

# Stephani Hecht

The Lost Shifter Series  
Book 1



PRIMAL  
PASSIONS

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Primal Passions

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Primal Passions

The Lost Shifter Series Book 1

By

Stephani Hecht

Dedication

To Joie. Thanks for all your help in researching felines.

## Chapter One

There would be bloodshed tonight, of that, Logan McDurin was sure. He just hoped it wasn't his. Sucking in deep on the cigarette he didn't like, but needed to mask his scent, he warily eyed the rundown liquor store. Out front, his target a white box-shaped ambulance. Or rather the individual inside the emergency vehicle. A twenty-five year old paramedic who was just about to have his whole reality turned on its ass. It sucked to be that poor sap.

Logan took refuge at the side of an abandoned meth lab. The ground was littered with empty bottles, used condoms and needles. In other words, it was about as far away from the Ritz as you could get. Why he had volunteered for this wild goose chase of a mission he would never know. He must have an undiscovered masochist streak.

Looking up into the sky, his lips formed a silent prayer that he wouldn't see the dark outlines of the Ravens. Given how shitty this assignment was going, them showing up would be the perfect way to end it. Even through the pitch-black night sky he would still be able to spot them, thanks to his heightened shifter senses. Nothing yet. That didn't mean the winged bastards weren't coming though. He had no doubt the Ravens were on their way. The only question was when they would pop up.

The passenger door of the rig opened and a tall man hopped out. Saying something to the driver that Logan didn't bother to try and overhear, the male slammed the door and started for the store.

He wore dark blue cargo pants and a matching windbreaker that had the words of his ambulance company embossed, in bright yellow print, on the back. A smaller embroidered patch on the breast couldn't be seen, but Logan knew what it said.

Jacyn.

The paramedic walked with a predator's gait. Smooth and measured, like a feline. It left no doubt in Logan's mind that if cornered, Jacyn would be more than capable of fighting his way out. He had brown hair that Logan knew would be a mix of dark and light hues. The man had it styled short, but not enough that when a slight breeze blew past it didn't mess it up a bit.

As that same small wind blew by Logan, he lifted his face and breathed in. He would be better able to track Jacyn if he had his scent. Instead, he got a whiff of something bad. Acrid. Fetid. All too familiar. "Fuck!" Logan snarled aloud, although there was nobody around to hear.

The all too familiar stench of the Ravens was now thick in the air. Frantic, heart pounding, and adrenaline jacking through his body, he scanned his gaze all over. His stomach dropped when he saw the source.

Sitting in the driver's seat of the ambulance, wearing the same uniform as Jacyn was a Raven. In human form, he had inky black hair slicked to the side. Even from a distance, Logan saw the all too familiar dark brown, almost black eyes, and pale skin that every Raven had.

Shit that answered his question about when the enemy would be showing up. They were already here.

They had been on the scene the entire time and were already closing in on Jacyn, who had no idea what kind of danger was looming. How could he when he had no clue of what or who he really was?

Stepping back further into the shadows of the house, Logan pulled out his cell to make a call. Home base needed to know just how bad things were about to get.

\* \* \* \*

Jacyn Adams was just walking under the weak light from the post on the center of the parking lot when he got a funny feeling that someone was watching him. Turning quickly, body tense and fingers going for his handheld radio, all he saw was the deserted street.

Still, the strange, prickly sensation at the back of his neck persisted. Shaking his head, he decided it must be the stress of the job getting to him. There was nobody there but the neighborhood bum, Texas. Sure Tex was stinky, loud and drunk, but unless he tried to get frisky again, he posed no danger to Jacyn. Turning around, Jacyn went into the store. "Hey, Buzzy," Jacyn called out over the ringing of the bell above the door. The place was so seedy and old it didn't warrant a more modern electronic one.

"Jacyn." The middle-aged woman smiled, showing off the gaps left from her two missing front teeth. "I was beginning to think you weren't working tonight."

"Where else would I go? You make the best coffee in LA." Going over to the ancient caffeine machine, he poured a cup and, without adding anything to it, took a sip. A satisfied moan slipped passed his lips. He hadn't lied when he said she made the best *joe* in the city. Hell, hers was probably the best brew in all of California.

