placing her funds.

Meg filled out a withdrawal slip for five thousand dollars, and the old bat didn't bat an eye at the amount. With her arthritic crippled hands, she counted out Meg's bills after double checking her ID and gaining a signature.

It was her other transaction that caused the teeniest little problem with the bank manager.

"Come again, ma'am?" The bank manager, a short, portly fellow with a bit of a sweating problem, gaped at her. He flipped her wire order over in his hands to the tempo of his breathing. *Flip. Flop. Flip. Flop.*

She didn't think she'd stuttered. And he was staring at her, so she was pretty sure she wasn't being ignored like the Q-tips tended to do to her. The poor guy seemed actually perplexed. Huh?

"I'd like the balance of the account transferred to this account in Switzerland." She pushed the piece of paper toward him once again. Maybe he just hadn't read the printout. It'd taken her two months to get the account opened and prepared to accept funds. Doing everything in secret by phone and mail had been difficult due to living with so many others. She didn't understand what the difficulty was now.

"All—" He tugged on his tie, and she furrowed her brow. Sweat was pouring down his neck and seeping into his dress shirt. "All of it, ma'am?"

Oh, goodie, he wasn't a slow human, just a nervous one. "Yes, all of it." She nodded, a single jerk of her head, to ensure he got the message.

The millions she'd collected as an unsuccessful breeder for the Atlanta pride were now on their way across the ocean into a tiny bank account that no one knew about, or could touch, but her. She was two steps closer to full autonomy. She just had another thousand miles or so to go to be fully independent.

After leaving the bank, Meg waved down a passing cab, white, not yellow in her area, and hopped into the backseat. "International airport, please."

"Any particular terminal, miss?"

"Not sure yet. Heading there with hopes that I can snag a quick flight." She smiled into the rearview mirror, thankful that he was treating her like ... a human.

"Where you headed?" The cabbie navigated through the busy streets, giving a quick honk here and there to get other cars moving when the light turned green, but otherwise it was smooth sailing.

"North Carolina."

The cabbie nodded but didn't say another word, so Meg turned her attention back to the journey she'd just begun and the woman who was willing to give her a chance.

Jacinda Fergus.

Meg dug into her new purse and pulled out the tattered and worn letter she'd practically memorized by now.

Dearest Meg,

After careful review of your application, I would like to cordially invite you to become a resident of Strange Hollow. Our small town located at the base of Mount Mitchell is the perfect place for a lioness looking to roam and settle on her own. The men of Strange Hollow understand and respect women as well as their ability to make their own decisions.

The town has three rules that I enforce myself:

1. Murder is punishable by death.

2. Rape is punishable by death.

3. Outcasts are welcome. Elitists will be eaten on sight. This is not considered murder, but natural selection.

I don't tell you any of this to frighten you, but to make sure you understand that any behaviors or horrors you may have suffered in the past are just that ... the past. You are welcome here with open arms and open hearts. Come home.

Yours,

Jacinda Fergus

Home. A real home where she could do as she wished, be loved as she wished and live as she wished without having the wills of the leading lions weighing heavily on her.

The cab jerked to a stop. "This'll be your stop, miss."

Meg pulled a few bills from her purse, handed them to the cabbie and jumped from the car. "Thank you!"

She was going home.

* * * *

Or, maybe she wasn't.

The flight had been easy enough to arrange. Everyone in the airport had been willing to accept cash as payment. The flight, her meals, items from the gift store, all of it had been purchased with cash.

The rental car was another story.

Meg took a deep, calming breath, ignoring the hideous stench of jet fuel and car exhaust that surrounded her. The rental car office was on the outskirts of the airport, but with all the car traffic it reeked of the office's bread and butter. With every swish of the automatic doors, more of the smell seeped into the office. Mix in a bit of the jet fuel fumes from the airport, and her lioness was perilously close to jumping across the counter and gutting the attendant.

"Ma'am, please understand—"

Kill now? Her lioness could be a bloodthirsty bitch.

No, not yet. We'll get through this.

"No. I don't understand, *sir*." She used the last word as a slur. The man, boy, behind the counter couldn't be more than nineteen, and the snot-nosed little rodent was what stood between her and her home. She pushed up on her tiptoes, doing her best to intimidate the clerk with her size. The problem was that the counter was at least four and a half feet tall. Even on the tips of her toes she barely crested five feet. So, he just got to

see more of her shoulders. But they were mean shoulders, darn it. “I was able to pay cash for my flight, my meals, everything, to get *here* and now you tell me that you can’t rent me a car without a credit card? That’s ludicrous.”

“I understand that, ma’am.”

She was really beginning to hate being called ma’am as well. As if she were *old* or something.

“But we do have policies in place in order to ensure the company’s assets, and one of those is that cars can only be rented—”

“Listen, lunchmeat,” she snapped at him. She could feel her incisors extending, her skin itching as the change inched closer. Stupid lioness. She was going to get them arrested. “Quit reading from your little cue cards on the computer and rent me a car.”

She wasn’t going to lose her home when she was *this* close. Not yet, not now.

A throat cleared behind her and she couldn’t care less about the spectacle she was surely creating. She wanted to go home and these humans could just wait until she’d gotten the car she needed. Or they could become dinner. Whichever they preferred.

The throat cleared again. “Ma’am, if you’ll come with us...”

She froze. “Oh, hell no.” She eyeballed the clerk. “You called security.”

All the blood drained from the clerk’s face, leaving him a deathly shade of white.

Meg huffed and turned around to face who most surely were the guards the clerk had alerted. As soon as she’d finished her turn she was faced by two rent-a-cops, hands on their batons, chests puffed out as if they could do anything to her that she didn’t want. She was a lioness ... of Strange Hollow! Damn it! Who was apparently stranded.

“Fine!” She threw her arms up in resignation. “I’ll figure out another way to get home.” She stomped from the office out to the parking lot, holding her breath. Her inner kitty wasn’t going to take much more of these smells for long before she decided *her* method of transportation would suit them better, and Meg wasn’t looking forward to a trek on four feet.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw a phone booth and trudged toward it, thankful to see that it, at least, accepted cash.

Stupid car rental place with its stupid “must have credit card” policy.

Meg dropped in a few quarters and dialed a phone number she had memorized. The phone rang one, two, three, four times before it was answered by an upbeat, bouncy man. “Hello, hello, hello!”

