



Changeling Press

# Unwanted Desire

Aubrey Ross

**Alpha Colony: Unwanted Desire**  
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## **Alpha Colony: Unwanted Desire**

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When Barbary Pride lions are blamed for the brutal murder of a she-wolf shifter, animosity flares and tempers ignite. In a moment of desperation, the victim's mate kidnaps Jizette and threatens to return her, one piece at a time, until the murderer is turned over to Timberline pack.

Kage is afraid his grief-stricken friend will follow through with his grisly threat, so he hides the terrified cat, giving her pride time to investigate the murder. Jizette isn't sure what to think of her rescuer. He's gruff and aggressive, and stirs feelings she doesn't want to feel. Interspecies couples are shunned. Forbidden. Yet, the flash of his eyes and the press of his muscular body, make her burn as never before.

To protect her, Kage must take her beyond the walls of Alpha Colony, and expose her to a world she's never experienced before. His rash plan might incinerate the sheltered beauty, or free her to become more than she ever dreamed possible.

## Prologue

"Halt! Who are you and what's your business in our village?" Duff, the younger of the two Barbary pride sentinels, moved to the edge of the shelter as Amara emerged from the surrounding trees.

Moonlight revealed the purity of his features and a subtle sway in his stance. Good. He was just about ready for her.

She held up both hands and smiled. "I'm unarmed, and I have no interest in the village." She tossed back her hair and licked her lips. Nudity was far less common in the village than in the mountain and forest communities. The cool night air had hardened her nipples, and young Duff was having one hell of a time keeping his gaze on her face. "I came to see you."

"We're on duty, miss." River stepped forward, putting himself between her and Duff. "You'll have to continue this once Duff has finished his rotation."

She brushed her hands down her sides, skimming the outer curve of her breasts as she smiled into River's dark eyes. "I came to cause trouble, and I was hoping both of you would be willing to help me."

"What sort of trouble?" Duff shoved River aside and pulled her into the shelter's relative privacy.

Senauta root freed inhibitions and made the mind susceptible to suggestion. She'd slipped it into their drinking water while they performed their last perimeter sweep. The extract appeared to be working better on Duff than River. Or Duff's youth and inexperience was simply making him easier to corrupt.

She chose her words carefully, not wanting anything she said to make them complicate her mission. "I recently found out that my mate is mounting other females.

Not just one, mind you. He pokes his cock into any female who will hold still long enough."

"So you thought you'd repay him in kind?" River's voice took on a dark, smoky quality that made Amara tingle. That was more like it.

"Can you think of a better way to illustrate my disapproval than to crawl into bed beside him reeking of other men?"

"What will keep him from coming after us?" Duff held his ground, but his eyes were wide and luminous.

"He can't identify breed by smell," she assured him, "and we live way up in the hills. Why do you think I came all the way down here to misbehave?"

"This can't take all night," River warned. "Our team leader will turn us in without a second thought if he catches us at this."

"Fine by me." Ulli was the only sentinel who could positively identify her. She had no intention of running into the cantankerous team leader. Shifting position, she made her breasts sway. River was obviously a breast man. The slightest movement drew his gaze like a magnet. "I have only one condition."

River snorted and folded his arms across his chest. He was taller and more muscular than Duff, probably quite a few years older. "Why are there always conditions?"

"You have to come in this." She held up a container by the long leather laces connected to its cap. Though fairly small, the vial's mouth was wide, then graduated, like a built-in funnel. "As I said, we live way up in the hills. I want to make sure I still reek of sex by the time he gets home."

"You are one twisted fuck." River shook his head, but reached for her shoulders. "If she wants this fast and dirty, Duff, we better get to work."

Amara sank to her knees in front of River. Duff knelt behind her and moved her legs farther apart. Despite his apparent youth, Duff obviously knew how to mount a female. She placed the vial within easy reach of the men. Collecting their cum was the purpose for this mission, and she would not let them forget.

River freed his cock and slipped it between her parted lips. Her eyes opened nearly as wide as her mouth. Damn the man was thick! He closed his eyes and rocked his hips, completely shutting her out. He was absorbed in his pleasure, a pleasure she had offered him. So why did she feel neglected?

It didn't matter. She wasn't here to make friends. She was here to pacify Izak. Regardless of his cruelty, he was the only chance she had of regaining her standing in the feline community. His bloodline was faultlessly fertile. And she needed a cub desperately.

Duff's touch was tentative, almost reluctant. He ran both hands up the insides of her thighs and tried to finger her pussy. "You're not very wet." He paused. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

Emotion burst within Amara, inundating her mind and shaking her body. What she wanted hadn't been a consideration for longer than she could remember. Her mate had been wonderful when he first chose her; then her body failed to produce living offspring, and he became cold and impatient, dismissive. He finally set her aside, shaming her in front of their entire clan.

Which put her at the mercy of men like Izak.

"Just fuck her," River urged. "She came to us. Of course she's willing."

When Duff touched her again his fingers were soft and slick. He must have licked them, or... She didn't care how he'd lubricated them. They slid smoothly, gently over her reluctant flesh. She closed her eyes, ignoring the selfish shuttle of River's cock, and savored Duff's gentleness. At least Duff saw her as a partner in pleasure rather than a receptacle for his lust.

"Suck harder." River shifted his hands to her face, thrusting faster and deeper. He threw back his head and groaned. "Gods that feels good."

"Don't forget to pull out." Duff's warm fingers carefully pushed into her cunt, and she wished she'd caught him alone in the woods. They could have fucked all night, exploring each other at their leisure, until the wretched vial was full.

In a frantic series of movements, River pulled out of her mouth, and pressed his cock against the open vial. He stroked his shaft in long, hard pulls, and ropes of white liquid shot into the small container.

"Thank you," she felt compelled to say, even though he'd treated her with complete indifference.

"Go on, cub." River tightly capped the vial then tossed it back to the ground. "Show me how it's done."

Duff traced her slit with the head of his cock, rubbing against her clit until she squirmed. "River might be okay with a quick blowjob, but I like my partners fully engaged and trembling with pleasure."

She lowered her head to her forearms, a gesture no male cat could ignore. With a low, appreciative growl, Duff entered her pussy and Amara moaned. The head of his cock pressed against the mouth of her womb, and her inner muscles stretched tight around his thickness. Fuck! She'd never felt this full. River had seemed huge in her mouth. Were all Barbary males this big?

River circled them as Duff began to move. She tried to ignore the distraction, tried to enjoy the steady slide of Duff's impressive length, but River's gaze burned into her, hot and hungry.

Annoyed and frustrated, she braced her arms and pushed up into Duff's firm down strokes. If River wanted a show, she'd give him one! Her frequent gasps and groans seemed to please both men. She tossed her head, sending her hair cascading across her back and along her sides.

"I can't see her tits jiggle," River complained. "Have her ride you for awhile."

Duff ignored the suggestion, but found another solution. He wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her up until her back pressed against his chest. Her breasts thrust forward, quaking with each thrust. The new angle also dragged his cock across the front wall of her passage, launching sensations all through her abdomen.

Tension twisted through Amara, real and intense. She hadn't expected to enjoy this mission, had only wanted to accomplish her task as quickly as possible. Izak forced



sensations on her with shameful regularity, but she couldn't remember the last time she'd savored the simple pleasures of having sex.

River palmed her breasts, his gaze boring into hers. "Why are there welts on your ass? Does your mate abuse you?"

His misplaced protectiveness shocked her. Why the fuck should he care what others did to her? Her body was teetering on the brink of orgasm. Did he honestly think she wanted to talk now? "Not... abuse."

Understanding ignited his gaze and a wicked smile parted his lips. "I see." He caught her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers and twisted viciously.

Like a well-oiled machine, her body produced the conditioned response. She came in sharp spasms that had Duff yelping in distress. He jerked out of her pulsing body and scrambled for the vial.

River drew her to her feet and reached between her legs, his gaze never leaving hers. "Who are you?" His long middle finger thrust into her primed pussy, the force rocking her back. "Why do I get the feeling this is about more than pissing off your mate?"

She closed her fist around his cock and stroked him just as roughly as he was fingering her. "Did you come too fast before? It feels like you need some more to me."

"I always need more." He lifted her, and she automatically wrapped her legs around his waist. She looked around for something he could brace her against, but he didn't seem to be concerned. Effortlessly supporting her weight with his hands, he lowered her onto his cock. He moved both hands to her ass and gave her a firm squeeze. Then with nothing more than the strength of his arms and the balance of his muscular legs, he moved her up and down along the length of his shaft.

She clutched his shoulders and kept her legs wrapped around his waist, but he controlled the speed and depth of each stroke. His angle and impact determined how quickly her arousal built and soared. He understood control and demanded her complete surrender.

Arching her back, she tightened her inner muscles and made sure her breasts quivered just the way he liked. He thrust deep then bent and suckled while her body screamed for the sweet friction he'd been creating moments before. He kept her off balance and unsure, his actions anything but predictable.

Duff came up behind her, his body warm and solid against her back. River growled around her nipple then lowered his head, ignoring the younger man. She rested her head on Duff's shoulder and unlocked her legs. River draped her knees over his elbows and resumed his slow, deep fucking.

"We've got to get her out of here," Duff cautioned. "Ulli's on his way."

River's only response was his change in tempo. His hands grasped her hips, and he thrust fast and true. Eyelids drooped to half-mast as he gritted his teeth and shuddered. Duff jerked backward, dragging her with him.

"What the fuck?" River muttered.

"Finish in the vial," Duff snapped in an urgent whisper. "We're out of time."

Looking none too pleased, River released his seed in the vial then quickly righted his clothes. He closed the cap and tossed the container to Amara with an arched brow. "Get what you came for?"

Rather than respond to the provocation, she snatched the vial out of the air and didn't look back. Damn Izak and his cowardly ways! She was the one who snuck into campsites and collected information while he lazed in the security of their secluded hideout.

She paused in the darkness long enough to tie the vial around her neck, then she dispersed her human form and started to morph. Fire burned away her frustration, consuming her consciousness until nothing remained but rage. She flowed with the change, embracing the pain as her tiger-self burst free of its human trappings. Then she ran, as fast as her feline legs would carry her, away from potential discovery, and into the arms of her tormentor.

Izak waited at the mouth of their cave, as she knew he would, restless and excited. "Did you get it? Let me see."

He snatched the vial from around her neck faster than she could morph back into her human form.

"This isn't very much." He held the vial up to the moonlight and watched the creamy contents swirl. "How many did you fuck?"

"Two. One of them twice."

"And they were both Barbary pride?"

She rolled her eyes and walked farther into the cavern. "I understood the mission. Do you honestly think you can fool the dogs?"

"We're about to find out."

His cold, harsh laugh grated on her frayed nerves. "You already tried this once and it didn't work. Why do you expect the same trick to have a different result?"

"Because dogs hate cats far more than cats hate each other." He lingered near the mouth of the cave, obviously ready to get underway. "I should have thought of this a long time ago."

She just shook her head. Arguing with Izak was an utter waste of time. Once he'd made up his mind, there was no reasoning with him.

"This shouldn't take long. Once it's done, you'll know," he predicted with an evil smile. "Once it's done, all of Alpha Colony will know."

## Chapter One

"Hold her down and let us fuck her," one of the wolf-shifters suggested. "We'll pass her around like they did with --"

Jizette's captor growled, cutting off the horrible suggestion and driving his pack mates back a step. They were in a grassy clearing in the middle of a cluster of cabins. She stayed on her knees and kept her eyes downcast. Every time she looked up their aggression spiked. Apparently, wolves expected their women to be docile and silent. Or at least their female captives.

"No one touches her -- but me." His stipulation drew bawdy laughter from his friends.

Her captor had dragged her halfway to the canine settlement before Jizette accepted that this was really happening. His mate had been violated, tortured and left in the forest, where she bled to death. And he blamed Barbary pride. Jizette was a hostage, a negotiation tool, which he intended to use ruthlessly. He'd been deaf to her questions, and responded to her slightest show of spirit with violence.

A suppression collar trapped her in human form and a long synth-leather leash tethered her to her captor's wrist. Her hands were bound in front of her, and her only garments were the filmy *geron* tied around her hips, and the rubber soled slip-ons she'd been wearing when he'd snatched her from the feline village. Partial nudity wouldn't have bothered her if the onlookers weren't leering at her breasts.

"Then mount her now. Let us watch you tame the spitting she-cat," someone else called out. To Jizette's utter astonishment the speaker was female. How could a female consider such a thing?

Fear clenched Jizette's belly, and she tried not to panic. She could face death with dignity, but rape? Was she strong enough to endure the pain and degradation without feeding the crowd's hunger for violence?

"Lane, stop this right now. Abusing the cat will not bring Enya back."

Finally, the voice of reason. She dared a glance through the fall of her hair. Her captor's name was Lane, and... Her relief fizzled nearly as fast as it had flared. Her rescuer was a plump, middle-aged woman. Wolves responded to strength and aggression. There was no way this woman would have much pull with the pack.

"You shouldn't be here," Lane muttered, his voice tight and low.

"You're not the only one grieving. Enya was my daughter." She stopped several paces away. All Jizette could see were her sturdy shoes. "You shame her memory with this nonsense."

"Nonsense?" he snarled, his fist tightening around the leash. Apparently that'd been the wrong thing to say. "It's nonsense to want her killers found? It's nonsense to expect them to be held accountable for what they did to your daughter?"

"How will hurting this cat bring us closer to those things?" She kept her tone even, but Jizette could sense anxiety and grief radiating off the she-wolf.

"Don't you know who this is?" He jerked the leash upward, dragging Jizette to her feet. She glanced at the woman then quickly averted her face. "This is Maddox's little sister. If he knows she shares my bed, senses her panic and humiliation as I... work through my grief, he might get off his lazy ass and investigate the crime!"

Jizette started to object, but Lane raised his hand, the warning undeniable. Her swollen lip still stung from his last response to one of her objections. He'd been a bully even when he didn't have an audience. She'd get nowhere with him now.

Still, this was the first she'd heard of Enya's murder. She was pretty sure Maddox knew nothing about it either. She needed to send word to the new joint council, let them know Izak had a new victim.

"This is wrong, Lane," Enya's mother tried again.

"I've heard enough out of you, woman. If Maddox ignores me, I'll send Jizette back to him one piece at a time."

Horror washed over her because he meant every word. Grief had driven him beyond reality to a place where there was only pain.

"Maybe a fingernail first, then a finger, or maybe..." His words were swallowed by a howl so drenched in sorrow Jizette ached for her tormentor.

The pack took up his cry until it echoed off the cabins, an eerie chorus of misery. She looked around as the circle slowly closed in. Bile rose in the back of her throat. She'd seen bloodlust before, but this was the first time the blood they lusted for had been hers.

She tugged against the leash, damning the suppression collar. Her lion-self would have no trouble managing a pack of wolves, even bloodthirsty timber wolves. But as a human, she was basically helpless.

Which didn't mean she was going down without a fight!

She widened her stance and tossed her head, sending her hair behind her shoulders and creating a distraction. Her breasts jiggled and, predictably, gazes shifted to her chest. Men!

"Back off!" a deep male voice snapped with authority. "This is not going to happen."

Refusing to let the interruption draw her focus, Jizette kept scanning the crowd.

"Where's Cassin?" The question came from somewhere on her right.

"My father is not your concern at the moment. I am." The interrupter was still behind her, though his voice sounded closer now.

"This woman is mine by right of Replacement!" Lane shouted for all to hear.