"You're just saying that because I don't charge you." She chuckled, the sound more rattles than laughter, thanks to her lung disease.

Even if she hadn't shared her life story with Jacyn, he would have known it had been a hard one. In her forties, she looked much older, her face sallow and lined. Her hair was frizzy and grayer than brown and it looked like it had never been professionally styled. The nails on her hands were thick, cracked and yellowed and there were permanent burn marks on her fingers from the crack pipe. Jacyn really didn't see all those flaws anymore. Buzzy was his friend and he didn't have too many of those.

"I was really getting worried though," she chastised. "It's been two days since I've seen you and I know you never take time off."

"I haven't been feeling too hot." He leaned against the counter just across from her and made himself comfortable. They had passed away many hours this way. Her working the register, him killing time between calls. He didn't mind it though. Buzzy was fun to talk to. Even more, the presence of his ambulance deterred any would-be robbers. While the store wasn't in the worst part of LA, it wasn't in the best either and he felt somewhat protective over her.

"Have you gone to the doctors?" she asked, her bloodshot eyes widening in concern.

"Nah, just some aches and pains." Jacyn shrugged off her concern. He didn't feel it necessary to tell her

that he'd already been to several doctors and not one of them could figure out what was causing the strange symptoms of headaches, muscle pain and strange nightmares.

"Oh, baby. Are you sure?" she persisted.

"I think I was just tired and needed a day off to catch up on my sleep." He wasn't used to having others worry about his welfare and felt uncomfortable with it now.

"You sure you're okay?"

"Yeah, it's no big deal. I never get sick." Which, before now, had been true. Even when he had been a kid shuffled around foster homes with nobody to really look after him, he'd never caught so much as a case of the sniffles. It made what was happening to him now, scary and disconcerting.

"I see they stuck you with a new partner." She jerked her head in the direction of the rig.

"Yeah, his name is Patrick. Nobody wanted to work with him and I drew the short straw. So lucky me gets to suffer through his sour ass for twelve hours." Jacyn sighed.

"That bad?" Buzzy cackled.

"He's moody, doesn't talk much, plus he smells funny."

"Ewe..." She wrinkled her nose. "Smells funny how?"

"I don't know. It's hard to describe, just off somehow." He took a sip of coffee and out of habit, scanned the parking lot. What he saw out there, made his heart hammer in fear. A trio of dark-haired, leather clad, giants walking toward the store. They moved with a lethal determination that told Jacyn they weren't coming for the coffee. That and the guns they all whipped out of their long leather coats.

"Run," he yelled at Buzzy as he raised his hand to his radio. Pushing the button, he was dismayed to hear a heavy static that told him help wouldn't be coming that way. He looked over to the rig, hoping his partner had caught all this. From there he could call in on the ambulance's main radio. Patrick may be a grumpy, self-centered prick, but even he could handle something like radioing in a robbery in progress. Right? Surely, Jacyn could count on him to do that. Instead, Jacyn saw the jackass getting out and pulling his own gun, joining the approaching goons

What the fuck? "He is *so* not getting a good evaluation after this," Jacyn huffed under his breath. He'd always used humor to aid him when he was afraid and right now, he could use any help he could get since he was scared shitless.

Reaching over the counter, he grabbed the landline and cursed when dead air met him. Great! Now, short of him starting a fire and sending out smoke signals, there was no way to get help. He noticed Buzzy still standing there. Frozen in place with that whole deer-in-the-headlights thing going. He gave her a shove. "Move! Run!"

The air rang with gunfire. The large front pane window shattered, glass and product from shelves went flying. Jacyn ducked for cover behind the coffee station and prayed that Buzzy had taken refuge, too.

Nothing made sense. If it was just a robbery, then why call attention by shooting the place up first? Plus, how could another paramedic be involved? Sure the pay sucked, but not enough to warrant committing a

felony.

Since the initial burst of gunfire, there had been nothing else and now a heavy silence hung in the air. Jacyn strained, hoping to hear something that would tell him that Buzzy was still living. His heart hammered when the sound of boots crunching on glass reached him instead.

“Here kitty, kitty, kitty,” one of the attackers sang out.