Meg sniffled. She wasn’t near crying or anything, but the stress of the day was wearing her thin. “Is Jacinda there? Th-this is Margaret—”

“Megsie! You’re coming today? Yay! It’s me, Ethan. I help Jacinda and I gave her your application and she’s gone right now, but I can help you. Can I help you? What’s all that noise? Sorry. I’m a pup and I get all excited and my guys usually exhaust me, but they didn’t today and did you say what you needed?”

The man, Ethan, took a deep breath, and Meg cut in before he could start another round of babbling. “I’m stuck at the airport and no one will rent me a car and I can’t get there. Can anyone there come get me? I’ll pay them, of course, but I could really use—”

“Yup, yup, yup! I’ll have someone come over. Stay by the Seraphim Hands airlines desk and I’ll send ... someone. Don’t know who, but they’ll come and tell you that Ethan sent them. See you soon!”

Soon...

Chapter Four

Lions and tigers and bears, oh, my God. There was a reason bears came in last, the fuckers were bigger than a Mack truck. Hell, even she was scared of their size.

The woodsy, musky scent of the bear assaulted her the moment he stepped into the terminal. The air conditioner grabbed his natural odor and spread it through the building. Dark, primal, strong and definitely male. Her body did something it hadn't done since she turned eighteen. It responded. Before she even glimpsed the man whose scent intoxicated her, she became damp with arousal. Her pussy felt heavy, aching and wanting.

Meg panted and gripped the obnoxious blue purse, her knuckles white with the tight hold she had on the strap. With each and every shallow breath she inhaled more of the scent, the dangerous smell that threatened to overpower her senses. She squirmed in her seat, uncomfortable with the wetness of her bathing suit—her poor excuse for panties. The spandex did little to soak up her ever-increasing juices.

This first time arousal frightened and confused her. She'd gotten away from men, was willing to forgo companionship, even love, for a chance at independence. Yet her body betrayed her. And all this before she even glimpsed him.

Then ... he broke through the crowds, steps long and purposeful toward her. Tall. Massive. Huge. All of those words pushed to the forefront of her mind before anything else. Her lioness purred. An honest-to-god purr from the beast within. *What? Why?* Meg needed to know, to understand.

Protection.

Protection? The man looked as if he could snap her in two, yet the beast inside wanted to rub and cuddle the man striding toward her. Those long, thick legs were encased in tight blue jeans. The pants hugged each and every muscle, shifting and moving with each step closer. The fabric pulled and melded to his skin.

The cotton T-shirt he wore did the same. It clung to his chest, accentuating the chiseled muscles of his abdomen, chest and arms. Wide and thick with muscle, the man looked as if he could take care of himself and more. Those thick arms looked like they could cradle or destroy, whichever he chose.

Meg's attention continued its upward journey to his face. His chin was strong, rough and solid with a five o'clock shadow at noon. His lips were full, kissable, and looked so sweet and soft she wondered what it would be like to kiss him. The eyes were a startling blue that seemed both resigned and also held a deeper hurt.

"Megsie? Ethan sent me."

Meg jerked and shook her head.

"You're not Megsie? Sorry to have bothered you." The man, the stranger, took a step back and turned his attention to the milling people.

She stood and reached for the man, snapping her hand back a moment before she touched him, remembering that sometimes males disliked an aggressive female. The males of her pride hadn't cared for a woman who made the first move, who reached out.

"Sor—I mean, I'm Meg, Margaret Montgomery. I'm not "Megsie" but Ethan must have saddled me with the nickname. It threw me for a moment." She smiled, watching his eyes, watching the different emotions fly from here to there, wondering what he was

thinking when she had no business wondering.

This time was for her, alone. Not to go male hunting. She'd just broken free.

The man held out his hand and Meg took it, marveling at the difference in their size. She couldn't even begin to guess how tall he was. He towered over her. His hand enveloped hers in a soft, tender grip. He didn't try to overpower her with his strength, but seemed to acknowledge and accept that she wasn't an opponent he needed to battle.

"Jacob Williams, pleased to meetcha." He winked. "Any baggage or are you ready to go?"

Jacob's open manner put Meg at ease at once and she smiled in return. "Nope. I travel light."

"Naw, not too light."

Meg retreated into herself, of course. Big good ole boy like him probably went for the typical prom queen. Then again, he had to have *something* wrong, or at least something that made him an outcast. That thought boosted her as she walked toward the sliding glass doors of the terminal. She wondered what his problem was... She hoped it was the fact that he shot blanks or couldn't get it up at all. Yeah, that'd be karmic retribution all right.

Asshole.

*

Asshole.

Idiot. Dumbass.

Jacob followed Meg, Meggie in his mind, out of the terminal, admiring the extra cushion in her ass that she brought along with her. Of course that reminded him of how much of an idiot he was and how he'd opened his mouth and shoved his whole leg in it. Stupid, stupid, stupid. He'd only meant that he liked what he saw, but obviously she didn't take it that way. Her hunched shoulders and downcast eyes proved that to him.

The moment he'd walked in the door, he'd smelled her heavenly scent. The perfect mixture of fresh-cut grass and the open plains. Utter perfection. He'd spent some time weaving around passengers and others milling around the concourse, searching for her, trying to hunt her by scent alone. Too many and too much crowded his beast from all sides until he was forced to use his other senses. He found her by sight.

The sweet girl was sitting alone by the official Strange Hollow airline desk, Seraphim Hands, just like Ethan promised. The little Labrador pup fairly burst with energy when he'd enlisted Jacob's help, and in truth, he didn't mind helping the guy out since Jacinda was off dealing with some emergency.

He'd noticed her legs first, full but muscular. Strong calves and thick thighs led to hips that filled out the airport seat. He'd hoped that there was an ass to match the rest of her. Her breasts nearly popped out of her top, and he wondered about the color of her nipples. Were they a dusky rose or a dark peach to match the peaches and cream of her skin? Her long black hair cascaded around her shoulders, falling in large curls and delicate waves.

Her hair confused him a bit. Most lions, whether they were male or female, had blonde hair, and he wanted to know if her collar matched her cuffs, so to speak. Hell, his cock surely wanted to know.

Those clothes, though ... the bright pink and obnoxious blue of her purse didn't fit her at all. Ick. He'd have to take her to the mall on the way back to Strange Hollow to get

her some new clothes. He knew enough about her situation to know she'd just dropped everything and run. Something about controlling males...