The newcomer stepped into her peripheral vision. He was tall and broad-shouldered, but the rest was a blur of gold-toned skin and darkish hair. Did she dare turn her head and look?

"Replacement?" He chuckled. "We haven't followed keeper codes for decades. Try again."

Yet another man threw his opinion into the cluster. "Technically, the keeper codes are still in effect. Replacement is within his right."

"The alpha has spoken. Lane keeps the cat!"

Unable to contain her curiosity, Jizette dared a glance to the side. The two men facing off looked so much alike they had to be related. The younger one had colorful strands threading through his thick dark hair -- gold, copper, and bronze. They were as unusual as they were beautiful. The older one's hair was entirely dark brown.

"This doesn't need an audience," the younger one said without taking his eyes off the older. "Send them away."

"Leave us!" Two words from the alpha dispersed the crowd.

"May I speak?" Jizette aimed the question toward the alpha without making eye contact.

"You have no voice here." Lane raised his hand, but the alpha's son caught his wrist.

"Enough."

"You can leave too." Lane jerked his arm out of the son's grasp.

"Kage stays and the cat may speak." The alpha was starting to sound impatient.

Kage? What an odd name. She wanted to thank him for sparing her another stinging slap, but knew it would only infuriate her volatile captor. "I don't know how to address you," she told the alpha.

"My name is Cassin."

"She is not worthy of your name!" Lane shoved her to her knees and forced her head to the ground, his fingers digging into the back of her neck. "Speak quickly and then be silent."

The sudden blast of his loathing made it hard to breathe. "Maddox... knows nothing of the latest tragedy." She paused to fill her lungs with air and steady her voice. "Even so, it's likely we know who did this."

"Let her go, Lane. I want to see her face."

Lane's fingers squeezed -- a punishment or warning she couldn't be sure -- then he shoved against her as he stepped back. Jizette ignored the provocation and slowly raised her head. Kage stood beside his father, their expressions so similar it was almost comical. They were both handsome, with high cheekbones and firm jawlines. Kage was a few inches taller and still possessed the lean physique of a man in his prime. Cassin was stout, his gaze less fierce than his son's.

"Explain," Cassin prompted.

"We have a rogue." Suspecting the reprieve wouldn't last long, she dove right to the heart of the matter. "He has committed similar crimes in our territory."

"If he has done this before, why is he still alive?" She met Kage's gaze and awareness arched between them, hot and electric. His eyes gleamed like sun-warmed honey, intense, yet caressing.

Lane growled and jerked her leash. "Stop eyeing him!"

Wise advice. With one glance Kage had made her skin tingle and her body stir. Now was not the time to entertain inappropriate notions, however fleeting. "The rogue is hiding like a coward. We know he's in the mountains northeast of our village, but without keeper technology, it's almost impossible to find one isolated cave."

"Why have the keepers refused to help you?" Cassin asked.

"The leopards wanted to deal with it internally."

"Understandable," Kage muttered.

"What sort of cat is the rogue?" Lane sounded a bit bored.

She shot him an annoyed glance, but he was looking at the pack alpha. "He's a tiger."

"Well, Jizette" -- Lane stressed her name, making it sound patronizing -- "there are a couple of problems with your theory." He looked at her then, so she quickly lowered her gaze. Gods, she hated these games. "I scented at least two men on Enya and they were both Barbary pride lions."

"That's not possible." She knew every member of her pride. There was no way any of them had done the things he claimed.



"You see!" Lane turned back to his alpha. "If we can't convince this frightened pussy that her kind is capable of evil, how are we going to convince the pride leader to turn over one of his own?"

"He has a point." Cassin crossed his arms over his chest and looked at his son.

Kage moved toward her, his features expressionless. "Can you identify individual cats by their scent?"

"It depends on the cat."

"No!" Lane dragged her to her feet again and started backing away. "She's not going near Enya. I won't stand for it."

Kage looked at his father and the air around them rippled with telepathic communication. She couldn't discern their thoughts, but there was definitely an exchange. Sure something was about to happen, she didn't resist Lane's hold. She watched the other two carefully, waiting for their next move.

"Think about what you're doing." Kage matched Lane step for step, subtly steering him to the left.

"I'm taking my hostage to my cabin. You have no right to --" The sentence ended in a groan as Lane's body jerked against her back then went slack. For no apparent reason, he collapsed on the grass at her feet.

She spun around and found a mountain of a man looming before her. Was he a wolf-shifter? She didn't think they grew this big.

"Thanks, Bear," Kage muttered as he disentangled her leash from around Lane's wrist.

From his wildly curling hair to his bewhiskered face, the name couldn't have been more appropriate. "Is Bear a nickname, or something more significant?" If he was a bear-shifter, he was the only one she'd ever seen.

He just smiled and looked at Cassin. "What should I do with Lane?"

"Take him to his cabin and keep him there until I tell you to let him out."

"You got it, boss." He bent and slung Lane over his shoulder as if he weighed no more than a child.

"He called you 'boss.' Is he part of your pack, or --" Cassin and Kage started laughing so she shut up.

"It shouldn't surprise you," Kage told his father. "Curiosity goes hand-in-hand with cats."

"So it seems."

"What should we do with her?"

"I'm standing right here," she felt compelled to remind them.

"As if we could forget." Kage's glance was filled with humor, not impatience. "It's not just Lane. The whole pack is out for blood."

"Why don't you take her with you?"

Kage made a choked sound. "You think that would be less dangerous than leaving her here?"

"I'm trying not to be rude, but --"

"Can you contact your brother telepathically?" Cassin turned to her suddenly. "Let him know you're unharmed and safe?"

She paused. Which answer would benefit her more? The truth had always served her better than lies, so she stuck with what she knew. "I'm out of range."

"Perfect." Cassin smiled at his son. "Maddox will have no way to verify anything I tell him. We can still use her to motivate her brother. He doesn't need to know I'm full of shit."

She gasped. "That's almost as bad as letting Lane --"

"We can still take you to his cabin if you'd rather be raped."

She hated to be interrupted, but Cassin's challenge found its mark. "I see the wisdom of your thinking."

"I thought you would."

Approaching her slowly, Kage unfastened the leash and stuffed it in his pocket. "If you can identify who did this, everything else is moot." He motioned toward a cabin slightly larger than the others.

With that goal firmly planted in her mind, she fell into step behind the men. They were both dressed in jeans and flannel shirts, which made her feel even more exposed. To their credit, neither had looked below her chin during the entire conversation, or at least while she was looking at them.

Cassin opened the door and escorted her into the cabin. It appeared to have a variety of uses, meeting hall, office, infirmary -- and morgue. She shivered as Cassin led her to the sheet draped body on a table in the back corner of the room. Poor Enya. No one deserved to endure the things her mate had described in graphic detail.

Death surrounded her like an oily cloud, shot through with terror and pain. Jizette covered her mouth with her hand and fought back a violent stomach spasm.

"Can you detect the scents or do you need the body uncovered?"

Cassin was trying to be gentle, but she needed to be as far away from this nightmare as physically possible. It was taking all her effort not to throw up. She held up her hand and breathed in through her mouth, providing oxygen to her brain without saturating her nose with more evidence of the atrocities.

She had to do this. If she could identify the villain or villains this could end right here. Pouring energy into her shields, she blocked out all external emotion and slowly inhaled through her nose. Death. Fear. Hopelessness. And lions. Holy shit! They were right. Lions had done this. She leaned closer and grew bolder, knowing better what to expect. Each detail her brain identified only compounded her disbelief.

"I don't understand how this could have happened." She moved to the nearest window and heaved open the heavy pane, breathing in fresh air to cleanse her nose and settle her mind. "I detected two Barbary pride lions and a tiger, which means Izak could still be involved."

"Why do you want Izak to be involved?" Another challenge from the perceptive pack alpha.

"I don't want him to be involved. It just makes sense that he is." Turning from the window, she leaned her hip against the wooden sill. "He's the only one I know who is capable of this sort of violence."

"And yet you said it yourself, two Barbary pride lions participated in her violation."

She nodded, acknowledging the fact. "I can't explain it, but --"

"No more excuses. Can you identify the lions or not?"

Cassin was all business now. Her status as hostage had just been reinstated. "I can't. I'm sorry."

"And I'm sorry for what your brother is about to go through, but I think we both agree that it's better than the alternative."

Tension returned to her belly and she licked her lips. "Let me talk to him, let me -"

"He will move heaven and earth to have you safely returned to his side. He will search night and day, tear his own pride apart, until he can deliver Enya's killers to me."

"He's an honorable man. He will search without thinking I --"

"If his honor were enough, Izak would be dead by now."

Cassin might have a point, but it would sure as hell be nice if he'd let her finish a sentence once in awhile!

Kage watched the exchange with silent amusement. His father knew how to push buttons like no one else. The little cat was doing better than most, but she was starting to simmer. He reached over with both hands and unlocked the leash from the loop on the suppression collar. She lifted her hair and looked at him with hope in her eyes.

"Sorry." He tossed the leash to a nearby table and shook his head. "The collar stays. I can't worry about you bolting on me where we're going."

"Where are we going?"

He'd never seen any eyes quite like hers -- gold flecks swimming in a sea of vibrant green, luminous and hypnotic. "You'll find out soon enough."

"You should have left her on the leash. It would have reinforced your role." His father smiled, and Jizette's lips parted as if she would question his meaning. The little cat was way too fond of questions.

"Let me worry about my role. You worry about your pack. All hell is going to break loose when they realize you let her go."

"Are you letting me go?" There was that hope again.

"In a manner of speaking." His father grinned. "My son is going to escort you on the adventure of a lifetime. Doesn't that sound better than what Lane had in mind?"

"I'll let you know once he admits where we're going," she muttered as she fiddled with the hem of her flimsy skirt.

Kage didn't have to picture her naked. At this angle, he could see every swell and hollow of her lithe young body. The ridiculous garment was knotted high on her sleek hip, exposing the entire length of her toned thigh. She had long, strong legs, the kind of legs to wrap around a man while he buried himself balls deep in her snug heat. She was a cat! He couldn't think of her as a sexual creature. Sexual relationships within the same species were complicated enough.

"So, tell her, Kage. It's not polite to keep a lady waiting."

Lady? Among the cats, she was damn near royalty. "We're going into the city."

"Into what city?" She looked from him to his father and back.

Kage couldn't help but smile. Her expression was so open, so... charming? He better pull it together and fast. They weren't going on a date. They were about to venture into the most dangerous environment on earth, at least for morphs.

"We're going beyond the walls." He waited for his words to sink in before he asked, "Haven't you ever wondered what it's like out there, beyond Alpha Colony?"

## Chapter Two

Jizette felt herself gape, so she snapped her jaw shut. "Of course I've wondered what it's like beyond the walls. That doesn't mean I want to risk my life to find out. There are real guards on those walls, and those guards have been authorized to shoot anyone trying to escape."

"Escape?" Kage arched his brow as his gaze searched hers. "I was told the guards are there for our protection." His ironic smile assured her he didn't believe the propaganda.

"We both know better."

"Come on." He held out his hand. "As much as I'm enjoying your current outfit, it's a little inappropriate for where we're going."

Heat suffused Jizette's face and she fought the urge to cross her arms over her breasts. "I'm lucky Lane allowed me to cover myself at all. He originally intended to present me to the pack naked and on my knees."

Sadness crept over Kage's expression, but he didn't comment. He nodded to his father and said, "If we're not back in a couple of days, I'll send word."

Sunlight warmed her face as they stepped out onto the wide, wrap-around porch. The settlement was nestled in a wide river valley with pine-covered slopes adding dramatic contrast to the rustic scene. The air was fresh and cool, the overall impression deceptively peaceful. No one would have guessed a public rape had been averted moments before.

"Lane said I was his by right of 'Replacement.' What was he talking about?"

Kage descended from the porch and headed across the front yard, obviously expecting her to follow. "It was one of the original keeper codes. Most all of the morph

communities have established their own set of standards to replace DOMA's codes of conduct."

"I understand that, but what did the code allow?" She had to quicken her pace to keep up with his long stride.

"Replacement allowed a wronged party to demand, or take, something of equal value from the party that wronged him."

"An eye for an eye sort of thing?"

"Basically. The problem with the code was it created more problems than it solved."

"I can imagine."

"Why can you only imagine?" His steps faltered, and he looked directly at her. "The keeper codes were still in effect twenty years ago. How old are you?"

She bristled beneath his assessing stare. "The codes were in effect when I was born."

"I bet you're closer to twenty than thirty." One of his dark brows arched accentuating the challenge.

"You'd be wrong. Barely," she admitted with a smile.

"Which means you're still a kitten to someone like me." His gaze lingered on her mouth, glowing with inner light, appearing more wolf than man. Despite his jabs about her relative youth, he was anything but repelled by her. He shook his head, as if to dismiss the tangent then resumed walking across the grassy commons. "How did Lane manage to snatch you without alerting the village sentinels? It was my understanding that your brother took every precaution with the security of his pride."

Though he'd removed her leash, her hands were still bound and the suppression collar made escape iffy at best. She'd move too slowly and be too easy to track as long as she remained in human form.

"Maddox always says I'm too trusting. Lane proved his point for him."

They reached a cabin on the far side of the clearing and Kage took her inside. "That's a bit vague. Did he catch you alone or lure you away?"

The interior was sparsely furnished and suspiciously neat. "You don't spend much time in here, do you?"

He chuckled and motioned toward one of the chairs pushed up to the small square table. "I generally take meals with my father and... the short answer is no. Now explain how Lane captured you."

She watched as he gathered supplies, not sure what he was doing until he joined her at the table and pulled her bound hands toward him. Her wrists were bruised and raw, but she hadn't realized he'd noticed. Using a thin, sharp knife, he cut through the leather straps and freed her hands. Blood rushed back into her fingers and she moaned at the blissful pain. Her instinct was to rub the aching joints, but he caught her hands and shook his head.

"You'll make it worse. It will feel better once I've cleaned the wounds and bandaged your wrists." His gaze lifted to her face and a surge of anger flashed through his compassion. "How many times did he hit you?"

"I bruise easily." Why in the world was she defending Lane?

Kage brushed his knuckle over the crest of her cheek, the touch feather-light and slow. "Instinct demands that we dominate, but this is inexcusable."

The growl in his voice contrasted with the gentleness in his touch, confusing Jizette's receptors. Her skin tingled and her lungs refused to function as she stared into his eyes. She'd waited for years to feel this stirring, the elemental craving of a female for her mate. She'd flirted and smiled, kissed and caressed, and always been left wanting. She licked her lips and swallowed, forcing her lungs to obey. This couldn't be happening now, not with a wolf! It was wrong. They'd be shunned. It was forbidden.

His thumb traced her lips as hunger radiated off him, sinking into her. "It's only fair to tell you that I'm empathic," she whispered.

"Meaning?" His fingers settled beneath her chin and he tilted her face up, his gaze boring into hers. "What am I feeling when I look at you?"

"It doesn't matter, because nothing is going to happen. I just thought you should know."



He chuckled. "Is that right?" His thumb resumed its teasing exploration of her lips. "You sound pretty certain of that."

"We both know... it's not a good idea."

Leaning in, he shifted his hand to the nape of her neck and replaced his thumb with his mouth. He didn't actually kiss her. He just caressed her lips with his, mingling their breath. "I'm not empathic, kitten, but I recognize desire when I see it. I'm not the only one having inappropriate thoughts and feelings."

Tingling heat cascaded through her body and pooled between her thighs. She closed her eyes and parted her lips, waiting for the demanding pressure of his kiss, wanting it, craving it. Time paused. Her nipples hardened... and he eased away.