Jacyn pressed his back to the counter and tucked his knees tight into his chest, trying to make himself as small a target as possible. While he was frantic to go to Buzzy to make sure she was okay, he knew that to move would be a death wish.

“You can’t hide from us, kitty,” another oily voice chimed in. “I can smell you. Taste your fear.”

A single shot rang out, the bullet hitting the counter inches above his head. Jacyn watched as a coffee cup fell to the ground, rolled on its rim before coming to a rest on its side. It was so surreal, that he noticed every second of its descent in intricate detail. Maybe because a part of him sensed it could be the last thing he ever saw.

More silence, the only noise was his breathing and the sounds of glass crunching under boots. More gunfire. Jacyn ducked his head down further, but no bullets flew his way this time. When there a sharp yelp of pain from one of the gunmen, Jacyn knew that there was a new player in the game and this one appeared to be on his side.

Ducking his head around the coffee island, he expected to see uniformed PD, but what he found was anything but. Dressed in a long dark leather coat like the other guys, this one looked even more dangerous if possible. At the same time, he had a sexy allure to him that even under the threat of death, Jacyn couldn’t help but notice.

With short dark hair and well over six feet of solid muscles, he looked like he had walked straight out of a *B* action movie. Jacyn gaped in shock when he saw all the weapons strapped to the newcomer’s chest. Draped over him were guns, knives and possibly grenades. Where in the hell had he come from? No cop Jacyn had ever met packed that kind of heat.

“I should have known he would send you,” Patrick snarled at the newcomer.

Jacyn felt a start of shock. It was pretty obvious that his partner knew dark, handsome and weaponed up. They weren’t cuddly buddies either because Patrick’s lip curled before he blasted away at the newcomer. The dark-haired stranger moved so fast that he became a blur as he took cover in the short hallway that led to the bathrooms.

“I thought you said the others hadn’t found him yet?” one of the gunman yelled to Patrick.

“They haven’t,” Patrick sneered. “It’s just Logan. He’s tracking the same scent we are. He’s a scout so there is no more. If you can’t take out one feline, then I’ll kill you myself.”

Using the distraction, Jacyn prepared to leave his shelter to see if Buzzy needed help. Not daring to get up all the way, he instead skittered across the floor on his hands and knees. It seemed to take forever, the register so far away, but finally he was there. A waist-high wall surrounded all four sides of the register and he burst through the swinging door.

As soon as he got in, he knew it was too late. A thick layer of blood covered the dirty, cracked tile. He quickly lifted his hands, but they still got covered in the gore and he wished he had taken the time to put on his latex gloves. Jacyn stared down at his bloodstained fingers in horror for a second before his training kicked in and he clambered in the rest of the way.

Buzzy's eyes were open, her pupils fixed and dilated. Her body curled on its side, he could see the back of her skull had been blown open. If he could somehow manage to get her to the rig and his equipment, there still wasn't jack he could do for her. His heart clenched in regret. If only he had managed to get her to take cover sooner, then maybe she would still be alive.

He jumped when someone else took cover in the register area. Jacyn spun on the balls of his feet, preparing to defend himself. Since he was still crouched, the movement was awkward and he ended up falling on his ass. He moaned in disgust when he felt the warm, sticky liquid soak into his clothing.

It was the lone guy who had been fighting it out with the gunmen. Jacyn relaxed some. Then he spotted a long sword in the guy's hand and the fear returned with a hard rush. The blade was sharp, the metal shiny. A lump of terror formed in Jacyn's throat when he noticed the fresh gore coating the blade. Staring at it, he wondered if maybe they were down to one gunman—well two if you counted his jackass-former partner. Maybe Jacyn got lucky and the blood dripping down the blade was Patrick's. It would serve him right for going all Glock on the store.

The new guy turned and Jacyn found himself locked in the green-eyed gaze. Even if he hadn't been carrying more weapons than a gangster, he still would have looked menacing. The hard line of his jaw was set and unforgiving, his lips pressed together tightly, as if he'd never smiled. Even though the guy was hunched down, too, Jacyn could still see the hard muscles molded by his leather pants and tight fitting shirt. A strange thrill went through Jacyn's body that had nothing to do with fear or adrenaline. Great, leave it to him to get turned on by a hot body while in the middle of a gunfight. He must be losing it because while the guy was sexy as hell, he had probably just killed two people.