From the moment he realized that the woman he'd been eyeing was Ethan's Megsie, he'd been hard as a rock and ready to go. Real ready. Then he'd shoved his foot in his mouth until he was kicking his own ass from the inside out. Idjit.

She would have been a nice distraction. After his encounter with Avery, Jacob had been off his game. The smooth words and sexual chemistry he shared with everyone but the mated, and Jacinda, had been off. It wasn't as if no one wanted him, per se, it was just that jumping from bed to bed was getting a little harder to stomach lately.

"This way, sugar." Sugar, his word for every woman in the world. Just like the "baby" he used for men, "sugar" kept him from embarrassing himself with the women.

She nodded, a quick jerk of her head, and he kicked himself once again. He really needed to get a hold of his tongue. Without checking to see if she followed him, Jacob took off toward where he'd parked his SUV.

"Hey!" He heard someone yell, but he hadn't walked in with anything so he sure as heck hadn't left anything. "Hey, Jacob!" The rhythmic flip-flop of sandals reached his ears and he stopped mid-step and turned around.

Meggie was jogging toward him, the purse draped across her body accentuating her bouncing breasts. "Slow down, Mr. Too-tall!" She finally caught up with him, a little out of breath.

Jacob winced. "Sorry, Meggie. Forgot you're just a tiny thing, aren't ya?"

She snorted. "Tiny, right. Make up your mind, will ya?"

He couldn't hold it back and he let out a big ole bear of a laugh. Pun intended.

She just rolled her eyes at him and kept on stomping by, leaving him to laugh by himself. She paused on the outskirts of the parking lot. "Well, He-man, you coming or do I have to guess which over-compensating piece of garbage is yours?" Then the spitfire had the audacity to harrumph.

Oh, he liked her already. Liked her a lot. She had a nice mix of fire and ice and a body that was anything but "nice." It was perfect. The only thing he'd have to work on was her self-esteem, but he'd give her enough praise to have her melting in his hands. He wanted Meggie for a day ... and night. Or four. Not permanent or anything. Bears didn't "do" permanent. Ever.

Jacob didn't ask for permission, but just snagged her hand, needing to touch her in some way whether she wanted it or not. Hand holding wasn't anything overtly sexual, but it soothed his beast a little. Big bear inside wanted to spread his seed and get inside Miss Meggie Montgomery. Wanted her like a squirrel wants a nut, and a bear wants to fuck every man and woman in sight.

Okay, his bear was probably the only one who wanted men *and* women, that's why he was in Strange Hollow, but whatever.

"This way." He kept his steps small, not wanting to cause her discomfort or make her jog again, but he did keep her moving toward his SUV. Once there, he turned off the alarm with his remote and the SUV chirped in response. He opened the door for her, admiring the way her shorts, regardless of their god-awful color, rode up her legs, revealing more and more thigh to his gaze. *Yeah, that's it.* "Meggie?"

She sighed. "What, Jacob? I'm tired. Today has been trying and you haven't made it much better. Can we please just get to Strange Hollow? I don't like being in unfamiliar

places and I'd like to settle into a place that will be familiar someday."

That urge to touch came back and he didn't resist it once again. He traced her lower lip with his thumb, feeling the silky smooth skin beneath the pad. His eyes locked on hers and he decided it was time for a little true confession whether it earned him a slap or not. He didn't want her thinking that she wasn't beautiful in any way. "Meggie, back there, when I said..."

"Yeah, I heard ya. I get it. I'm not everyone's cup of tea. It doesn't matter."

"Oh, but it does. 'Cause when I said you didn't travel too light, I meant it as a compliment. A big guy like me? I like a woman with meat on her bones. Curves, curves like yours," he leaned forward, his mouth mere centimeters from hers, "they get me hot."

Meggie gasped and Jacob retreated. This was supposed to be a slow, subtle seduction. And, apparently, his bear was as subtle as an ox.

Closing her door, he strode around the back of the SUV and took a moment to adjust his aching cock. He was hard as a rock, his prick extending down his pants leg, begging and hoping to be set free, but it wasn't going to happen just yet. He wanted her, no doubt about that, but it'd take a little finesse—and when he wanted to, he could pull off finesse. Sorta. Maybe. Okay, probably not, but he'd sure as hell try.

Chapter Five

The house... No, not just *the* house, but *her* house, was perfect in every way. It was quaint and small. Jacob swung the mammoth SUV onto the smooth concrete driveway and Meg sat, mesmerized.

The front lawn was well manicured with grass all the same length and blooming flowers lining the front walkway to the porch steps. Steps. She had porch steps and a porch! In addition, it was a wraparound porch extending the entire front and side of the cottage. The home was a soothing pale blue with wood siding construction. On either side of the front door were big bay windows with white curtains. And the front door... It was bright cherry-red, accenting the sky-blue of the home.

"If it doesn't suit you, we can always contact Jacinda. I'm sure she'll..."

"It's perfect. Absolutely perfect." Beyond the color and lawn and anything else she could think of, the most important part of the house was one simple fact: it was hers.

"Well, all right, then." Jacob exited the car.

Meg quickly followed suit, unable to contain her excitement over seeing the house for the first time. She bounded toward the front door as if springs were attached to her feet and skidded to a halt in front of the wooden barrier. She reached for the doorknob, but Jacob beat her to the brass handle. "Hey!"

"Who has the keys to this operation?" He raised one eyebrow and the corner of his mouth followed suit. His infinitely kissable mouth. Meg stepped aside and he unlocked and opened the door, bowing to her with practiced ease. "After you, madam."

She curtsied, a small dip of her knees, and skipped through the doorway feeling as if a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. For the first time she was out on her own in a house that belonged to her—and no lions or other lionesses to listen to.

Inside the home, Meg was awed by what she saw. Cherry hardwood lined the floors of each and every room except the bathrooms which had an off-white tile. All the walls were the institutional white of an apartment, but essentially, she had a blank canvas.

"Wow." She stood in the living room, taking in the small brick fireplace, the large bay window looking out to the street, and the sheer size of the room. She could easily fit in a couch and loveseat along with a coffee table and entertainment center in the room. Something nice and comfy-cozy to relax on in the evenings.

Her next stop was the dining room that she immediately decided would become her office. For what, she didn't know, but every entrepreneur needed an office and she'd have one. If only because she could.