His features revealed only challenge when she opened her eyes.

"You're right," he said with a knowing smile. "It's a bad idea. Now stop avoiding the issue. How did Lane capture you?"

Kage shifted his focus from Jizette's flushed face to her bruised wrists. Anger rippled through his lust, helping him control his need for his captive. She might not realize it, but she was still a hostage of Timberline pack. Enya's death had to be avenged, and Jizette was their best hope of motivating Maddox.

"He stole a cat's tunic to disguise his scent then asked me to take him to my brother. I figured he was part of the new joint council, so I agreed to take him to their meeting place."

"Which is somewhere beyond the village proper?"

She nodded then flinched as he poured water over her wrist. Her words came out in a hoarse rush, and she stared off into the distance. "As soon as the village guards were out of earshot, he pounced on me."

"Pounced." Kage chuckled. "That's such a feline description." She glared at him so he smiled. "Sorry. Go on."

"There's not much more to tell. He slapped the suppression collar around my neck and bound my wrists." Her features tensed, and her hands clenched. Then she angled her face away, retreating behind her shiny hair.

He touched her arm, brushing her soft skin with his thumb. "Did he do more than slap you?"

"I thought he would. He started to, but then he..." She tucked her hair behind her ear, shadows gradually clearing from her eyes. "I don't know what made him stop. I'm just glad he reconsidered."

"So am I." Kage carefully smeared a healing salve over the abrasions. "Now I won't have to kill him." Her soft gasp made him look up. The kiss-me-now heat had returned to her eyes and his lips tingled in response to her need. "Don't take it personally. Wolves mate for life, so we take crimes against females very seriously."

"Someone needs to remind your pack," she muttered, obviously disappointed with his attitude. "They were anything but protective a little while ago."

"That's because they didn't realize..." He stopped himself with a firm mental shake, not quite ready to accept what his instincts were telling him. "Regardless of the provocation, their actions were reprehensible. Is this better?" He steered them both away from the unexpected sensations pulsing between them. There'd be plenty of time for sensual exploration once they reached Milo's farm.

She flexed her fingers and rotated her wrists. "Much. Thank you."

"I can't use the salve on your lips. It's toxic." He hesitated for a moment. Few in the area knew of his gift. Paranormal abilities generally meant excessive genetic manipulation and often led to unstable personalities. So, despite their ability to morph, most of the members of Timberline pack were wary of anyone with other gifts.

But Jizette was a cat, and she was in pain. His protective instincts wouldn't allow her to suffer. He pressed his fingers against the corner of her mouth and pushed energy into her wounds. The swelling quickly receded and the tissue knitted, repairing the small gash in her lip.

He eased his hand back and she smiled then licked her lips. "Wow. That's some trick. I'm all warm and tingly."

Her smile sent desire spiraling through his body. He wanted to lick those soft pink lips and take her beyond warm tingles to consuming heat. "Glad I could help."

“Are you Timberline’s primary healer?”

He dismissed the question with a noncommittal sound. “I do far better work with my mouth.” Letting his gaze dip to her tempting breasts, he added, “Would you like a demonstration?”

She quickly gathered her hair over her shoulders in a useless attempt to conceal those lovely curves. Rosy tips peeked through silky blonde strands, teasing him rather than dissuading him.

“We really need to get moving.” If they stayed in his cabin much longer, he’d have her beneath him, or on top of him, or bent over the nearest chair.

Their gazes locked for a moment, and he wondered how she’d react if he “pounced” on her. On some level, she wanted him, but she was uncertain and conflicted.

*Leave it alone, Kage.*

He’d packed a small duffle bag earlier in preparation for the trip. Leaving her at the kitchen table, he went to his bedroom and found a pair of drawstring shorts and a thick black T-shirt. “These will have to do for the short-term,” he said as he returned to the kitchen. “Milo can purchase whatever you need.”

“Who is Milo?”

It was a natural question. Still, he’d guarded Milo’s identity for so long, it felt uncomfortable even to say his name. “Just a friend.”

“Do you have many friends in the city?” The combination of challenge and amusement in her expression clearly illustrated her disbelief.

Rather than debate the issue, he handed her the clothes. She donned the T-shirt before he could decide whether or not he should turn his back. Then she pulled the shorts on under her skirt and tightened the drawstring. Everything was much too large, but at least she was covered from shoulders to knees.

“Is there a reason to bring this along?” She untied the sheer skirt and held up the silky material.

He shook his head. “Human females don’t wear anything like that.”

"We're going to try to pass as human? What about your hair?"

His multi-colored hair was unusual, but not nearly as outlandish as some of the shades achieved by human dyes. "We'll minimize exposure, and we'll only be outside for a few days."

She accepted his explanation without argument, and he hoped it was a forecast of things to come. He hefted the pack onto his back, and they set off through the canine compound. She took in her surroundings with childlike wonder, carefully matching her gait to his longer stride.

They followed a winding footpath that cut through the densely forested hills. The trees made the compound feel secluded, but in reality it was less than half a mile from the perimeter wall.

Was she always so accommodating? He'd expected a bit more spirit out of a Barbary pride lioness.

Her soft chuckle drew his gaze to her face. Even in profile she appeared noble and undeniably feline.

"What's so funny?"

"The reality of the situation is I'm entirely at your mercy. I'm attempting to make myself as easy to get along with as possible, and yet you seem annoyed by my efforts. Would you rather I hound you with questions and demand my release? I do realize I'm still a captive, by the way."

"Hound me with questions?" He laughed, the tension inside him uncoiling in a sudden release. "That's more like it!"

She stopped walking and faced him, hands on her hips. "Take off this collar and I'll show you the real me."

"No doubt you would, but that's not going to happen. At least not right now." He schooled his expression and took a deep breath. He'd showed her he could be kind, now it was time to reestablish the boundaries, for them both. He reached into his pocket and took out her leash.

Her eyes narrowed, and her lips pressed into a mutinous line. "Don't."

"It's necessary."

"Why? I've been nothing but cooperative."

"I know, but that's about to change." He motioned through the trees, where the perimeter wall was visible. "I caught you sneaking around in the forest, and you've been nothing but trouble ever since. I'm going to take you back to headquarters and question you." He made "question" sound particularly licentious.

Before she could voice the argument brewing in her eyes, he lowered his backpack to the ground and unzipped it. He pulled out a handler's jacket and understanding eroded her misgivings. Turning his back, he quickly switched pants, but he felt her gaze moving over his naked body and her tantalizing scent perfumed the air. Now was not the time to think about the hunger they aroused in each other, but the time would come -- and so would they. Her pussy would clutch his cock so hard, and so long, they would both forget everything but the pleasure.

The possessive thought banked the fire, allowing him to function. He stuffed his discarded clothes into the backpack and secured the utility belt around his hips. After freeing the pulse pistol from its holster, he slung the pack onto his shoulder and turned to his captive.

"Showtime." He held up the leash, and she didn't object when he fastened it to the suppression collar. "We need to make this believable, yet not so violent that any of the guards feel compelled to assist me."

"I understand." Her voice was barely a whisper, and she wouldn't meet his gaze.

He curved his index finger beneath her chin, and raised her face until she looked into his eyes. "I won't let them hurt you. No one will ever hurt you again."

"I know you'll do your best to protect me, but none of us can withstand keeper weapons. If you released me from this bloody collar --"

"It's not going to happen. Let's go."

Defiance burst within her gaze, and she swung on him. He wasn't sure if she was diving into her role, or if she'd finally had enough of being bullied. Her motivation

didn't matter. In either event, the result was the same. He caught her arm, carefully avoiding her bandaged wrist, and bent it behind her back.

She arched and wiggled, smacking his chest with the back of her head. He tried not to smile, but her antics were damn amusing. Glancing down to make sure the pistol's safety setting was engaged, he pressed it against her side and marched her forward through the trees.

They emerged near a guard tower, as he'd intended, and a blinding light immediately swiveled, illuminating their position.

"Halt! Identify yourself," a husky female voice shouted down from the tower.

"Walters, James P, DOMA Handler ID 62973."

A moment of silence followed and then the same woman asked, "Who is the female, and what is her species?"

"Felidae-morph, but she won't tell me her name or what she was doing this deep in dog territory." Jizette yanked against his hold and tossed her head, sending her hair flying into his face.

"Need any help subduing her? Several of my men would be more than happy to lend a hand."

"Thanks for the offer, but it's probably best if she's contained before she's questioned."

"If the collar didn't take the fight out of her, you're probably right." The light shifted out of his eyes. "ID checks out. He's clear."

He looked at Jizette and had to fight back a smile. She'd caught her lower lip between her teeth and excitement glowed in her eyes. It was unlikely she'd ever imagined the world beyond these walls, much less pictured herself seeing it for herself. Kage pulled her tight against his side and gave her a little squeeze.

"Where's my hellion?" he whispered as they passed through the gate.

She elbowed him in the side and grabbed her leash with both hands, yanking on the tether for all she was worth. Much better.

"Damn" -- one of the guards stepped forward -- "she's hot. Why don't we use the armory? It's big enough for --"

"Not gonna happen." Kage kept his tone firm, yet casual.

"Do you need a transport?" The female leader appeared in a doorway on the far side of the room. "You can't take her on the subway. It will start a riot."

He couldn't take her on the subway, because the subway didn't go where he was taking her. But he wasn't going to clutter the conversation with details. "I hadn't thought of that, but you're right."

"They don't call me Den Mother for nothing." She paused, waiting for the codename to sink in. Milo had mentioned her several times in the past. This woman was part of the resistance. She pushed her helmet farther back on her head, revealing her pleasant, round face. "Shuttles are hard to come by. Where are you taking her?"

"Not far," he lied. "A truck will be fine."

"Pazin. Toss him your keys." The guard grumbled, but obeyed. "When will you return it?"

"I'll try to have it back tomorrow, day after at the latest." He wasn't sure he could keep the promise. More than likely he'd abandon the vehicle once they were within walking distance of Milo's farm.

"Back to work, boys. Excitement's over for tonight."

The truck was old and loud and had the suspension of a stagecoach. Even so, Kage was thankful for the antique. Always before he'd hitched a ride with a passing motorist. Not the safest practice under the best of circumstances. And an unacceptable risk with someone like Jizette.

"How often do you make this trip?" She'd been huddled against the door ever since he took her off the leash. She was as far away from him as physically possible. He understood the strategy, but he also knew it was pointless. As soon as she caught his scent, her body had started producing pheromones that spiked his libido. Spiked hers too. Males weren't supposed to resist their mates, and nature conspired to see that they didn't.

Mates? He shook his head. He was the son of the Timberline pack alpha. How the fuck could a cat trigger mating fever?

“Is Milo expecting you at a specific time?”

He shook his head, barely registering the question. “I always get there when I get there. He’s okay with that.” Small talk was not going to cut it. He had to understand what was happening to him, to them. “Are you a virgin?”

“That’s none of your business.” She sounded more defensive than embarrassed.

“Cats don’t mate for life, so why haven’t you let anyone bed you?”

“I didn’t say I haven’t.”

His nerves were fried, and his body demanded some sort of release. If nothing else, he had to have the possibility solidified within his own mind. He turned off the main road and found a section of the shoulder wide enough to accommodate the truck.

“What are you doing? Why did you stop?”

He turned off the lights then killed the engine. “Last chance, sweetheart. Are you a virgin, or not?”

She licked her lips, and her eyes narrowed. “It is none of your business.”

Despite her startled gasp, she didn’t seem entirely surprised when he lunged forward and grabbed her. He drew her toward him then turned and laid her back across the wide bench seat. Their bodies formed an enticing tangle. Her legs arched over his lap while his chest arched over her upper body. He bent her elbows and pinned her forearms to the seat.

“All I wanted was a simple yes or no. Now I’m going to find out for myself.”



## Chapter Three

Jizette glared up at Kage in mutinous silence. Let him do his worst. Her body had been aching ever since he rescued her from Lane. She couldn't deny her desire, so let him use whatever excuse he liked as long as he touched her, kissed her -- fucked her? Did she want her first time to be in a truck on the side of the road?

His gaze drilled into hers as he slipped his hand beneath the drawstring of her shorts. "Your skin is so soft." His breath wafted across her lips, teasing, promising caresses his mouth failed to deliver. She clasped her thighs together, but the effort was futile. He wedged his fingers between her legs and cupped her mound. "So hot." His middle finger sank deeper, brushing over her clit on his way to her vaginal opening. "As I thought. You're still veiled, still very much a virgin."

"Very much?" She smiled. "I didn't realize there were degrees of virginity."

He didn't remove his hand. Instead, his finger returned to her clit. "Surely you've gotten yourself off before."

It wasn't a question, so she didn't bother with false denials. Her body jerked each time his finger flicked the sensitive nub. She caught his wrist, and whispered, "Not... so hard." Was she actually giving him sexual instructions? And did her request imply consent?

His touch eased, becoming a light, circular motion that made her wiggle and moan. "Better?"

"Yes. Oh gods, yes." She closed her eyes and rocked her hips, lost in the gathering pleasure. It never felt like this when she touched herself. The tension was so much stronger, the heat more intense.

His mouth covered hers, brushing, caressing, yet not really kissing. She wanted his tongue in her mouth, sliding against hers and curling around hers. Why wouldn't he kiss her? Parting her lips, she waited for him to accept her invitation.

"Come for me first," he directed and his fingers closed on her clit, gently tugging. She arched off the seat, shaking with the force of her orgasm. Powerful spasms pulsed through her body as his gaze moved over her face. "Good girl." He whispered the praise against her lips then rewarded her with the long-awaited kiss.

She felt boneless and peaceful, if only for a moment or two. He held her hands motionless while his mouth took possession of hers. She opened for him, wanting him inside her, needing his taste and the rush of passion emanating from him. Her desire had been fulfilled, but his still blazed.

His free hand pushed up her T-shirt and cupped her breast. He teased her nipples, working one side and then the other, while their kiss went on and on. Finally releasing her mouth, he kissed his way down to her breasts and suckled her pouty nipples.

"We need to stop," he murmured, then sucked her back into his mouth.

"But you're still..." He bit down hard enough to make her yelp. "You didn't come yet. Can't we do something for you?"

He looked up from her breast, lust glowing in his eyes. "Oh there are all sorts of things we can do, but I don't think you're ready for any of them."

She wasn't as ignorant as he presumed. Cats were passionate by nature, and they weren't always subtle with their desires. "I can touch you like you touched me." The suggestion made her insides quiver.

"You want to wrap your fingers around my cock and stroke me until I come?"

She recognized the challenge in his tone and something dark and sexual stirred deep inside her. "Or I could use my mouth."

His fingers pushed into her hair and he brought her face up to his. "Have you ever sucked a cock before? Maybe you wouldn't be as shocked by some of the variations as I'd presumed."

The rebelliousness fizzled as suddenly as it had flared. "I've only caught glimpses of others. I've never..."

He smiled and released her, brushing her cheek as he removed his fingers from her hair. "It's your choice, kitten. I'd enjoy your touch, and I'll always welcome your mouth. But I can step out of the truck and take care of myself, if you're not ready for any of this."

"No, I want to touch you." She wanted to take this as far as they could within the confines of the truck. She'd never wanted anything more.

Her answer clearly pleased him. "Take off your clothes and see if you can kneel on the floor."

"I understand the position, but why do I need to be naked?"

"Because I want to see your amazing body."

The simple claim intensified the pressure between her thighs with sudden tension. "I don't think I can wait." She held her hand over her pounding heart and pressed her thighs together.