Then there was the kitchen. And, oh, my God, a *Better Homes and Gardens* worthy kitchen. Stainless steel appliances were abundant as was granite on each and every surface. There was an island and a hanging above it for her pots and pans—once she had some.

The other rooms she viewed were just as spacious and gorgeous. There were two bedrooms, both large, that could easily accommodate king-sized beds and all of the other furniture to match the bedroom suite. The bathrooms both had jet tubs and stand-alone showers along with double sinks and more marble than she could imagine. The house was fit for a queen ... or a newly-free lioness.

Standing back in the living room, Meg stared through the bay window out over the street, unbelieving that this truly was her new place.

“Well, what do you think?” Jacob’s deep voice rumbled through her, zinging from head to toe and then settling in her sex.

She spun to face him, not realizing how close he really stood. “Oh.” She stepped back, her rear coming into contact with the windowsill. “It’s, um, gorgeous. Beautiful. Better than I imagined.” She swallowed against the growing lump in her throat and willed her rising ardor to cool. She didn’t need emotional attachments yet ... if ever.

“Yes, you are, but I was talking about the house.” He gave her a half smile. He teased her then, his fingers sliding up from her wrist to her shoulder before moving to massage the base of her skull.

He eased closer to her, his lips coming nearer with each passing second, and she held her breath, wondering if he really would. Did she want him to? Was she any good? They’d never kissed—her and the lions. That was something shared between true lovers, not lionesses and lions. This ... this was her first true kiss and she yearned to feel Jacob’s lips against hers.

“Tell me to stop,” he whispered against her mouth, his breath mingling with hers.

“No,” she whispered back a moment before he closed the distance between them. He captured her lips in a bruising kiss, his tongue delving into her mouth with the intent to dominate—and dominate he did. His tongue flicked and tasted, and she tentatively returned his caress, easing her tongue into his mouth. That earned a moan in response and he slanted his mouth over hers, giving her better access.

Jacob insinuated himself between her thighs, the hard ridge of his cock pressing and grinding against her heat. If only ... If only there were a bed, a blanket, something nearby that they could lie on, love on. She wanted him and his kisses and caresses for as long as she could get them.

He continued his assault, performing an erotic come-and-get-me with his tongue, licking every nook and cranny of her mouth with what seemed like practiced ease.

She probed his mouth, mimicking his every move, anxious to give him the pleasure he gave her. She searched out more of his musky, woodsy taste, reveling in his scent and flavor.

And like a cold shower, the spell was lost with the clearing of a throat nearby.

Meg tore her mouth from Jacob’s and peered around him, gasping when she caught sight of who could only be Jacinda Fergus, matriarch of Strange Hollow. *Oh. Shit.*

“Jacinda, impeccable timing as usual.” Jacob’s voice rumbled through her and Meg’s pussy clenched in response, unable to stop her body’s reaction to Jacob.

“Well, I saw you drive in. Only, I didn’t expect ... this.” Her voice seemed icy cold, and Meg worried that the two of them had a history she hadn’t known about.

“Um, sorry?” Meg eased around Jacob and put space between them. “I didn’t realize...”

Jacinda waved away Meg’s apology. “It’s nothing. I just wanted some time for girl talk and to see if you needed help with decorating.”

“And that’s my cue to leave.” Jacob pressed a quick, chaste kiss to Meg’s lips before striding from the house.

Meg watched the sway of his hips as he strode down the driveway, and she couldn’t restrain the shudder of desire that shot through her body.

“He’s trouble, that one.” Jacinda’s soft, angelic voice sounded from behind her.

“Is he? Do tell.” She didn’t want to get tangled up with the wrong kind of man so soon after gaining her independence.

“He’s... The thing about Jacob is...” Meg turned to face Jacinda, wanting to read whatever emotions she could. The fairy with the long, brown hair and glowing violet eyes, nibbled on her lower lip while she searched for the words. “He’s a bit of a man-slut.”

She raised her eyebrows, skeptical. “Man-slut?”

Jacinda nodded. “No offense against him. He’s a bear, it’s what they do.” She shrugged. “He can’t help his present just like you can’t help your past, Meg. It just is.”

Meg glanced out the window, watching the big SUV drive away, and wondered. Would it be so bad to have a fling with the roaming bear?

Yes.

* * * *

Jacob’s cock was hard. Harder than hard if that were possible. Meg, with her sweet eyes and luscious lips, got to him. Made his bear think things it didn’t have any business thinking or wanting or fantasizing about. Stupid bear.

He needed to purge the sweetness of her kiss from his mouth, his mind ... his prick.

Driving home, he navigated his SUV through the streets of town, turning this way and that until he finally ended up on Main, driving past the Cauldron. The parking lot was nearly empty. There was a car or two Jacob recognized and those owners couldn’t give him the release he needed right now. Nah, they wouldn’t do at all...

Wait a second though. Avery’s little beat-up Honda was in the lot. The boy’d been eager enough the other day...

Without second-guessing himself or listening to the raging bear inside, Jacob swung into the parking lot and threw his SUV into park. Before the truck stopped rocking, he was out and striding toward the front door of the Cauldron, sweet ass and all the cock he could suck on his mind.

He stood inside just past the doorway for a moment, giving his eyes time to adjust to the darkened interior. Once he could see again, he scanned the interior, looking for his prey. In a back booth, he spotted the sweet little morsel sitting alone.

Jacob didn’t waste time. He moved around chairs and tables, his prey in sight. He didn’t wait to be invited to sit when he got to the table, but just slid into the booth, smiling. “Avery, baby.”

He got a smile in return, big and beautiful. “Jacob!” The smile turned flirtatious. “Fancy meeting you here.”

“Uh huh. So, baby, did Mr. Whoever turn out to be “the one”?” Sometimes men found one person to spend their lives with. Jacob didn’t think he was one of them, but that didn’t mean Avery wasn’t.

Avery took a sip of his drink, teasing the straw with his tongue. “Nu-uh.”

Jacob eased closer. “Care to spend a little more time with “Mr. Wrong”, then?”

“You know exactly what I like.” Avery purred and eased even closer.

Jacob kissed the other man, lips brushing, his tongue dipping just inside for a deeper taste. “Out back.”

Jacob’s cock was hard as nails while he dragged Avery behind him through the bar.

In moments, they were out back as they'd been days before, cock eager, hands stroking and petting, pulling on clothes and anxious to get to skin. He tugged on the man's belt and delved between skin and jeans to feel Avery's hard dick jerk in his hands. He continued his journey to just behind the man's balls and felt the telltale bit of slick.

"Always ready for me, baby?"

"Always." The other man panted and moaned. "Always. Fuck me."

He spun Avery around and pulled on the man's jeans, exposing his bare ass. Jacob undid his own pants, freeing his hard erection and sheathing himself quickly, ready to be inside someone, ready to brush the memory of a sweet mouth, round hips and cute ass from his mind.

Condom on, Jacob separated Avery's cheeks with his hands and placed the head of his cock against the man's asshole. And then ... promptly got soft. As in, no erection, no hard dick, no pounding nails ... soft. Mr. Happy was not happy and he knew exactly whose fault it was.

She had dark hair, gorgeous eyes, a body that even a priest would lust after, and the sweetest little bow-shaped mouth that he ached to kiss again. Damn it. "Fuckity-fuck."

Avery wiggled his bottom and pushed it out toward Jacob. "That's what I'm waiting for, Jacob," he whined.

"I-I know, baby. Just one second." He stroked his cock, willing it to harden once again. He squeezed and massaged and prayed to God that the damned thing would fill with blood so he could fuck Avery through the wall, and then... Nothing. Not a damned thing. He thumped the head of his dick, wincing at the blossoming pain that coursed along his shaft. Well, at least he could feel something.

"Jacob?"

"Uh..."

Avery pulled his jeans over his hips and turned around, his gaze immediately going to Jacob's wilted dick. "Oh. You know, Jacob, it happens to everyone. Not me, but... Okay, no one I know, but..."

He raised his hand, silencing the talkative man. "It's a woman."

"A woman? Wow. And you're with me because..."

He hung his head, his attention focused on his prick. "I don't know." And he didn't.

"Well, it was fun, sorta. Not really, but I'll see ya around, Jacob." And with that Avery zippered and snapped his jeans closed and sauntered down the alley through the Cauldron's back door.

"Shitmotherfuckershitfuck." At least he hadn't gone through with it. At least he could say that much. He'd come close, but... His bear growled and roared, pissed that the human side of him had even *thought* of being with someone other than its mate. "Mate." He spat the word. He never thought he'd have one of those.

He needed a drink.

Jacob stripped off the lubricated condom, tucked his cock back into his slacks, and zipped up before heading toward the door Avery had just entered. It took his eyes a moment to adjust to the dim interior, but once they did he headed for the bar. He bellied up to the bar. "Whiskey on the rocks, make it a double."

"Little early." The bartender, Caleb or something, commented and then reached for a bottle behind the counter.

"Nah, top shelf." Today deserved top shelf.

“Troubles? Man or woman?” he asked while reaching for the bottle Jacob indicated.

“Woman. Mate troubles.” He tossed back the drink, whiskey burning while it made its way down his throat, the heat reminding him he was alive and needing to be punished for what he’d tried to do.

“Ah. Want to talk about it?”

Just what he’d needed, an impartial third party. “Pour me another and we’ll get to it.” He watched while Caleb filled the glass again. He nodded when it’d gotten to near the top. “The thing about it is...”

Chapter Six

Jacinda left with smiles and promises of shopping. With new information about Jacob in mind, Meg decided to keep her distance from the alluring bear. Nothing good could come from a fling. Her feelings were still too raw from leaving the pride, and an affair would only break her heart, not mend it.

A knock sounded from the front door. No, it was more like a rough pounding, and she wondered if Jacob had returned.

Meg glanced out the front window and froze. Four black BMW's packed her driveway and, without looking at the vanity plates, she knew exactly who they belonged to. *Damn it.*

It hadn't taken them long. Not long at *all* and already they were here to drag her back home. *No, no, no.*

The pounding came again followed by her Aunt Nia shouting through the solid wooden door. "Don't make me go big bad wolf on this door and break it down, Margaret!"

Oh, hell no. She hadn't grown a backbone and moved hundreds of miles away from her home just to have her new front door broken down by her aunt and the woman's minions. She was a lioness, hear her bitch the women out.

She stomped through the house, the ground shaking with her fury. She wrenched the front door open and ... froze. Half the women of the pride were standing on the front step of her porch, suitcases in hand. Meg stood there, mouth agape.

Her aunt closed her mouth with one well-manicured finger. "Close your mouth, dear, you'll catch flies."

Nia pushed past her and the other lionesses followed. Meg counted them as they entered the house, and by the time the line ended she had eight ladies in her two-bedroom home.

Oh, this would not do at all.

All of them started chattering at once, discussing decorations and sizes and additions, and it was all too much for Meg after the day she'd had. She lost it. "Enough! Nia." She hadn't ever called her aunt anything but "Aunt Nia" and the woman gasped at Meg's tone. "What are y'all doing here? Why do you have suitcases?"

Her aunt stepped forward. "We found your note and scented you to the airport and Gemma hacked the airport computers..."

Of course, Gemma, the computer nerd of the pride.

"And then we just did a little research and drove on up. Figured we'd need transportation, and since the men have used us for years, we figured they owed us. Plus, we took all our money, just like you did. We're here to stay."

"The hell you are!" Lincoln, Marcus and Nicholas's voices echoed in unison.

Great. Meg stomped her foot and groaned. The lions had arrived.

The room erupted with screams and yells. Men declaring and women telling them they were bat-shit crazy.

"No!"

"Yes!"

“Fuck you!” Wow, Gemma actually had a voice. And she used it.

“Gemma!” Nia gasped and clapped her friend on the back, smiling.

“Fuck me? Fuck you! You’re coming home.” Nicholas reached for Meg, and a deafening roar silenced the whole house. Twelve lions were suddenly quiet as a mouse.

Meg looked toward the source of the sound and froze. Her sweet, rugged bear had turned into a ferocious animal in a matter of seconds. Jacob’s shirt was hanging off him in tatters, his jeans split at the thighs and his chest was covered in a thick carpet of dark brown, almost black, hair. His face had elongated and formed a half-snout. The man ... was scary.

Nicholas, the strongest and biggest of the pride’s lions roared in return and stepped up to Jacob. Stupid mistake. “They’re coming home with us, *bear*.” He said the name in a sneer.

“No.” One word and he brooked no argument. Jacob dismissed Nicholas and waded through the gathering of people to come to stand behind Meg. He placed his claw-like hands on her shoulders, and instead of being afraid, she was strangely comforted.