He kissed her for a long, lingering moment then smiled into her eyes. "Your first time isn't going to be on the front seat of this truck. We are going to wait."

"But I ache. You just made me come. How can I need it again so soon?"

Concern creased his brow, but his next comment didn't address her question. "Another reason I want you naked. So I can touch you while you touch me."

"How did this happen?" She tried again, pulling the T-shirt off over her head. Then she lifted her hips so he could pull down her shorts. "We shouldn't be attracted to each other. I know that much about sex, that much about cats and dogs."

He clasped her to him with a groan, his hands roaming over her nude body with frantic urgency. "I can't explain it, love. All I know is I've never wanted anyone like this. Never!"

They kissed and touched, hands roaming, tongues sliding in an eager exchange of sensations and emotions. She opened her mind, needing to understand what he was feeling as much as she needed to memorize each muscular contour of his body. She

yanked his shirt up so she could touch his bare chest. He took the shirt off and let her hands wander over his torso and back, before he guided her to the floor of the truck. She folded her legs beneath her and reached for the front of his jeans, ready to see more of his lean body.

Emboldened by the need so apparent in his gaze, she unbuckled his belt and opened his pants. He caressed her breasts while she worked, not offering her advice or assistance. She wasn't satisfied with the access afforded by his open fly, so he raised his hips, and she tugged his jeans down past his knees.

"Much better." She cupped his sac with one hand and curved her fingers around the base of his cock, trying not to seem impressed. Barbary pride males were the largest of the cats and their human counterparts followed suit, or so she'd been told. She couldn't imagine that their shape was any more pleasing than Kage's. His cock was long and thick, amazingly hard, and yet captivatingly soft. She stroked down to the flared tip and brushed her finger over the top. He shivered and a bead of clear liquid formed on the slit. "Does this mean he likes me?" she whispered with a smile.

"He loves you already."

She didn't let the phrase mean anything. He was extremely aroused, and they were talking about his cock. The faithless organ would love any woman who was about to suck it into her mouth. As if to prove the point to herself, she leaned down and licked the drop off his cockhead. He groaned and arched, trying to drive himself into her mouth.

Tightening her fingers around his shaft, she worked him with firm, steady strokes. He scooted to the edge of the seat and reached behind her, cupping her ass. His long fingers pushed deep into her crease and found her other opening.

"Don't." She tried to wiggle away, but his other hand clasped her hip, holding her in place while he caressed her anus. "I don't like that."

"Why not?" His finger stopped advancing, but he didn't retreat.

"It just doesn't feel right to me."

"Right compared to what? You've never fucked before. Unless... did someone --"

“No!” She let go of his cock and shoved his hand away from her ass, sitting back on her heels. “Do you want to talk, or do you want me to suck you?”

He laughed. “I want to talk, and then I want you to suck me.” He took her by the shoulders and pulled her back to her knees. “Who tried to ass fuck you and how far did they get?”

“Who doesn’t matter,” she insisted.

“It does if he hurt you, or pressured you unfairly.”

“I told him I was saving myself for my mate and he tried to convince me we could do... that without compromising my principles. Part of me was intrigued by the naughtiness of it all, but when he put his finger inside me, it made me feel dirty not hot.”

“Was my finger making you feel dirty or hot?” He punctuated the question with a sexy smile.

“Both,” she answered honestly. “But can we just explore one pleasure at a time?”

“Fair enough. I’ll have to content myself with your nipples.” He chuckled deep in his throat. “Such a sacrifice.”

His cock had lost a bit of its hardness during their conversation, but she closed her lips around the tip and sucked firmly for a few seconds and it reared back to glorious life. Steadying herself against his thighs, she lowered her mouth along his length, taking him deeper and deeper into her mouth. He bumped the back of her throat and she reversed direction, dragging her lips upward just as slowly.

She loved the way he felt sliding against her tongue and the salty sharp taste she collected each time she passed her tongue across the tip. He allowed her to play while he caressed her breasts, teasing and tugging on her tender nipples. Finally, his hands framed her face, and he showed her the movement he needed, the speed and the depth that pleased him best.

Jizette had known mouths were used to enhance pleasure, but she’d never guessed how exciting she would find pleasuring her partner. Her body felt ripe and needful, ready for another orgasm. Gods, she was so greedy!

She carefully rolled his balls, feeling them pull up tight against his body. His hands pushed into her hair and tilted her head back as he moved faster in and out of her mouth. Her lips warmed, friction building against his smooth shaft. He was close. She could sense it, taste it, hear it in the sharpness of his breaths and the hoarse cries escaping from his throat.

He arched his neck and gasped, slamming against the back of her throat. She tightened her lips and swallowed each time his cock jerked against her tongue. His pleasure surrounded her, the sensations overwhelming. Her body pulsed, teetering on the brink of orgasm without being able to topple into ecstasy.

Heat spread through her veins, creeping like lava upon the ground, scorching everything in its path. She whimpered, unable to understand the burning. He pulled out of her mouth and bent to kiss her. His tongue moved boldly in her mouth, spreading his taste and stoking the fire ravaging her soul.

Urgent demand hardened his expression and blazed within his eyes. He dragged her up and onto the seat then laid her back and unceremoniously spread her legs as wide as the truck allowed. The steering wheel dug into her thigh on one side and her other heel rested on top of the seat. The pose was brazen, unashamed, begging for the passion burning in his eyes.

For a long moment he stared at her flushed pussy with ravenous intent. He traced her slick folds with his index finger, his possessive gaze following the slow up and down movement. Then he draped her legs over his shoulders and covered her cunt with his mouth.

She came with the first brush of his tongue, but he was far from finished. He traced her slit and circled her clit, sucking her folds in between caresses. Over and around and against, he explored every silken hollow and crevice, always returning to her swollen nub. She came again, the spasms harsh and painful, but the release only added to the ache inside her body.

“Kage, please!” She bucked against his face, her abdomen clenched with demand. “I need you inside me now!”

With a feral growl, he raised his head and looked into her eyes. His gaze glowed like golden fire, all traces of human consumed by the wolf. Frantically kicking out of his jeans, he knelt on the seat and bent her knees up and out.

Open and vulnerable, the position was impossibly submissive. He didn't just want to fuck her, he wanted to subdue her, claim her, master her. Each term sent a fresh rush of desire thrumming through her body until her ears rang and her skin seemed to vibrate.

He folded her in half, knees pressed against her shoulders. Still, she forced herself to relax. She wanted this, needed it. Everything within her craved his sexual aggression. Instinctively she knew she'd never be complete without the shattering intensity they would create together.

His cock found her opening and she held her breath, waiting for the tearing pain, the burning pressure. His chest heaved and his canines extended. Fuck! He was about to morph.

"Kage, wait! Look at me." She couldn't reach his face, so she squeezed his arms. "Pull back the shift. Come back to me."

He hesitated for a moment, battling the shift, then drove into her with a savage growl. She cried out, more from surprise than actual pain. A short sting accompanied his entry then all she felt was incredible fullness. Time stood still as he sank deeper and deeper. Her body opened for him and spread around him, stretching to take his thick length.

She dragged in a ragged breath as he came to rest deep inside her. Somehow, she'd taken his entire length and lived to tell the tale. The melodramatic thought made her smile and allowed her to relax beneath him.

He tossed his head, eyes tightly closed.

"It's all right." The words slipped automatically from her lips, and she tried to ease her legs into a more comfortable position.

His fingers dug into her thighs and a menacing growl rumbled in his throat. He slowly raised his lids and Jizette stilled. Glowing from within, his eyes had been

consumed by amber fire. He opened his mouth, as if to speak, but the only sound that emerged was a snarl.

She didn't move, didn't dare to breathe. His wolf seethed beneath the surface of the man, clawing and twisting, demanding release. She could sense the conflict and the discipline it took to maintain this much control.

With a frustrated curse, he separated their bodies and reached for the door handle.

"Where are you going?" She hadn't meant to sound so panicked, but she wasn't sure what was wrong with him, or what she could do to help.

He kicked open the door and morphed in midair. His wolf-self landed with nimble ease in the gravel beside the truck. He was big in either form. His fur blended brown and auburn, echoing the colors of his human hair. Distinctive white markings surrounded his legs and mouth, and his eyes were the same liquid gold.

With a violent head butt, he told her to close the door. She scrambled across the seat, happy to dispense with the overhead light as well as shut out the cool evening air.

What a disaster!

She found her discarded clothes and quickly redressed. The last thing she needed was to be caught naked if someone stopped to offer assistance. Did people still do that out here? She had no idea what the social norms of the outside world entailed. However, she didn't think fucking a wolf-shifter on the side of the road was considered appropriate behavior by anyone.

What had she been thinking? *Do me, baby; do me now!* That was about it.

She couldn't see Kage, so she crawled closer to the window and angled her head. He was pacing beside the truck. Working off his excess energy or... She wasn't sure why he'd spontaneously morphed. Why had being inside her made him lose control?

What should she do if he couldn't change back? Oh, this could be very bad. She didn't know how to drive much less... much of anything of much use out here.

*Kage, can you hear me?* It was a long shot. She didn't think their bond had time to solidify before his shift interrupted their joining. But she had to try something.



*Open the door.*

Thank the gods! She opened the passenger door and scrambled out of the way as he jumped onto the seat beside her. Anxiety blasted her empathic receptors and she stifled a moan. She had to be brave, had to help him in any way she could.

*Now close it.*

Was he angry with her, or did his telepathic voice sound gruffer when he was in wolf form? She reached around him and yanked the door shut. He turned his head and sniffed her hair. She paused for a tentative pet.

*How badly did I hurt you?* He nuzzled her chest, the unexpected reaction surprisingly poignant.

She stroked his head, surprised by the softness of his thick fur. "I'm fine."

His head came up, and he looked into her eyes. Despite the new shape of his face, his eyes were virtually the same, intelligent, assessing, and hungry. *You are not fine. I can smell blood.*

"It's not unusual, under the circumstances."

*If my control hadn't snapped, I wouldn't have hurt you. It's my responsibility to tend your wounds.*

She knew what he was thinking. All morphs had healing properties in their saliva and the properties were strongest in animal form. Mothers frequently used the technique to heal their young. Even so, she hesitated.

If he'd been a cat...

"There's no need. I'm fine."

*Show me.*

He was obviously not going to let the matter drop. His cock had just been buried inside her body. She better get used to the idea of having a canine mate.

Reclining against the driver's door, she opened her legs for him. She moved the shorts aside rather than taking them off, but it still gave him access to her pussy. His warm, wet tongue brushed along her inner thigh, a gentle warning of his intent.

She relaxed her legs and closed her eyes. He started out carefully, almost tentatively, but soon his tongue moved over every fold and pushed deeply into her passage, soothing and healing her. Rather than arousing, his touch was comforting, so she submitted and let him work.

“Was that so bad?”

Her lids flew open and she found Kage, in human form, kneeling on the seat between her legs. “I didn’t sense you morph.”

“I can be subtle, most of the time.”

“What made you go wolf in the first place?”

“I’m not sure. I haven’t lost control like that in years.” He shook his head. “More like decades. I suspect it’s all part of the same problem. Whatever is affecting us must have triggered my shift. Your scent, and your taste, soothed me as much as my mouth soothed you.” He found his jeans and pulled them on. “This is not what I had in mind when I pulled the truck over.”

“I’m sorry,” she said with an unapologetic smile. “Was I supposed to squirm and cry and beg for mercy?”

He chuckled and reached for his shirt. “I’ve never been one for crying, but we’ll see if I can make you squirm and beg for mercy once we reach Milo’s farm.”

## Chapter Four

Angry voices drew Dyauna's attention away from the knife she was sharpening. She shoved the blade back into the sheath strapped to her thigh and tossed the whetstone onto the table. Hustling across the cottage, she opened the front door and gazed across the sunny front yard.

On the other side of the low picket fence -- thank the gods it wasn't white -- Maddox stood with two of his sentinels, arguing with a wiry man she didn't recognize. She sniffed the air and automatically reached for her knife. Guns might be forbidden in the feline village, but she refused to walk around unarmed.

If this was village business, there was no reason for her to be involved. Maintaining consensus among the joint council ministers was exasperating enough. She had no desire to poke her nose into pride disputes.

But why were the sentinels here?

Suddenly Maddox lunged for the stranger with an infuriated roar. Dyauna leapt off the porch and hurtled the picket fence. Maddox was the most even-tempered person she'd ever met. Few things had the power to rile him.

To her astonishment, the sentinels grabbed his arms and dragged him off the cowering stranger. "What the fuck is going on?" She hadn't intentionally drawn her knife, but it fit comfortably in her hand.

"They have Jizette." The anguish in her mate's tone clawed at Dyauna's heart. Maddox had raised his sister. He was extremely protective of her.

"Who has her? Why was she taken?"

The stranger remained on his knees, head bowed, trembling. Without lifting his head, he proffered some sort of message. She snatched the folded paper from his hand and read the provoking words.

"This makes no sense." She looked at Maddox, easily understanding his outburst. No one threatened a Barbary pride lion, much less one of his kin. "Even if a lion did what this claims -- which I find hard to believe -- no one in Barbary pride is stupid enough to leave the body where it will be found."

Maddox pulled her into his arms for a quick hug. "I can always count on you to boil things down to brutal logic."

"This mutt claims Jizette herself verified the scent of two Barbary males on the victim's body," one of the sentinel's reminded him.

Dyauna eased away from Maddox and positioned herself so she could see the others. "Ever heard of a condom? It's not that hard to plant evidence. Most men can be led around by their cocks if a pretty woman is involved."

Maddox nodded, purging his anxiety with a deep breath. "Ask around. See if anyone will admit to an unusual indiscretion. I'll double the teams searching the mountains."

"You think Izak set this up?" Dyauna's suspicions had been headed that way; Maddox just got there faster.

"He failed to spark hostilities between your people and mine, so he put a new twist on his old strategy."

She didn't ask about Jizette. Maddox was well aware that his sister was in danger every minute he delayed. Finding Izak was the wisest course, the only viable option. If they launched an offensive against the dogs, Jizette's captors would simply kill her.

Even so, the woman in Dyauna understood what it was like to be utterly helpless. And she was tormented by the possibilities.

\* \* \*

A thin, black man rushed out of the side door of a large farmhouse and met their truck as Kage pulled into the wide, graveled lot between the house and the barn.

"About time you got here!" He pulled open Kage's door and started to say something else when he spotted Jizette. "And who do we have here? I didn't know you were bringing a guest."

"Jizette, this is Milo." Kage leaned back so she could shake their host's hand.

"Welcome to the freak show, milady. Any friend of Kage's is a friend of mine."

*Freak show?* She mouthed the words to Kage as Milo walked around to her side of the truck.

"After he's shown you around, it will all make sense," Kage promised.

Milo opened her door and led them into the house. They paused in a cozy, eat-in kitchen and he asked them if they needed one room or two.

Kage looked at her and smiled. "One is fine with me, but it's up to the lady."

"Two rooms would be a waste. We'll end up in the same bed and you know it."

Milo chuckled and slapped Kage on the back. "Lucky man. Now, let's get the pleasantries out of the way before we get down to business. Are either of you hungry or thirsty?"

They both shook their heads; then Kage said, "Jizette could use a change of clothes, if you can scrounge together something in her size."

"I'll see what I can do."

"This is fine for tonight," she told them. "But I'd appreciate whatever you can find for tomorrow."

Milo's dark gaze settled on her face and narrowed with speculation. "At the risk of being rude, what species are you?"