“She’s ours,” Marcus stated, as if she were property.

“Mine.”

“Look, *bear*, we can come to an agreement,” Lincoln cajoled, ever the negotiator.

“No.” Jacob growled and shoved her behind him. “Mate trumps pimp, asshole.”

Oh. *Oh*. Meg snuggled up against Jacob’s back, soothed and calmed by the touch of his fur on her skin.

Jacob reached back and patted her hip. “You can leave now, or I can make you leave.”

Nicholas just couldn’t back down. He stepped forward, sniffing the air. “Mate?” He inhaled deeply, his chest expanding. “Then why do I smell bird all over you, bear? Is this a new realization or did you decide to stick with females instead of the male’s arousal and seed I can smell on you.” He took a step forward. “She comes with us.”

Her heart broke. It’d ridden high for moments, thrilled that the man she’d met only hours before felt the same as she did, that he recognized the mating instinct as clearly as she had. Only, it’d been a lie. Even she could scent the male arousal permeating the room, and she knew without a doubt that none of the lions or even Jacob were aroused by the situation they found themselves in.

“Regardless. Mate trumps pimp, asshole.” Jacob took a step forward and Meg released him, no longer enjoying his touch. “Leave.”

Growls filled the room and it took Meg a moment to realize that they weren’t coming from Jacob or the lions, but from the lionesses. They were asserting themselves, and a peek around Jacob revealed three white-faced lions.

“Leave!” they chorused as one, and without hesitation the men fled, jumping into their SUV and squealing their tires as they peeled out of the driveway.

“Well, glad I wasn’t needed.” Jacinda appeared to Meg’s left from down the hallway, looking as perfectly put together as always. The ladies turned on her, growling low. “Oh, stop it. I don’t want y’all for sex any more than you want me.”

That cut off the growls pretty quick.

“Now, if you ladies will come with me, I think these two could use some time alone and the eight of you aren’t even going to come close to fitting in Meg’s home. Come along now.”

And just like that Jacinda had the house cleared, leaving Meg with a half-shifted bear.

Perfect.

Meg scooted around Jacob and scurried down the hallway toward the kitchen. She had a feeling their conversation was about to get heated, and while a lioness could hold her own against a bear, knives were sometimes better. Thank God she had knives.

Thudding footsteps followed her down the hallway and she didn't stop until she reached the butcher block and had a carving knife in hand. She spun around to face the entrance to the kitchen and nearly laughed at the shocked expression on Jacob's half-shifted face. "Now, let's chat."

Jacob covered his groin. "I'm good."

"Shift back."

"Promise not to Lorena Bobbitt me, first."

"No."

"Then, no." He took a step back.

"Jacob. We're going to discuss this." She took a step forward, and the man actually whimpered. "Did you mean what you said?"

He nodded and took another step back as she stepped forward.

"And the reason you smell like a man in heat is because..." She'd never seen a bear nibble its lower lip before and couldn't withhold her laughter. "Ha! Ha! Jacob. I'm not going to Lorena Bobbitt you and cut off your dick. Shift back already."

"Put the knife down."

"Are you really afraid of me?"

He nodded. "I wouldn't hurt you in a million years, Meggie. And if you attacked me, I'd stand there and take it. So, yeah, think of this as self-defense. I like myself, so does the bear, most times. We're defending."

Meggie... She liked it. Everyone always called her Meg or Margaret, but no one had ever given her a nickname all their own. "Fine," she grumbled and put the knife back. "Better?" She held her open hands out to him.

He nodded, and she watched as the bear shifted and turned from half-man to completely male and the man she wanted desperately to mate with. If only she could trust him. Not five minutes out of her sight and he smelled of aroused male, and it *definitely* wasn't his arousal she scented.

"Well?"

"Uh..."

She nearly banged her head on the counter. "Spit it out already."

"I was afraid?"

"Question or statement?"

"Both." He smiled.

Men were idiots. "What were you afraid of?" Lord, it was like dragging details out of a two-year-old.

"You."

"Me?" She sighed. "Jacob, I weigh half as much as you do, even shifted. I'm seven inches shorter than you and you've got muscles I could never dream of. Try again."

"The thing about it is..."

This time she really did bang her head on the counter. Within moments Jacob

scooped her up in his arms, cradling her like a child and shushing her. “No, don’t do that. Don’t hurt yourself. I’ve hurt you enough as it is. The thing is... I’m a bear.”

“Duh.”

“Bears aren’t monogamous.”

“Neither are lions, most times.”

“Well, I hadn’t planned on it ... ever. I’m here because I like women *and* men. Other bears shunned me so I came to Strange Hollow. Not because I wanted a mate like you do, but because I wanted it all.”

He let her slide down his body, but kept her snug in his arms. She couldn’t resist his heat and laid her head on his chest, listening to the accelerated beat of his heart, letting her know without words how nervous he had to be. “And you were with someone else, because...”

“Because I was afraid of what my bear was telling me. I’ve never been a one-woman bear, Meggie, but I want to be ... for you.”

She nodded, rubbing her cheek against the soft hair on his chest. “So, you think I’m your mate. You got scared and tried to fuck someone else. Fuck the idea out of your head?”

“Well, when you put it that way, it’s sorta ... dirty.”

She sucker punched him in the stomach. “That’s because it is dirty, asshole.”

He doubled over, gasping for breath. “Damn it, Meggie.”

She waited for him to catch his breath. “I want your word, swear on your nature, Jacob Williams, that you’ll never do something like that again, and maybe I’ll forgive you for this.”

“I swear it...” He inhaled slowly. “Meggie. I don’t want anyone but you.”

He closed the distance between them, standing tall once again. He cupped her cheek, and she nuzzled his hand, absorbing his scent, letting it surround her. This is what she wanted, what her lion craved from the moment she scented this gorgeous man. She wanted to mate and love and create babies with this idiot, more than anything in the whole world.

Jacob brushed his lips across hers, a soft caress, a promise of something more to come. Her pussy clenched and ached with a new desire growing deep within her.

“Jacob,” she whispered against his lips.

“Mate with me, Meggie mine.”

She licked her lips, slipping her tongue along the seam of his lips at the same time. “I don’t think—”

“Don’t think.” He pressed his tongue between her open lips. “Just feel. Know that more than anything I want you for the rest of my life, sweetheart.”