She glanced at Kage, unsure how much this "farmer" knew about what went on inside the walls of Alpha Colony.

"She's Barbary pride," Kage answered for her. "Maddox's sister to be exact."

"You know my brother?" Apparently Milo knew a great deal about DOMA's favorite petting zoo. Kage had managed to avoid discussing his reason for visiting the farm. He'd told her he had something Milo needed, and neatly sidestepped the details.

Milo smiled. "We know some of the same people and have some common enemies. Most notably DOMA, of course."

"Why is a farmer at odds with the Department of Morphological Affairs?"

“Why don’t I show you?” He lightly touched her elbow, guiding her across the kitchen and out the same door through which they’d entered. “To the casual observer, this complex appears to be a family farm. We have pigs and a few head of cattle, nothing noteworthy. We grow a variety of grains, vegetables, and observe all the irrigation restrictions, so we don’t attract attention from local authorities.”

She wasn’t sure why the facts were important, but his tone warned her to pay attention. The barn was dark and dusty, like every other barn she’d ever been in, but this one had a wide service elevator that took them to a nondescript corridor.

All right, this was odd. Why would a farm have underground corridors wending their way from one building to another? Milo led her to the first “subterranean station” and she had her answer. A massive, largely mechanized laboratory operated beneath the cornfield.

“With a state of the art recirculation system and various forms of alternate energy, we are completely off the grid and self-contained. The pigs provide all the methane we care to harvest, and all the fertilizer we could ever need. The grains feed the animals and the animals feed us,” Milo explained. “That’s the true circle of life.”

She was mesmerized by the high-tech scene before her, so incongruous with the rustic panorama above ground. Beneath his practiced justification, the explanation didn’t quite ring true. She dragged her gaze away from the lab and faced Milo. “Are you being a good steward of your recourses, or is the farm’s primary purpose to conceal your true mission from outsiders?”

He smiled at Kage. “Smart girl.” Then he turned back to her and replied, “To some degree, it’s both. Self-sufficiency equates to safety in a world as corrupt as ours. The power players know where we’re located. That’s not the primary purpose for the façade. The farm discourages vandalism and adds a layer of security between us and the general public. We operate the only medical research facility that is completely unaffiliated with any outside organization or government. We do not take donations, nor do we accept corporate sponsorship. We offer completely unbiased certifications, much to the chagrin of those who would manipulate our findings.”

“And that’s where DOMA comes into the picture?” She glanced at Kage, pleased by the approval in his eyes.

Milo nodded. “Pharmaceutical companies from around the world come to us when they’re ready for clinical trials. Because of our uncompromising standards, our endorsements actually mean something. We have helped in the development of everything from preventative vaccines to complex medical imaging.”

“Very impressive.”

“Thank you.” Deep dimples framed his mouth when he smiled, giving him a boyish charm.

“When and why did you cross paths with DOMA?” She needed to understand how Alpha Colony was connected with Milo’s farm.

“DOMA has submitted applications on four occasions and all four times their claims proved false. They coaxed and coerced, bribed and begged, and finally threatened to have us shut down.”

Understanding unfurled within her, and she moved away from the observation window, more intrigued by their host than his fancy toys. “Have you been helping Director Darman? Did you leak the recording of Sasha’s transformation to the media?”

“I didn’t, but I employ the person who did. She’s the head of my investigation’s team.” He flashed his charming smile and added drama to his tone as he asked, “Would you like to meet her?”

“She’s the reason we’re here,” Kage reminded with a patient smile.

Milo led them past a smaller laboratory where the two workers wore elaborate, enclosed suits. Jizette felt her steps falter again. “What are they testing in there?”

“Bio-hazards. I’m not sure what’s on the menu today.” Milo’s dismissive tone told her to keep walking.

The access corridors branched off in three directions. Milo followed the tunnel on the left. Jizette felt edgy, restless, as if something wasn’t quite right. She clenched and unclenched her hands, unable to identify the source of her anxiety.

Kage slipped his arm around her waist and gave her a little squeeze. *You okay?*

She looked up at him and smiled, but a now familiar ache erupted between her thighs, making her breath hitch. *This is just a little overwhelming.*

He immediately stopped walking and turned her to face him. "If you need a break, I can take you to our room and you can meet Tayla in the morning."

"I'm not sure what I need," she whispered. "I feel really odd."

Pulling her to his chest, he wrapped his arms around her and pressed her face against the curve of his throat. *Breathe, sweetheart. My scent will soothe you.*

She inhaled deeply and let his warm, woodsy smell fill her nose and spread across her senses. His arms felt wonderful, so strong, yet careful. This would be so much better if they were pressed together skin to skin.

"Change of plans, Milo. We need to see one of your doctors."

"Is she ill?" His concern sounded genuine, but his voice grated now. All she wanted was Kage, only Kage.

"Not ill per se" -- his hand stroked the back of her hair and his arm kept her anchored against him -- "but we're concerned about some elements of our condition."

"You are affected by this too?"

An impatient growl rumbled deep in Kage's chest. "Suffice it to say, there would be no concern if she were a wolf."

"I see."

They started moving again and the world swam sickeningly. Kage pulled her firmly against his side, supporting and guiding.

"Dr. Hillard has worked extensively with hybrids and morphs. She should be able to figure out what's going on."

It seemed like they walked forever. Each step sent intoxicating sensations ricocheting through her body. Her breasts swelled and the T-shirt irritated her nipples. The urge to rip off her clothes was almost unbearable.

Kage's fingers dug into her side and need throbbed from him in searing pulses, intensifying her desire.



"Let's just... I can't..." Her legs buckled, and he swept her up in his arms. She curled into his body, needing more of him.

Harsh light stabbed into her eyes as they entered the clinic. She moaned and closed her eyes. Greetings were exchanged and explanations given, but it all meant little to Jizette. A bone-deep ache had settled over her body. She was ravenous, beyond modesty or logic.

Kage set her down on the end of an exam table and ordered the others from the room. The lights dimmed and she opened her eyes, blinking as her pupils accepted the dimness. He stripped off his shirt and unfastened his pants, not taking time to remove the rest.

There were no words, no need for coaxing, or justifications. They communicated with scent and touch. She lifted her hips as he pulled down her shorts, tossing them aside. Her T-shirt followed and then her shoes. She assisted him every step of the way.

He pushed her legs apart and stepped between them, his gaze fixed on her face. She grabbed the backs of her knees and held herself open, demanding an end to her suffering.

They were beyond preliminaries. The entire day had been one excruciating bout of foreplay. He positioned his cock then clasped her hips, pulling her toward him as he thrust into her. She threw back her head and screamed, coming hard and fast from the simple bliss of being filled.

He held still inside her, his hands moving up and down her back. She wrapped her legs around his lean hips and clutched his shoulders. She didn't try to understand it, didn't try to analyze it. She just accepted the pleasure and the perfection of their joining.

Pulling back slowly, he watched her face, his gaze intense and concerned as he dragged his cock nearly out of her passage. "You are so fucking tight." He groaned. "I don't want to hurt you again."

"That wasn't pain. I promise. Move. Please. I'll die if you don't." She leaned back on her elbows, giving him a better angle as he happily obliged.

He insinuated his hand between their bodies and covered her clit with his fingertip before starting to thrust in earnest. His finger gently caressed her clit and her pussy provided a fresh rush of cream. Within two long strokes, his motion smoothed and she sighed, a gliding shuttle replacing the tight friction that had hovered on the brink of pain.

“Better?” he whispered and she smiled.

She wasn't sure an exam table was much better than the front seat of a truck, but Kage was perfect, and that was all that mattered. He draped her legs over his forearms, thrusting deeper and harder. His hunger drove into her just as powerfully as his cock, feeding her hunger, intensifying her need.

Pleasure rolled through her. She opened her mind and her body, surrendered entirely to the magic and the madness. Her cunt contracted around him, holding him and caressing him with the demanding rhythm of her release. He clasped her to his chest and came in deep shuddering spasms. His forceful climax sent a fresh wave of pleasure surging through her, and then reality bled through the blissful tranquility.

“We need to find a more appropriate place before we do this again.” His voice was still low and passion-roughened.

Her legs squeezed his hips, driving his cock deeper. “I don't know. This table seems to be the perfect height to me.”

One of his dark brows arched as challenge flashed in his gaze. “You don't mind our audience?”

She blanched. “What audience?”

“If Dr. Hillard is like every other scientist I've ever known, she activated surveillance as soon as she closed the door. We morphs are too unpredictable. They have to be ready for anything.” He zipped his jeans and gathered their discarded clothes. No sooner had he helped her into her T-shirt than a discreet knock came at the door. “Just a minute.”

"They knew we were done, which means you're right. They were watching us." She scooted off the table and pulled on her shorts, quickly securing the drawstring. She was wiggling her feet into her shoes when Kage opened the door.

"Has the crisis passed?" A certain gleam in Milo's eyes hinted that the doctor hadn't been the only one watching their inadvertent performance.

Jizette tried not to let one extremely rude intrusion ruin her opinion of the man. Her first impressions were usually right, and she'd liked Milo.

Dr. Hillard was a stunning brunette, who went out of her way to minimize her physical appeal. A complete lack of cosmetics didn't distract from her sculpted features and a shapeless lab coat only hinted at the curvaceous figure concealed beneath. Was she determined to be taken seriously as a scientist, or was she afraid of her sexuality?

"Ask her," -- Kage motioned toward the doctor -- "we're not sure what the hell is causing this."

"I ran a variety of scans while the crisis progressed." Dr. Hillard moved across the room and activated a wall display, her manner all business. It was sad to see such lovely features cold, and expressionless.

"You were scanning us while we fucked?" Kage stalked toward her. Watching was one thing. Analyzing every physiological change took her invasion to an entirely new level. "Discover anything interesting?"

Ignoring his scathing sarcasm, she shrugged. "Potentially." Dr Hillard called a series of three-dimensional graphs to the screen and pointed to the first. "Both of your bodies produced a combination of hormones and enzymes at staggering levels, which is to be expected during bonding fever."

"But we're not even the same species." Jizette wasn't sure if anyone had told her. "I'm a lion-shifter and Kage is a Timberline wolf."

"Which led me to my second set of scans." She touched one of the smaller graphs and it expanded to fill the screen. "I was afraid your sexual interaction had triggered the resurgence of your genetic evolution, but that's not the case. At least not entirely."

Mr. Kage's DNA is stable. He is reacting to his mate as any male does during bonding fever. Your DNA, however, is in a state of flux."

"What the fuck does that mean?" Kage stalked toward her, fists clenched at his sides.

"There is no cause for aggression, I assure you. Your female is in no immediate danger. There are two possible explanations for her condition." She turned to Jizette as she went on, "It could simply be a naturally occurring anomaly."

"Meaning?"

"Generally the female triggers bonding fever. Her body produces pheromones that draw potential mates to her, and the mate most genetically suited to her physiology is most strongly affected by her... scent, for lack of a better word."

"You said 'generally.' That's not what's happening to me?"

Hillard shook her head. "On extremely rare occasions, the male can trigger the process in a female. Because your body can also shift forms, that element of your physiology could be trying to compensate."

"I'm becoming a wolf?" She was paralyzed by the possibility. Would loving Kage cost her everything, her family, her identity, her species? Loving Kage? She needed to calm down.

"I'm not explaining this very well." The doctor sighed.

"Try not to be so nice," Kage suggested. "Is fucking me changing her?"

"Without having scanned you before you encountered each other, all I can really do is hypothesize."

Kage chuckled. "Can't help it, can you? Give us your best, overeducated guess."

"All right. I suspect that you succumbed to a mutual attraction that led to your first sexual encounter. Was that about three or four hours ago?"

"Damn good guess. Keep going."

She nodded and stuck her hands in her pockets. Why did a medical professional seem so uncomfortable with a simple biological function? "Exposure to your secretions..."

"Cum," Kage taunted. "You can say cum."

A vivid blush accentuated the crest of her high, hollow cheeks. "Absorbing your secretions likely triggered the genetic reaction she is experiencing now."

"How long will this reaction last and what will I be when it stops -- fluxing?" Jizette was too anxious to find much humor in the conversation.

Hillard actually smiled, her blue eyes sparkling. "I need more information before I explain my second hypothesis. You might find it troubling and chances that I'm right are infinitesimal."

"How comforting," Kage drawled. "So, you'll just let us worry all night?"

"There's no need to worry," Hillard insisted. "I see no physical risk to either of you. If you're comfortable with this attraction, enjoy yourselves."

There was one complication they hadn't explained yet. "Right after our first encounter, Kage shifted spontaneously."

Hillard was silent for a moment, then her arched brows rose and she said, "There is no stronger instinct in a wolf than to protect his mate. Was something, or someone, threatening you?"

"Yeah, I was," Kage grumbled. "Come on, let's go."

"What about this other possibility?" Jizette persisted.

"I'll contact you when I know more."

They'd been dismissed, Jizette realized as the doctor turned back to her graphs. Milo ushered them back into the corridor, doing his best to look at ease. Had he enjoyed watching them fuck? Had it turned him on? Served him right for being so rude!

"Is Tayla still here?" Kage asked.

"She headed home for the night. Said she'd see you in the morning."

"That's probably for the best. I have a lot to tell her, and Jizette and I are both exhausted."

Milo's cough sounded suspiciously like a laugh. "I can't imagine why."

Jizette was free to look around as they made their way topside, but she was still distracted. She wanted to accept that she and Kage were simply destined mates, drawn

to each other by some random trick of nature. But life for morphs was never that simple. DOMA's ambitious schemes threaded through every aspect of their existence.

"Why so quiet?" Kage tucked her hand into the bend of his elbow, his gaze warm upon her face.

"Just trying to take it all in." His lips parted in a wicked smile and a vivid image of his cock pushing into her pussy formed within her mind. Take it all in indeed.

*You're blushing.*

His thoughts were so much clearer now, and at the height of passion, his emotions had flowed as freely as his thoughts. It had been dizzying, amazing. Passion simmered within him now, banked and controlled, yet still hot.

*This is still new to me, she reminded him.*

*I haven't forgotten. And I still plan to take my time and show you how it should have been.*

She'd meant the entire situation, being beyond the walls, not just having sex. But arousal flowed into her, tingling and stimulating. She shivered, fighting back a moan.

"Are you two telepathic?" Milo asked. "It sure got quiet in here all of a sudden."

They both smiled, but neither confirmed or denied his conclusion. He led them to a guest room tucked away in the back corner of the farmhouse's second floor. "The only surveillance in this building is in public areas, like the kitchen and fireside room. Do you need anything before I disappear for the night?"

Kage smiled at her. "Everything I need is right here."

"Good enough, then I'll see you two in the morning."

Kage followed Milo to the door and locked it behind him. After a search of the bedroom revealed no hidden cameras, they began to relax. Kage's backpack had been placed on a chair near the closet and a clean outfit had been left on top of the dresser for Jizette.

Despite his claim that she was exhausted, Jizette wasn't the least bit sleepy yet. "Are we really going to bed?"

“Eventually.” He chuckled, advancing on her slowly. “Right now I thought we’d take a bath.”

## Chapter Five

Maddox heard a muffled curse and then a distinct *thunk*. He turned around in time to see Ulli, the head of his sentinels, shoving two of his men through the doorway of the workshop in front of him.

"Sorry to bother you, sir," Ulli said, "but these two got something to tell you."

Now that Maddox could see their faces he recognized the two guards, River and Duff. "Speak quickly. I have a lot to accomplish today."

They hesitated and Ulli motivated each with a cuff to the back of their heads. "Speak!"