Meg moaned and opened for him, allowing him full access to her mouth, her tongue. They dueled for dominance, swirling and tasting and dancing round and round. She twined her arms around his neck, pulling him closer, delving deeper into him with every passing second.

Jacob’s arms went around her waist, tugging and pulling her shirt out of her shorts. Then his hands were beneath her blouse, stroking her skin, feeling and touching her with such a tenderness that tears threatened. He untied the top of the bathing suit she’d been wearing and pulled out of the kiss for the barest of moments to divulge her of her blouse and tug down her suit. Then he was back, hands, fingers, palms massaging and kneading

her breasts, plucking at her hardened nipples. She writhed in his arms, arching into the touches.

Meg hadn't realized she was being moved until her ass collided with the kitchen counter, and he lifted her up onto the granite surface.

"Lift up, sweetheart."

Meg did as directed, wiggling and lifting, allowing Jacob to remove the rest of the bathing suit and her shorts until she was spread naked before him, legs wide-open.

Jacob dropped to his knees before her, his smile wide. He licked along her slit, gathering her juices on his tongue, and she moaned in pleasure, legs going even wider, opening herself fully to his gaze. "Please, Jacob. Please."

"Gladly." He dipped his tongue between her folds, licking and sucking on her aroused flesh, nipping her hardened clit and flicking it with the tip of his tongue.

She writhed against his mouth, her pussy clenching and convulsing, seeking and searching for something... She ached to be filled, completely stretched wide around his cock, his fingers, something. "Jacob," she whined.

A finger teased her entrance, circling round and round and round again before plunging inside, opening her. She cried out, her hips stilling while he pumped his finger in and out of her pussy. Jacob twisted and stroked her from within, and she rocked against him, his tongue flicking her clit, his mouth sucking on her while his fingers made magic in her cunt. He made a gentle "come here" motion and she nearly bucked him off her pussy, the electric shocks of pleasure forcing her body to jerk uncontrollably.

"Yes, yes, yes..." she urged him on, her orgasm nearing, heat clenching and tightening in an even rhythm, letting him know that her release approached. Her muscles flexed, starting at her toes, the shocks of electricity building and traveling through her from foot to head and back again. "Close... So close..." And then he was gone—orgasm lost. "Noooo!"

Jacob rolled to his feet and kissed her on her nose. She nearly nipped his lips off with her teeth. "You'll come on my cock the first time, sweetheart. Make it special. Make it ours."

All right. She wouldn't rip his throat out. Yet. The lioness really wanted to, though.

Jacob whipped off his shirt and shucked his pants so fast she didn't get a good look at him, but within seconds she could feel all that he offered. Her pussy opened and accepted his thrust, stretching around him with relative ease, the tiny pinch worth all of the pleasure she received from being filled by him. He completed her in that one moment, completed her fully.

After all she'd been through, all she'd endured, she hadn't believed that she could bear another's touch ever again, yet here she was enjoying the most insanely pleasurable encounter of her life.

Jacob, fully seated, withdrew and then thrust forward again, swiveling his hips as he bottomed out within her, grinding his pelvis against her mound, stimulating her clit.

"Right there!"

"Here, Meg?" He repeated the motion, grinding and rotating and swiveling and driving her out of her fucking mind with pleasure. "Or here?" He tilted his hips, his cock stroking that spot, her G-spot, from within, and she lifted her hips, aching and demanding more without words.

Jacob eased out of her cunt and then slowly re-entered, his cock stroking her internal

walls, stimulating her G-spot with every achingly slow stroke. In and out and in and out he shifted and moved, his prick giving her everything she'd ever desired in a mating, in a mate.

He increased his speed, his hips pistoning his dick in and out of her stretched pussy, pleasuring her, bringing her closer and closer to pure ecstasy that she thought she'd physically shatter from the shocks coursing through her veins. Again and again he pumped, thrust and retreat, ebb and flow, push and pull. She rocked against him, meeting each of his thrusts, forcing him deeper and deeper still, wishing she could keep him within her forever.

They were bucking and arching and meeting in perfect rhythm in a dance as old as time itself. Her teeth ached, her lioness demanding that she mate with this man, this lover of hers. She allowed her teeth to descend, filling her mouth with feline fangs. She could easily see that Jacob had done the same, his mouth filled with wicked white teeth that could tear her to shreds ... or mark her as his.

His thrusting and fucking became faster and harder, if that were possible. She gripped the edge of the countertop, her nails digging in, holding herself steady as the precipice neared. She wanted this, wanted him and everything that came along with him, imperfections and all. He made the unbearable bearable again, and deep down she loved him more than any other on Earth.

Closer and closer, higher and higher she climbed, reaching toward that inescapable moment of pure unadulterated release, the pleasure that made the work worth it. She bit her lip, her orgasm approaching. "Close, Jacob," she warned him, and he grunted in response.

She took his agreement as permission to come, permission to give over what her body had been working toward. In a rush of release her body tensed and then relaxed, pleasure following the release of the pressure that'd built and built and built within. Harder and harder she came, her pussy convulsing and clenching around his cock. He thrust harder and faster until he, too, froze, cock embed within her, spasming and releasing his seed.

As one, they reached for each other's necks and bit the joining of neck and shoulder. Bit and sunk their teeth into one another, mating themselves together for life, creating a new life with their shared pleasure and pain.

He'd done it. He'd made the unbearable bearable.

Chapter Seven

The lion woke her. *Trouble*. It growled, low and menacing.

Yeah, no shit.

Meg kept her breathing steady, unwilling to give herself away before she knew what she faced. Consistent breathing was the key, not too shallow, not too deep, but just right. She eased her chest up and down, snuggled against Jacob with her head on his shoulder, and willed him to awaken with her, help her.

The thump of his heart picked up, but his breathing remained constant. Good, he was awake and playing possum, just like her.

The creak of a floorboard echoed through the house and the intruders froze. Their scents were trickling through the air conditioning, creeping and crawling until they reached her nostrils, the smells filling her lungs.

It was her heart's turn to pick up the pace.

Nicholas. Marcus. Lincoln.

All three of them had entered the home as Jacob and she slept on the bare wooden floor. The sun no longer shone on her face and the room felt uncomfortably cool. Night had definitely fallen.

A soft rumble, a vibration of the chest beneath her, shivered through her from head to toe. Obviously Jacob had caught the scent as well.