"She came to us, sir. We didn't instigate." River stepped forward and went down on one knee. "I swear I'd never seen her before. She said she came from one of the mountain villages."

Duff followed suit. "She pleased us both and collected our juices. Took them away with her. We're both so terribly sorry, sir."

"Sun-streaked brown hair, light brown eyes, real curvy, and willing to please. Sound like anyone we know?" Ulli dismissed the guards with an impatient jerk of his head. "Dyauna wasn't fooled for a minute. I guess a woman's tricks are easier for another woman to spot. The real question is, why can't we find the bastard?"

Maddox rubbed the back of his neck, trying hard not to let his frustration show. "There are thousands of places for Izak and Amara to hide. That canyon stretches on for miles. We'll find them. We have to keep at it until we do."

"Do you know anyone who's still in contact with Cruz? No one knows those mountains like he does."



"That's a great idea. Unfortunately, Cruz might be harder to find than Izak." Maddox sighed, refusing to be demoralized by the obstacles facing him. "I'll ask around. Someone has to know how to contact him."

"Sorry about my men." Ulli straightened his shoulders, tone suddenly formal. "That happened on my watch. I take full responsibility."

"Find Cruz and I'll forgive you," Maddox said with a weary smile.

\* \* \*

Kage watched Jizette's eyes widen and savored her evocative musk. His scent mingled with hers now, which made him wild and possessive. Blood rushed to his groin and tenderness gripped his heart. He was used to his body's almost violent reaction to her, but the flood of emotion was new, raw, and powerful.

"Can you still sense what I'm feeling?"

"When my own emotions aren't raging out of control."

The confession pleased him. He wanted her wild, as desperate for him as he was for her. It was selfish, he knew, but that didn't stop his heart from fluttering with approval.

Taking her hand, he led her into the adjoining bathroom. He'd stayed with Milo several times over the past few years. All of the guest suites were similar, but he'd never slept in this one before.

"Is it just me or do you sense everyone's emotions?"

"I've spent most of my life learning how to shield my mind and control my ability. It can be really painful when my shields slip."

He turned on the water in the tub then reached for her T-shirt. She automatically raised her arms so he could rid her of the unflattering garment. But then her naked body was so damn beautiful any garment would seem unflattering. The rest of her clothes followed in quick succession. He was glad she had no aversion to being naked with him because he intended to keep her that way often. His clothes surrendered to her persistent hands just as quickly, and they paused to look at each other.

“Do you think it will always be this intense, or will the urges ease once our bond is solidified?” She splayed her fingers against his pecs then moved up and squeezed his shoulders.

“If all we’re feeling is bonding fever, it should ease.” Reaching behind her, he cupped her ass with both hands and pulled her flush with his body.

“You don’t think Hillard knows what she’s talking about?” Concern crept into her gaze. She’d obviously wanted to be relieved by the doctor’s prognosis.

“All she said is we’re not dying. She hasn’t explained why this is happening to such an unlikely pair or why your scans were still in flux.”

“You’re such a comfort to me,” she grumbled.

Immediately seeing his error, he pulled her into his arms. “I’m sorry. You must be twice as frustrated as I am.” And sure enough there it was -- she smelled like fear. He tilted her face up and captured her gaze. “We’ll get through this, regardless of what it is. I’ll never leave your side.”

She nodded stiffly, and they stepped into the shower together. “Did you buy her explanation about your spontaneous shift?”

“Actually, that’s the only thing she said that made any sense to me.” He handed her the shampoo and he started with the soap. “I was so revved up by... whatever this is; I might have hurt you far worse than I did if I hadn’t gone wolf on you.”

“It was a safety mechanism?”

He nodded. “Basic, primal instinct.”

They lapsed into thoughtful silence while they finished cleaning up, then they climbed into the deep, jetted tub. They faced each other and she wrapped her legs loosely around his hips. The position was intimate without being sexual. They both needed to relax and absorb the rapid-fire changes fate had thrown their way.

He rubbed her shoulders and enjoyed the simple pleasure of looking at her. She closed her eyes and reached behind her, resting her hands on the bottom of the tub. The water lapped at the underside of her breasts, and Kage licked his lips. His cock hardened, bobbing in the water between them. So much for relaxation! Luckily the

swirling current hid his condition. If one of them was able to unwind that was good enough for him.

“So, how is this going to work?” She opened her eyes and cocked her head to the side, her expression a bit cautious. “Do you expect me to live in the canine compound? Your father is alpha, which means you’ll lead the pack one day. How will your people react to your new mate?”

He’d known the conversation was coming; it was inevitable. Still, he’d hoped to have his own feelings sorted before he tried to explain them to her. “I will lead the pack if I choose to challenge my father, and if I manage to win. He’s survived sixteen challenges in the past eight years.”

“You’re avoiding the issue, so I’ll keep it simple. Do you want to be pack alpha?”

He’d never really thought about whether he “wanted” it or not. He’d accepted that it was his chosen path. No, that wasn’t true. He admired his father and looked forward to continuing a long and honored family tradition. “With occasional exceptions alphas are bred. We are stronger and live longer than the other members of our pack. My great-grandfather founded Timberline pack. It’s in my blood, my genetics.”

She chuckled and pushed off the tub, scooting closer to him. “Is that a really long way of saying yes?”

“Yes. I want to be alpha when my father is no longer capable of leading our pack.”

“All right. That solidifies what you want for the future.” Her voice lowered and her body tensed. “What about me?”

“What do you want?” He brushed her hair back from her face, tucking the damp strands behind her ear. “What were your plans before this unexpected twist?”

“I want a family.” Her voice grew even softer, and he sensed her emotional withdrawal. “Your family has always produced alphas, and mine has always been highly fertile. No female in my bloodline has ever failed to produce healthy offspring. We are highly sought after as mates.”

“And yet you were a virgin until today.” He wasn’t sure how to ask the questions going through his mind without alienating her completely. Communication was the foundation of any relationship. They had to be able to talk about anything. “Did your brother scare off all your suitors?” He’d meant it mainly as a joke to ease the tension, but it was a possibility. Maddox had a nasty reputation.

“He tried” -- her smile was sad now -- “but it only worked with the most timid. The others were far more determined.”

“Yet none of them... I know they couldn’t have because you gave me what they were after.”

She wrapped her legs around his waist and pressed her pussy against his aching cock. The water felt cool compared to the heat they created. “None of them made me feel what I feel with you. I know you’re my mate. I’ve accepted it. But why would the creator do this to us when I want cubs more than anything?”

“Do they have to be cubs?” He tilted her face up and nipped her lower lip. “What if I can give you pups?”

“That’s not funny.” She pushed away from his chest and gazed into his eyes. “You don’t believe I’m somehow mutating into a wolf, do you?”

“No. If we could do that, I’m pretty sure we would have seen it happen by now. We have a little more access to morphs than overeducated Dr. Hillard.”

“Good point.” She sighed and the tension gradually eased from her body. “Which brings us back to a mixed-breed match. My brother is mated to a leopard. The pride accepts her begrudgingly, but only because Maddox has agreed to preserve our bloodline by...” Tears filled her eyes and her lips trembled. It tore at his heart to see her so miserable. He tried to kiss her, but she twisted away. “He will mount at least one of the Barbary females, probably more. It’s not just an emotional preference. It’s a matter of survival. If morphs are going to survive, we are all going to have to manage our gene pools.”

He knew she was right, but this was the last thing he wanted to discuss while she was naked and in his arms.

“If, by some miracle of fate, we are able to produce offspring, would you want to have my children?”

Her lips pressed together, and she blinked away her tears. He could almost hear her mind debating the outlandish possibility. “We both know it doesn’t work that way. Different breeds of cats might be able to fuck, but they seldom produce offspring.” She sighed, but her shoulders squared as if she’d accepted reality. “And we’re pushing the boundaries even further than that.”

“Regardless of our alter egos, we are both primarily human. What if our offspring were simply human, without the ability to morph. Would you be happy with a human baby?”

She swallowed and searched his gaze, tension building again. “Why are you asking me this? Has it worked that way with wolves?”

“Do you remember Bear, the man who sneaked up behind Lane and knocked him out?”

“He’s a little hard to forget.” Her chuckle dispelled some of the tension. “I was raised among Barbary pride lions, and that man still seemed enormous to me.”

“Well, he was a failed experiment. A project DOMA abandoned.”

“That’s horrible. Is he the only one of his kind?”

Kage nodded. “He was helping one of our widows put her life back together after the long and devastating illness that claimed her mate. He made repairs to her property and one thing led to another. They began a rather scandalous affair.”

Her agile mind easily saw where he was going. “He got her pregnant?”

“Much to the wonderment of everyone concerned. The child was born healthy and whole, but she is neither wolf, nor bear. She is simply their daughter, and they couldn’t be happier.”

Hope slammed Jizette’s heart against her ribs. Was it possible? Could she and Kage produce a child together? When things were too good to be true, they couldn’t be trusted. She pushed away from his chest and turned around, unable to resist the lure of

his handsome features and lean body. It would be so easy just to dive into his eyes and let the consequences be damned.

“And how do the others in your pack feel about Bear’s daughter?”

“It took them awhile to warm up to the idea, but she’s a happy, well-adjusted five-year-old now.”

“Of course, this widow is not their alpha’s son,” she pointed out stubbornly.

He pinched her bottom hard enough to make her yelp. “Are you always so pessimistic?” He triggered the drain and stood, water rolling off his body.

She looked up at him while uncertainty twisted inside her. “I don’t want to embrace this unique and bizarre situation only to have you ripped from my arms.”

His gaze narrowed and his cock swayed standing at attention, ready to reinforce his claim on her body. “There is no force in the universe strong enough to drag me from your arms.” He pulled her to her feet and kissed the tip of her nose. “I didn’t realize how empty my life was until you filled it.”

Affection expanded within her, eroding her uncertainty. This was all happening so fast, but it felt so right. If she just let go and let it happen... it would fundamentally transform her life.

She stared into his eyes and searched her soul, momentarily blocking out the warmth and tenderness flowing from him so she could analyze what she was feeling. He was brave and noble. He proved the strength of his character when he rescued her from Lane’s abuse. His lineage was impeccable. Five generations of pack alphas? How could Maddox object to... Holy shit! Maddox would --

“This isn’t about your brother. It is between you and me.”

She narrowed her gaze on his face. “Did you read my mind?”

He laughed. “I don’t need to be clairvoyant to guess where your worry just led you. He’s not just a protective brother; he’s the head of your pride. Of course you’re concerned about how he’ll react to this.”

“He needs to know I’m not your prisoner anymore.”

His brow shot up and he lifted her into his arms. "Who said you're not my prisoner anymore?" Stepping out of the tub, he padded, naked and dripping, toward the bedroom. "Maybe I intend to keep you chained to my bed for the rest of your life, so I can indulge my every desire."

The half-growl returned to his voice, making her shiver and squirm. "And if I object?"

"It won't matter." He sat her on the edge of the bed and knelt on the floor in front of her. "You're my captive. Your body belongs to me now. You will do as I tell you without question or argument."

Her breasts swelled and heat lodged between her thighs. She understood the structure forming beneath the fantasy. He was a future alpha. Of course he needed her to submit. He would protect her, shelter her, and cherish her, but first she must trust him with her pleasure.

His hands, strong and large, so capable of bestowing pleasure, or meting out punishment, settled against her waist. "Look at me."

Their gazes collided and she opened her mind, bathing herself in the heat of his desire, and the darker, deeper needs pulsing within him. This wasn't a passing fancy, a flash-fire attraction that would burn itself out as soon as it was indulged. They were establishing the foundation for a life-long commitment.

"Do you want this, kitten? Are you ready to explore all the pleasures awaiting us?"

"Yes... sir."

His gaze narrowed, and his emotions flared, momentarily searing her senses with his excitement. "Do you understand what that means, what I need from my mate?"

"Mostly. What I don't understand, you will teach me."

Her words pleased him and aroused him. He stood, then pushed his fingers into her damp hair and pulled her head back. "If you want me to stop at any point, if you're frightened, or uncomfortable, all you have to do is say 'Barbary'."

“Why Barbary?”

“Do you prefer a different word? I chose something you could remember easily even when your mind is muddled.”

She smiled, pressing her lower lip between her teeth as anticipation thrummed through her system. “Are you going to muddle my mind?”

“At the very least.”

He lowered his head and captured her mouth, parting her lips with the tip of his tongue. She opened wider, welcoming him inside with her uninhibited response. Wanting to touch his powerful body, she slowly raised her hand. He growled without breaking the kiss, and she returned her hands to the bed on either side of her hips, accepting what he gave her, following where he led.

Long moments later his lips released her, and he eased away. “You will only touch me when I request your touch. Is that understood?”

“Yes, sir.” Each time she spoke the title excitement pinged through her body. She didn’t fully understand the reaction, but she accepted that it was real. She wasn’t just doing this because her mate needed her submission. Something in her nature needed to submit.

“Scoot back and turn around. I want you lying in the middle of the bed.”

She didn’t hesitate. Scooting to the middle of the bed, she rotated her body a quarter turn and lay back across the cool spread. Her head ended up just below the pillows, and there was plenty of room for him all around her.

He tugged the pillows out from beneath the quilt and tossed them aside. “I’d love to bind you, but your wrists are still healing. So we’ll test the sincerity of your commitment. Raise your arms above your head and leave them there. Under no circumstances are you to move your arms.”

This was worse than being bound. She placed her arms above her head and tangled her fingers in the bedding, not trusting her self-control.

His smile sent tingles dancing across her skin. “Now bend your knees and open your legs. Offer me your pussy.”



When she'd positioned herself as he directed, made herself completely accessible, he joined her on the bed. He knelt between her legs and traced her slit with his fingertips. "I will never tire of looking at you. Your folds flush so dramatically and your clit..." He circled the swollen nub with his thumb. "So responsive." His fingers pushed into her snug passage and Jizette moaned. Already the first spasms of an orgasm gathered around his fingers. "Fight it, kitten. Your release belongs to me. I will tell you when to come."

"I don't think I can --"

"Yes, you can. Absorb the pleasure, but resist the peak."

His thumb moved off her clit, allowing her to experiment with the sensations he described. When she suppressed her natural urge to dive headlong into a fast, hard climax, the tingling pressure continued to build rather than fizzling out.

"This will be harder, but I want you to try." He lay on his stomach and lowered his mouth to her slit. She trembled, knowing how quickly she'd come when he did this in the truck. How was she supposed to resist when he was so damn good at it?

But his kiss was different this time. He brushed her folds gently with his tongue, avoiding her clit as he built her arousal. She understood the rhythm and surrendered to the sensory waves rocking her body. He held her open and pushed his tongue deep into her cunt, swirling slowly as he gathered her cream and savored her softness. His emotions were so raw, and so possessive, she filtered them, knowing she couldn't control her urges if she was subjected to his as well.

"Gods, you taste good." His breath wafted across her wet folds, his lips brushing against her as he spoke.

"I'm glad I please you."

"Everything about you pleases me. You are perfect, absolutely perfect."

His mouth returned to her pussy, but his words lingered in her mind. How could a feline-shifter be the perfect mate for Timberline pack's future alpha? Regardless of their feelings for each other, it made no sense.

"You've clearly found something to distract you. Let's test your newfound control."

He parted her folds with his fingers and latched on to her clit. Her hips came up off the bed and she cried out. Sensations burst from the nerve cluster like fireworks, showering her entire body in colorful sparks.

"Please, sir. I can't..." His lips released and his tongue pushed back into her core. It wasn't much better. Her body still hovered on the razor's edge, shaking and throbbing, ready to go off.

He rocked back onto his knees and pushed the head of his cock inside her. His thumb covered her clit and he said, "Come for me." His thumb rotated, and her body obeyed, coming in slow, sweeping pulses. "So beautiful," he whispered, driving deeper as his thumb prolonged her bliss.

She floated and spun, lost in the wonder of surrender. He arched over her, his chest rubbing the tips of her nipples as he started to thrust. The fullness combined with the heat and the surreal haze carried her along.

His gaze drilled into hers and she arched beneath him. He lifted her hips then shifted her legs, but the steady rhythm of his hips never ceased.

Rolling to his back, he settled her over him, showing her how to move, how to ride him. "Touch me. Squeeze me tight while your hands move over my body."

The hoarse command revealed the depth of his desire without needing her empathic receptors. Her hands explored his texture and shape, while she slid her body up and down on his hard length. His hands were just as busy on her. Not just her breasts. He touched her arms and legs, her hips and sides.

Restless and needy, she moved faster, thrusting down harder, taking him deeper. She tightened her inner muscles, and he groaned. "Yes! Like that. Do it again."

She squeezed him, over and over, while she rode him, inadvertently increasing the tension inside her own body. An orgasm rushed up through her, threatening to shatter her control. She shut her eyes and slammed her hips down, holding perfectly still until the sensations receded.

When she finally opened her eyes, he smiled up at her. "Next time ask permission. It's my job to enhance your pleasure, not deprive you of it."

He lifted her off him and her legs shook. Her abdomen felt tight and jittery, and she didn't even want to think about the condition of her core. If she didn't come soon, there was a distinct possibility she'd spontaneously combust.

He turned her around and moved behind her, easing his cock between her thighs. "Nothing beats the intimacy of fucking face to face, but the wolf in me needs to cover his mate."

More than willing to accommodate his needs, she leaned forward and rested her forearms against the bed. He pressed against her back, wrapped his arm around her waist, and surged into her pussy. His cock felt more intrusive from this angle, but it was a wonderful sort of fullness. She braced her legs and lowered her head, offering him complete submission.

The subtle gesture didn't go unnoticed. He opened his mouth against her shoulder, holding her without breaking the skin. And then his hips pulled back and he filled her with steady thrusts.

She tried to remain passive, to accept his mastery, but the pleasure building within her was too powerful. He didn't growl when she pushed back against him, so she allowed herself to move, rocking in counterpoint to his steady lunges.

His hands clasped her hips, and he better synchronized their movements. She climbed with him, her demand just as evident as his. Her shields lowered and their bond expanded, allowing her emotions to flow into his mind.

He gasped, pausing for a moment, then resuming with a deep groan. "Oh, kitten, this is unbelievable." Cupping her breasts and licking her skin, he pushed them both toward completion. *Come with me, love. Let's go over together.*

Amazed by the power of his being, and the depth of his affection, she was happy to surrender the last of her reservations. She anchored the bond between them, sealing the telepathic link with their combined energy.

Kage wrapped his arms around her, holding her close while his seed burst from his body in rhythmic spurts. She trembled in his arms, savoring each hot splash then surrendering to her own need for completion. Her orgasm was slow and thorough, spreading through her body in tingling waves.

They collapsed onto their sides, his body contoured to hers. She closed her eyes and covered his hand, which was cupping her breast. "I don't care what anyone says, I'm not letting you go."

He chuckled and nuzzled her hair. "Glad to hear it, 'cause I'm pretty sure you plucked that thought right out of my mind."

"I can't read minds, only emotions."

"Well, my emotions are so possessive right now, they aren't hard to put into words." He eased out of her body and gently rolled her to her back. "I keep coming back to Bear and Carla."

"Should I be jealous?"

"Not in the least." He brushed her hair back from her face then rested his hand at the base of her throat. "I can't help wondering how many other couples are out there like them. Maybe Timberline can become a sort of refuge, or maybe..." He shook his head and looked away. "I don't know."

She guided his face back around and smiled. "I like the idea. I've watched so many people be demoralized by pointless expectations."

"Not all of the expectations are pointless, but many can be tempered. We need to find a balance, a way to value tradition without discounting individuals." His fingers traced the edge of the suppression collar, touching her skin as well as the metal band. "I would remove this if I could. It's not a matter of trust anymore."

"You don't have the code?"

He shook his head. "Bear knocked Lane out before I could ask him, and I wasn't going to wait around until he regained consciousness."

She snuggled against his side, resting her head on his shoulder. "It doesn't matter as long as we're here. Morphing would draw too much attention. How long are we going to accept Milo's hospitality?"

"That's up to Tayla. She'll have to go over Darman's information and put together a response."

"I always wondered how he did it." She propped herself on her elbow, so she could see his face. "Everyone knows he's the source of information at Alpha Colony, but DOMA hasn't been able to catch him in the act."

"He's careful and he's clever. DOMA knows he has a vested interest in the cats, and he's used that fact as misdirection. Every week or so, he sends a message to our resident medic. The message contains a layered encryption with an update for Tayla. And while DOMA is watching every move made into or out of cat territory, I smuggle the real message here to Milo's farm."

She laughed, delighted by the creativity. "That's brilliant. Hide the evidence in plain sight."

"Basically." His gaze focused on her mouth, and his fingers weren't far behind. "You better get some sleep before I forget that this is all new to you."

She licked her lips, teasing his fingertips in the process. "But it's the newness that makes it so very appealing."

"Is that right?" He swept her beneath him in one smooth motion and nudged her legs open with his knees. "Be careful what you wish for, kitten. Too often you'll get it." His mouth sealed over hers, and his cock pushed back into her waiting warmth.

## Chapter Six

Cruz crawled across the rock outcropping on his belly, silent and unseen. He'd ignored the unusual activity for the past few weeks. Hunters used the caves from time to time, but they never stayed for long. This gorge was too steep, the terrain too unforgiving for most cats. So who were the squatters and why were they hiding out in his mountains?

The male was useless. He cowered in the cave while the female brought him food and ran his errands. Cruz had just about lost patience with the worthless pair. He'd give them a few more days to clear out of his territory and then he'd let them know, in no uncertain terms, that they had encroached on his territory. With the plan solidified in his mind, he scooted backward off the ledge and disappeared into the shadows.

\* \* \*

Jizette wrapped her hands around her coffee mug, savoring the warmth as much as the bitter brew Milo passed off as coffee. Her body was replete and content, but her head was punishing her for a night spent indulging her carnal appetites with her new mate. The energy humming across their bond didn't keep her eyes from drooping.

Kage and Tayla chatted easily, obviously comfortable with each other. Tayla had sleek dark hair, a compact build, large dark eyes, and seemingly boundless energy. She sat with her feet propped on the corner of her desk in sublevel two of Milo's farm.

"Sasha's video is still getting close to a million hits a day," she told Kage. Her big brown eyes shifted occasionally to Jizette, but she'd given up trying to include her in the conversation. "The fact that it verges on porn doesn't hurt our cause, but DOMA squirms every time it runs."

"What about the lab results? When were those released?"

“Three days ago. They’ve been picked up by two of the major news services, but the other three are being more cautious. However, there have been numerous demonstrations, and the subsequent media coverage has been better than we anticipated. If the hybrid phenomenon is as widespread as I think it is, we need to decide what we want.”

“What do you mean?”

“This gives us leverage, a strong negotiating position. But we need to decide what we want. If we force DOMA to shut down Alpha Colony, where would everyone go? The vast majority of the inhabitants have known no other life.”

“We already determined that’s not an option. We just want control of our own lives.”

“Which is impossible as long as DOMA controls your food source.” She lowered her feet to the floor with a *thunk*. “Like I said, we need to decide what we want.”

Kage nodded, his expression distracted and thoughtful.

Tayla shifted her attention back to Jizette and smiled. “So, someone finally landed this rascal? How’d you do it?”

“We’re still trying to figure that out.” Setting her coffee cup on the corner of Tayla’s desk, Jizette rubbed her temples. “Gods, this headache will not back off.”

“Why don’t you go see Hillard?” Tayla suggested. “She’s great with headaches.”

Kage rose as well, but Jizette waved him back into his seat. “One left and two rights. Correct?”

“Exactly,” Tayla confirmed.

“I’ll be right back.” Kage reached for her mind as she headed for the corridor, and she found the strength for a weak smile. They would have to work on his overprotective instincts. One overbearing male in the family was enough.

Dr. Hillard stepped away from a wall display as Jizette tapped on the door to her office. “Good morning, Jizette. I was just about to send for you. Is there something I can do for you first?”

“I hope so. I’ve got the mother of all headaches.”

"That sounds miserable." The doctor smiled, and her blue eyes sparkled, the added color doing wonders for her face.

Why was she hiding behind dowdy clothes and... her head hurt too much for her to care. She followed Hillard into the adjoining clinic. She lifted her sleeve so Hillard could administer an injection and within minutes the pounding lessened.

"Tell Milo to give you a raise. You're worth far more than he is paying you." Another tentative smile reinforced Jizette's opinion that the doctor was hiding from something, or someone. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. That's why I'm here."

"If you were going to send for me, does that mean you've reached a conclusion about your hypothesis?"

"Actually, I have and the possibilities could be rather staggering." She placed her hand on Jizette's upper arm, her expression serious. "Would you like to go get Kage?"

"Does he need to be here?"

"It's entirely up to you."

"Then go on, I'm too curious to wait."

"I'd like to perform another scan, to compare with the baseline I created yesterday. Would that be all right with you?"

"Of course." Jizette took a step toward the exam table, but the doctor stopped her.

"That's not necessary." She removed a small, hand-held device from her pocket and walked around Jizette in a slow circle. "All done."

Jizette followed her back into the adjoining office and Hillard slipped in behind her desk. After uploading the new data, she studied the changes, her fingers lightly tapping against her lips. "It's happening even faster than I thought."

"What's happening?"

"Your body is creating an environment which will increase the chances of pregnancy."



Jizette rubbed her eyes and tried not to lash out. "Kage and I can't have children. We are from different genetic families."

Hillard smiled patiently and folded her hands on her desktop. "How much do you know about Alpha Colony? Are you part of the resistance?"

"I'm new to it, but I'm aware of DOMA's lies."

"Good. I'll spare you the in-depth history lesson. Suffice it to say DOMA's ambitions progressed in stages. Hybrids came first, then morphs, then morphs with paranormal abilities. You, my dear, are part of this third and final stage. I believe you are a universal breeder."

"What the fuck is a universal breeder?"

Jizette snapped her head toward the doorway and found Kage standing there, arms crossed over his chest.

"A female whose reproductive system is able to morph," Hillard explained. "She can produce offspring with any male."

"Any male, or any male to which she's bonded?" Dread chilled Jizette's blood, making her lungs sluggish and her chest tight. She already knew the answer. She just needed to hear the words.

"If you are truly a universal breeder, which is what my scans indicate, a bond is not necessary."

"Oh gods." She pressed a hand over her chest as lights danced before her eyes. "If this gets out, I'll never be safe. Rogues will come from all over the colony."

Kage knelt beside her chair and swung her around to face him. "No one will ever know. No one. Do you hear me?"

"How will we explain it if I give birth to a wolf?"

"We'll claim you were a surrogate, or whatever. I don't care. This information never leaves this room." He stood and glared at the doctor. "If you endanger my mate --"

"There's no need for threats, Kage. You don't know me, but you know Milo. And Milo trusts me implicitly." A moment of tense silence stretched between them before

Kage accepted her assurance and moved behind Jizette's chair. "I need to inform Director Darman of my findings, but I will leave her name out of it. We were aware of the program, but we didn't realize they had succeeded."

"There could be more than one like me out there." Jizette's head was still spinning from the revelation.

"It's more than likely that there are." Hillard didn't try to soften the blow. Candor was more her style. "Darman will find them. Now that we know they exist."

"DOMA has to be watching them, watching her." The realization set Kage in motion again.

Hillard took out a note pad and wrote a series of numbers, then pushed back from her desk and stood. "Which is why you can't go back. I know your father is pack alpha, but apparently fate has something else in store for you."

"What are you talking about?" With all the anxious energy surrounding her Jizette could no longer sit. She stood as well and turned around to lean against the desk. "We don't even know if I'm pregnant yet."

"You will be. That's what you were designed for."

Jizette suddenly went still. "You said DOMA worked in stages. Was fertility engineered into my bloodline?"

"Of course, and then they took it one step further with you."

"How do I protect her?"

Hillard tore the top sheet off the note pad and handed it to Kage. "GPS coordinates. It's a sanctuary for DOMA's castoffs, hybrids and morphs like yourselves. Very secluded, very primitive, very cold. But you'll be free of DOMA and your children will be safe."

"Then nothing else matters."

"What about Enya's murder? What about my brother?" Jizette objected. "He still thinks I'm a hostage, and your people still blame our pride."

Hillard winked at her, and then smiled. "Leave Maddox to me. I'll notify your families, then help Maddox unravel this mystery."

"He has a mate now," Kage warned.

"My interest is purely professional. I have some nifty toys that will make finding out what really happened child's play. Besides, it's been far too long since Director Darman and I spent any time together."

Darman was old enough to be her grandfather, so Jizette wasn't sure she wanted to imagine the exact nature of their attraction.

Hillard shook her head. "Don't look so scandalized. Jack was my mentor before we both fell out of favor with DOMA." She shifted her gaze to Kage and added, "Milo can provide what you'll need for the trip. He's outfitted refugees before. Just keep the truck. It will be perfect for where you're going."

"Thank you."

She chuckled. "You might not feel like thanking me for long. It's a hard trip and the encampment is rustic to say the least."

"You haven't spent much time at Alpha Colony, have you?" Jizette held out her hand toward Kage. "We're not afraid of hardship."

"What about the collar?"

Jizette shook her head. "I can't believe I forgot about it." She looked at the doctor. "Can any of your fancy toys slice through this?"

"A lazar scalpel should do the trick."

Kage cringed. "We don't want you to cut her head off."

"Such confidence you have in me."

It took a matter of seconds for Hillard to remove the collar. She performed the task with such calm, Jizette wondered why she hadn't thought to ask her about it before. "Again, thank you."

"No problem. I'll let everyone know what's going on."

With a mixture of excitement and sadness, Jizette left the clinic. She was thrilled at the possibility of having children with Kage, but the price was her other family. It didn't seem fair.

He slipped his hand into hers, entwining their fingers. "You okay with all this? We could return long enough to have Darman confirm the diagnosis."

"She has no reason to lie."

"Well, you're more trusting than I am. Milo has ways of contacting Darman. I'm not heading off on some blind adventure without some sort of confirmation."

Remembering how easily Lane tricked her she gave Kage's hand a squeeze. "You're right. We should make sure we're not being toyed with."

Kage turned suddenly and pressed her up against the corridor wall. "The only one I want toying with you is me."

"You still haven't made me beg for mercy." Before she finished the sentence his hand was under her shirt and his knee pressed between her legs. Her lids drooped and her senses burned. Gods, how she loved this man!

"Would you like to beg now, or shall I wait until we're alone in the truck on some North Country road?"

She looked up and down the corridor, her heart beginning to pound. "We better wait. Milo already thinks we're perverts."

He cupped the side of her face and smiled into her eyes. "Milo thinks we love each other so much we can't keep our hands to ourselves. Do you have a problem with that assessment?"

"Hell no."