The soft, padded steps of the three men seemed to echo and bounce off the walls as they searched the small home. Within moments they'd be upon them. Meg examined the scents again. They weren't lion ... no hint of grasslands. They weren't carrying guns ... there wasn't a smidge of gunpowder filling the air. They were in their human forms, unarmed and looking for her. They probably figured the three of them could take a single bear and that she wouldn't put up much of a fight. The old Meg would have gone with them, meekly following in their footsteps.

Not this Meg. Not this Meggie who had a mate to live for, live with.

With one hand hidden beneath her, Meg slowly, ever so bone achingly slowly, shifted her hand, her fingers turning into razor-sharp claws. She'd be ready, and hopefully they wouldn't smell the subtle shift before she had a chance to take off someone's face.

She didn't have long to wait.

Two hands grabbed her free arm and she swung around, using the momentum to swipe her attacker across the face, taking a good chunk of skin, muscle and flesh with her. Before he had time to recover she shifted her other hand and swiped at him again, slicing across his throat with deadly precision. Lincoln, the coldest bastard she knew, was dead before he hit the ground, her claws having cut through bone and into his spinal column. Blood gushed and pooled on the bare wood floors, seeping in between the cracks and natural crevices of the wood.

Dinner. Her beast demanded, but a searing pain sliced through her bare back and Meg spun to face her newest attacker. She confronted Nicholas, her favorite of the three and she would almost be sorry to see him die, but it seemed unavoidable.

Out of the corner of her eye she watched as Marcus and Jacob fought, grappling and

reaching for one another, claws distended. She wasn't worried about her lover against one lion. One, he could easily handle.

Her distraction and worry for Jacob hurt her in the end. Nicholas got her across the gut, her skin splitting easily by his claws, cutting through skin and muscle, almost to her organs. She roared, angered and hurting, her lion pissed beyond all recognition. Her shifting took a new turn, fur spreading across her stomach and chest, up her arms and over her face. Her teeth elongated to the inches-long canines of her lioness, and she let out a bloodcurdling roar that even stopped Nicholas in his tracks.

She attacked—fangs and fur and claws. Meg jumped on him, launching herself into the air, ready to do damage and take no prisoners. Her beast wanted blood and that's what it'd get. She fought, claws sinking into flesh, slicing through bone like a hot knife through butter, blood splattering and covering her from head to toe. She relished the carnage, taking out her years of frustrations and rapes and forced intercourse out on Nicholas. She fought until he lay before her, a tattered lump of half-shifted man and beast.

"Finish it." Jacob stood behind her, and she looked over her shoulder at him, her lips curling into a snarl. "Finish it, Meggie."

Meg looked to the other side of the room to find Marcus much like Nicholas, except dead, his head nearly torn off.

"Meggie..."

She hissed at Jacob and dropped to her knees, her teeth sinking into Nicholas's neck. Blood poured down her throat, the coppery liquid sweet and thick, easing the beast inside. Slowly, second by second, her body returned to normal with the exception of her face. Her teeth had one last duty. With a roar she ripped out Nicholas's throat, ending his life.

"Well, that was messy." Jacinda's voice came from the hallway.

Meg whirled, ready for the next attack and then froze at Jacinda's appearance.

"Jacey..." Jacob's voice held a warning that Meg didn't understand.

Jacinda waved her hand at Jacob. "It wasn't murder. As far as I'm concerned these three were elitists and should have been eaten the moment they crossed the border. You two just took care of the problem for me."

Jacinda snapped her fingers, and within a blink Meg and Jacob were clean and wearing the clothes they'd only hours ago torn off one another. "There, that's better. So, bear, I think it's time you took your mate to her new home while I *deal* with this one. I think it'll make a nice garden. What do you think?" Jacinda's attention shifted from body to body. "Yes, a garden it is. Toddle off you two... Finish your healing and make whoopee and all that."

* * * *

Meg sat in the car, shock and adrenaline pouring through her in alternating waves. In one night, in moments, she'd helped to destroy her entire pride and she ... she wasn't sad. Not in the slightest. Now her cousins and aunts would be free of the men and could safely stay in Strange Hollow forever, not having to worry about the men trying to take them back.

"Sweetheart..." Jacob twined his fingers with hers. "You okay?"

"Perfect." And she was. She was perfect.

Jacob pulled the SUV into the driveway of a large, ranch-style home and parked inside the garage. He came around to her side of the car and helped her down. She couldn't figure out what to do next. So much had happened in such a short time that her life had literally turned upside down and inside out in a day. A single day.

She had a new home, a new city, a new mate and a new life without worrying about the pride. It all seemed too good to be true. "Jacob." She tugged on his hand, unwilling to take another step. "Is it real? All of it?"

"Oh, sweetheart, I'm sorry you had to go through all of that and had to kill. We'll get you a good doctor to talk to—"

"No," she shook her head, "I mean, it's good, yeah? But is it really happening? Are all my dreams coming true all at once? In a single day?" Tears burned her eyes and she wiped them away with the back of her hand.

"Oh, Meggie mine." He closed the distance between them, his scarred fingers wiping at her tears. "It's all true, it's all real. I'm not leaving, they're gone and this is home, forever and ever or as long as you can tolerate me." He smirked at her and she smiled wide and nodded.

"Good. Now, take me inside, kiss me senseless and make love to me for the rest of the night."

"Gladly."

The End

About the Author:

Celia would have loved to have written her own biography, but she just didn't know what to say. In a fit of desperation, she turned to me, her most trusted confidant and friend. I realize you're asking yourself, "Who is this?" I am Cali, her cat. I also go by a few other names, but those may be too strong for your delicate ears. Suffice it to say my mommy is very creative and not just with writing.

My mommy, Celia, began writing in August of 2006. I know this because it was around that time our meals started coming later and later in the day. As months passed, she spent more and more time in front of the boring screen. Though it was fun to chase the little arrow around every once in a while. You should hear her scream! But I digress.

She's worked hard to give readers sexy, quirky heroines they can relate to. And you better damn well appreciate it. All I got was late night feedings. And I didn't even make it into one of her books by name! That damn kitten, Katie O'Meghan, did. Bitch.

Well, enjoy her writings and if you want to praise her for her work... don't. I'd like to get fed at some point, people.

Fine. If you must contact her, her website is at www.celiakyle.com or you can send an email to celia.kyle@gmail.com. But when I go hungry, I'll blame you all!

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