Their kiss was long and lingering. They both sensed the changes hovering on the horizon. "We better go," he said with an encouraging smile. "Apparently, there's a bright new future waiting in the snowy north."

She laced her fingers through his and smiled. "I'm ready if you are."

## Epilogue

### Canada: Two Months Later

Kage took the heavy buckets from Jizette so quickly water splashed onto the floor of their small, rustic cabin. "I told you I would do this as soon as I finished chopping wood." He kicked the door shut with the heel of his boot, his expression thunderous.

"And I told you to stop treating me like an invalid. We're in for a serious storm. Neither of us needs to be out there once it gets going." She planted her fists on her hips and glared into his eyes. This fight had been brewing for days. Ever since he'd detected three hearts beating inside her instead of two. The thought was almost enough to melt her aggravation. They were having twins! "Barbary females frequently deliver more than one cub. Why are you being so weird about this?"

"We are in the middle of the wilderness, and I'm the closest thing you've got to a doctor. In the blink of an eye, the pressure doubled."

Unable to maintain her anger in the face of his concern, she closed the distance between them and wrapped her arms loosely around his waist. "I'm strong and healthy, and according to Dr. Hillard, I was engineered for this."

"That's not funny." His arms came around her and he pulled her tight against his chest. "I couldn't bear it if anything happened to any of you."

"Nothing is going to happen to us. There will be a few hours of pain, a rather gory delivery, and then years and years of happily ever after."

"I like the sound of that."

"So do I." She tilted her head back so she could look into his eyes. "Now we need to come to an agreement about the next seven months. Do you believe I love our children?"

"Of course."

"Then why won't you trust me to take care of them?"

He tensed, obviously uncomfortable with her line of reasoning. "It's my job to protect you and --"

"I carried water in from the pump, you ass. You'd have me flat on my back in bed until the babies are born if you had your way."

A wicked smile parted his lips. "A rather unimaginative position, but I can work with it."

She laughed and slapped him on the arm. "If I'm as fragile as you presume, how the hell am I going to survive delivering twins?"

"All right, all right, I get it. Pregnancy does not equate to helplessness."

She punched him in the arm. "And you better not forget it."

"Yes, sir," he drawled, desire smoldering in his eyes.

"I thought that was my line."

"Well if you're hale and hearty, perhaps I'll punish you for disobeying me."

Heat rolled through her body, tense and electric, like the storm gathering outside the cabin. "It's been weeks since you punished me, and I did blatantly disregard a directive."

"Are you absolutely certain we won't hurt the babies if we... indulge ourselves?"

"They are still really tiny." She wasn't sure what else she could say to reassure him. "Can't you sense them? You felt their hearts beating before I did."

"I have to intentionally scan, but that's not a bad idea." He eased her to arm's length and ran a hand through his hair. "I'm going to build up the fire, and you're going to get naked."

"Completely naked?" She shivered. "It's cold in here."

"Which is why I'm going to build up the fire." His expression hardened while his gaze blazed even hotter. "No more arguments. I want you naked and on your knees."

His authoritative tone was a balm to her spirit. She'd felt almost neglected these past few weeks. He'd been attentive and affectionate, but there had been an emotional

reserve about him that she hadn't understood. When they made love each night, it lacked the spontaneity and intensity she had come to crave.

She pulled off her boots and unbuttoned her sweater. It was amazing how quickly they'd been able to make this cabin feel like home. It had been vacant for almost a year before they arrived and the Haven council granted their request for occupancy. Winter Haven was inhabited by an eclectic mix of hybrids, morphs, and misfits. No one asked too many questions, but they still managed to create a sense of community.

Kage fed branches into the fire until the flames crackled and roared. The warm, yellow light made his skin glow and accentuated his angular features. His multi-colored hair was swept back from his face in distinct waves, just brushing his broad shoulders. Noble, watchful, protective -- wolf. Even in human form his animal nature shone through.

As if to confirm her thoughts, his golden gaze shifted toward her, looking undeniably canine. "Why are you still dressed?"

"I was admiring my mate."

He stalked toward her, his gaze fixed on her mouth. "Your mate wants you naked." He paused for a slow, sexy smile. "Now."

"Yes, sir." She pulled her T-shirt off over her head and tossed it aside. He spread several blankets in front of the fire and collected pillows from the bedroom as she shed her jeans and took off her underwear. When she was naked, she moved onto the blanket and knelt in the middle folding her hands in her lap. She didn't speak, knew he enjoyed her silence.

"Part your thighs. I can't see your pussy."

She moved her legs apart and rested her hands on her knees. Tension arced between them, anticipation mixed with lust. What would he ask her to do? What would he offer in return?

Moving one of the kitchen chairs to the edge of the blanket, he sat facing her. "Do you deserve to be disciplined?"

"Yes, sir."

"More importantly, do you want to be disciplined?"

"Very much, sir."

"Then show me." He motioned her forward. "If you want to revel in your punishment, you must offer me your mouth." Feeling utterly decadent, she crawled toward him. His gaze swept from the sway of her breasts to her undulating ass then back to her face. "You look so feline when you do that. It reminds me that our relationship is forbidden, taboo. I shouldn't love you."

"But you do?"

"You know I do."

His hushed confession filled her with warmth and joy. "May I unzip your pants, sir?"

"Please do."

She knelt between his legs and obliged him. His cock sprang free, falling heavily into her waiting hand. She reached inside his pants with her other hand and cupped his sac, loving the outward evidence of his virility. He pushed his pants lower, giving her more room to play.

Squeezing the base of his cock, she looked up at him and smiled. "This is much easier to do when my legs aren't folded like a pretzel."

"Nothing about our first time together was ideal. Now, no more talk. Find something better to do with your mouth."

"Like this?" She closed her lips around the tip and sucked greedily. "Or this?" Lifting the heavy shaft, she licked the underside. "Or this?" She wet her lips and slid him deep into her mouth, performing two slow strokes before allowing him to spring free. "Is that what you had in mind?"

"Keep it up and I'm going to do more than spank you."

"I certainly hope so." She laughed and returned to her task in earnest. Using her hand on his shaft, she sucked and licked the upper portion of his cock, paying special attention to the very tip. She swirled her tongue and slid up and down, using his gasps and groans to guide her movements.



"Enough." He suddenly pushed her back.

"Why did you make me stop? I love it when you lose control."

"Exactly." He stood and turned the chair sideways. "The only one losing control tonight is you. Now lean over the chair, and get that lovely ass in the air."

His spark of dominance ignited the embers of her smoldering desire. She crawled forward and bent over the chair, cool air teasing the heated flesh between her thighs. This was what she wanted. She needed him to assert his true nature, to be himself with her. He would never be content as long as he restrained his inner wolf. And she would never be content with a restless mate.

With his sexy smile curving the corners of his mouth, he reached inside one of the pillowcases. "I've been saving this, figured it would have to wait until after. But you've been so disobedient today. I really have no choice." He withdrew a small flogger. The handle and the shaft were black, but the strips at the end mixed gold, bronze, and copper, like the multi-color strands of his hair.

She clutched the edge of the chair as excitement curled through her body. His emotions blazed into her mind, wild and possessive, yet so incredibly tender. He approached her slowly, dragging the flogger along her spine and into the crevice between her ass cheeks.

"I'm trusting you, kitten. I can read your body like a book, but I don't know how this affects our young. If you need me to stop, say the word."

"I would never do anything to harm our pups." She let her gaze reflect her hurt. "Why won't you believe that?"

"Our pups?" He stilled, looking deep into her eyes. "Was that just a passing phrase, or..."

She smiled. "I've been meaning to tell you, but you've been so exasperating."

"Tell me now." He manufactured a fearsome scowl and tapped his palm with the end of the flogger.

Laughter bubbled from the depths of her soul. This would make him so happy. "I can sense them a little better each day. I have no idea if they'll be able to morph, but they both possess their father's spirit."

He lowered the flogger to his side and moved closer. "Are you disappointed? This means you have conformed to meet my needs. That doesn't seem fair."

"I had resigned myself to a childless marriage. This is a miracle."

The flogger momentarily forgotten, he knelt at her side and pressed his hand against her belly. His eyes closed and her abdomen tingled. "Their heartbeats are so strong. I will never tire of the sound."

"When those heartbeats are replaced with demanding screams at two-thirty in the morning, I'll remind you of those words." She chuckled and pushed him away. "Now, are you going to gush over our pups all day, or are you going to fuck their mother?"

With laughter rumbling in his chest, he pushed to his feet. "Their mother has a sassy mouth today. I think I pulled my cock out of it too quickly."

She wisely kept her agreement to herself. Her pussy had been tight and needful since he suggested this punishment.

"Move your legs farther apart." The autocratic snap returned to his tone, and he resumed his teasing massage with the end of the flogger. He trailed the strands down the backs of her legs and up the insides of her thighs. "Such a pretty pussy." He passed the flogger over her folds then snapped it against her ass cheeks.

She gasped and clenched. The sting was sharper than she'd expected, hotter and brighter.

"Try not to tense. Absorb this sensation as you would any other. Let it sink into you and flow through you."

His arousal washed over her and twisted through her, every bit as intense as the heat radiating from her bottom. Knowing how badly he wanted her thrilled her, made her ache for the penetration of his cock and the strength of his body.

He repeated the dual stroke, first one side and then the other. Then he paused, allowing her to process the feelings. Her fingers clenched the chair, but she kept the rest of her body still, focusing on the need passing between them.

After one final set of hot caresses, he tossed the flogger aside. "Your skin is so delicate, so fine." He carefully pressed his palm over one burning cheek, his fingers teasing the sensitive crease between. "Are you wet, kitten? Did this make you hot?" Before she could answer, his hand slid down, his middle finger parting her sodden folds. "So very wet."

It wasn't the punishment as much as his reaction to punishing her that had revved her body into overdrive. Or at least it was easier to accept if she justified it that way. He pushed two fingers into her core and she moaned, needing more than this teasing hint of penetration.

"Tell me what you want," he coaxed, sliding his fingers in and out.

"You. I want you deep inside me."

He rotated his hand and rubbed the front wall of her passage, brushing his fingertips over an elusive spot that made her entire body tremble. "I am inside you."

"Your cock." She gasped. "I need your cock."

"Soon." He slowly removed his fingers, and she whipped her head around. Why was he stopping? He returned to the pillowcase from which he'd drawn the flogger and produced a small bottle of amber liquid. "This feels best when it's heated, but we'll have to make do. I don't think either of us have the patience to wait right now."

He hadn't told her to alter her position, so she remained over the chair. His gaze moved over her with obvious hunger as he returned to her side. "Do you have any idea how beautiful you are to me?"

She smiled, unable to speak past the lump in her throat. Tenderness radiated off him in waves, warming her, soothing her. She pushed her emotions across their link, needing him to understand how much she loved him.

His gaze narrowed and a smile curved one corner of his mouth. "Don't try to distract me. We're doing this my way."

Pleased by his determination, she turned back around and wiggled her bottom. He knelt beside her and opened the bottle, drizzling the liquid onto the small of her back. It was cool and fragrant, spicy with a hint of musk.

He spread the oil over her back and massaged it into her shoulders. "This will ease the sting without diminishing the heat." His fingers passed through the puddle on her back and smoothed the oil over her ass cheeks.

His hands worked together, yet separate from each other. One slipped between her thighs, while the other remained on her back. He finger fucked her slowly, drawing out each stroke as his other hand sneaked beneath her and found her clit from in front.

She jerked with the first firm stroke of his fingertips over her sensitive bud. Sensations ebbed and flowed, abandoning one part of her body as his skillful caresses drew her attention to another area.

He kept up the gentle caress of her clit, but his other hand momentarily left her. The oil's scent grew stronger and then Kage moved behind her. "Do you trust me, kitten?"

She closed her eyes and dug her nails into the chair as uncertainty threatened her arousal. There was only one reason he would ask, only one intimacy they'd yet to share. "Yes, sir."

"You don't sound very certain."

"I trust you." It was as much a reminder to herself as a reassurance for him. "You would never hurt me."

"Say the word and I'll take you to bed and make slow, sweet love to you."

She'd had slow, sweet love for the past two weeks and it had left her feeling incomplete and separated from her true mate. "I want you, Kage. The real you."

He raised her and turned her head, rewarding her decision with an intoxicating kiss. His hands stroked her breasts and pressed her tightly against his body while his mouth moved over and against hers. Their tongues curled and clung, deeply mingling their tastes.

With a hungry growl, he released her mouth and guided her back down to the chair. His hands slid down her sides and palmed her ass. He squeezed, then slowly parted the way for his cock. She'd learned to enjoy the slide of his fingers and even a small toy, but this was different. His cock was so much bigger than anything she'd taken before.

"Don't tense up on me now." He reached around and found her clit, resuming his light, circular motion. "Push back onto me. The oil will make this easier than you think."

She took a deep breath and slowly drove her hips backward. Her body resisted, pulsing in protest, then releasing with an unexpected rush of sensation. She shivered and groaned as her mind registered the exquisite fullness. His hand clasped her hip and he drove deeper, his fingers never faltering in their loving orbit.

"Come for me, Jizette. Do it now."

Her inner muscles rippled and squeezed. She arched her back and took him deeper, helpless against the current streaming over her. He held her, guided her, she was safe in his arms. She let go and came in deep, pulsing spasms.

Before the last tremor passed, he drew nearly out and drove back in. Out slow and in fast, his strokes kept her pleasure climbing, higher and hotter, more intense.

Unable to remain still beneath him, she bucked into each of his strokes. His pleasure rushed across their link as well as his emotions. She absorbed the sensations with greedy delight and shoved the tempest back toward him.

He cried out sharply, driving deep one final time as the sensual storm obliterated what remained of his control. His arms wrapped around her, pulling her up off the chair as he shuddered against her back. She was half an instant behind him then she was soaring at his side.

His arms supported her as they gradually returned to reality. "That was... amazing."

"Glad you approve." He nipped her shoulder, then buried his face in the warmth of her neck.

She could picture his semi-smug smile. "Are we going to stay like this for the rest of the day?"

He carefully separated their bodies and turned her toward the fireplace. "Stay close to the fire. I don't want you catching cold."

They lay on their sides facing the flames, bodies nestled together, enjoying the firelight and the afterglow. He pressed against her back, absently stroking her hair.

"I wonder if they've caught Izak yet." She shivered. "Hillard seemed pretty confident that she could break the case."

"She has technology on her side. If she works with the morphs rather than blazing a trail through them, she should be fine."

"That's the hardest part of this." She rolled to her back and looked at him. "I hate that we can't make direct contact."

"It's too dangerous. We can't risk DOMA finding out where you are. Milo promised to send updates from time to time, and he'll pass on our important news to the ones we love."

She stroked the side of his face and smiled. "It will get easier, I know. But I still miss them."

"So do I." He leaned down and kissed her lips, his gaze warm and caressing. "But I'd do it all again in a minute. I have no regrets."

Rather than respond with words, she pulled his mouth back down to hers and poured all her love and devotion into one lingering kiss.

## **Aubrey Ross**

Award-winning author Aubrey Ross writes an eclectic assortment of erotic fiction. From power struggles between futuristic clans, to adventurous Mystic Keepers, her stories are filled with passion and imagination. Some of her recent awards include an EPPIE finalist, two Passionate Plume finalists, and a CAPA Nomination from The Romance Studio.

With a pampered cat curled on the corner of her desk, Aubrey dreams of fascinating worlds and larger than life adventures -- and wouldn't have it any other way! Visit her website at <http://www.aubreyross.com>. Join Aubrey's news group at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Anything-but-Ordinary/>.