He looked dangerous, mean and had a frigging bloody weapon in his hand. Jacyn realized that his *savior* was every bit a threat as the gunmen. As if answering his musing, there was another round of shots. A display of lottery tickets took a hit and exploded. Jacyn ducked and covered his head with his arms.

"We need to get out of here," the giant taking cover with him whispered.

The get-out-of-here part Jacyn was all for, it was the *we* he wasn't sure of. He still nodded and acted *all for one* though. He could use all the help he could get. Once they got to the doors, he'd just make a break for it and take cover in his rig. There he had the radio and he'd call dispatch for help.

"My name's Logan and your brother sent me," the stranger said.

Again, Jacyn nodded, even though he knew for sure the guy was crazy or had him confused for someone else. As an orphan, Jacyn had no family. He sure as hell didn't have a brother who would hate him enough to send a homicidal meathead after him.

"Okay, just tell me what to do," Jacyn replied. Once he got out though, he was going to put as much distance between himself and this *The Rock* wannabe as possible. Then he was going to do whatever it took to pay these assholes back for killing Buzzy.



## Chapter Two

The little punk had plans of running. Logan knew that by the way Jacyn's gaze shifted over to his rig as he bit his bottom lip apprehensively. With that reaction, he may as well have taken an ad out in a newspaper, announcing his intentions.

Logan decided not to call him out on it yet. Right now, his main concern was getting the jaguar out alive. Once they had reached safety, he would just pick up the ungrateful jerk and haul him away if need be.

He still had his sword out, that being his weapon of choice. While it may be easier to take someone out from a distance with a gun, Logan had been fighting with a blade for so long it felt like a part of him. Not only that, the easiest way to kill a Raven was to decapitate it and nothing did the job better than a long sword. Inching his way to the door, Logan paused long enough to take his Glock out and hand it to Jacyn. "You know how to use this?" he asked, his voice barely more than a whisper.

"Yes, I used to date a cop and got all kinds of firearm lessons." Jacyn reached out to take it.

His fingers were cold and clammy when they brushed against Logan's hand. Even so, a slow fissure traveled through his body and he suddenly became aware of the woodsy, clean scent coming from Jacyn. *Forget it. He's Mitchell's brother and the last thing you need is that kind of trouble.* "Will you be able to shoot someone if necessary?" He cleared his throat as he jerked his hand back.

The paramedic nodded, then gave a quick glance to the dead woman.

By the way his eyes filled with grief, it was obvious he had liked her. Then Logan saw a flare of anger flash through the male's eyes. One he recognized well. The look of fury and the need for vengeance. Good, he needed Jacyn angry. Nothing like that and adrenalin to get you jacked up enough to fight your way out of situations like this.

Jerking his head to the door, indicating it was time to move, Logan gripped his sword tighter, the handle slick with sweat and blood from the Raven he'd killed. He caught Jacyn eyeing up the mess on the blade, the paramedic turning a bit pale.

Logan could only imagine how hard it must be for Jacyn right now. First someone shooting at him, then to find his friend's body and now having to trust a complete stranger waving around a bloody weapon.

All in all, he was handling it pretty well. Most others would have curled themselves up in a fetal position, praying to whatever God they worshiped about right now. Either Jacyn was in shock, stupid or the bravest son of a bitch Logan had ever met.

The familiar way he held the Glock said he hadn't been lying when he'd claimed to know how to use it. That gave Logan some comfort, but not much. Although he'd wounded two of the shifters, the odds were still two against three and Jacyn had no formal battle training when it came to fighting other shifters.

Okay, time to move. If they stalled any longer, the Ravens would come in to get them. Logan knew the only reason they hadn't already was that they had a healthy respect for his sword and what it could do to their necks. That would only buy a little time though. Ravens had never been known for their smarts or patience.

"Move!" Logan yelled to Jacyn. Hoping that the paramedic was following, Logan burst through the door. With a battle roar, he swung the sword around in a wide circle. Gunfire ripped through the air, bullets hitting walls, windows and display cases. Just as he clipped a Raven in the arm with his sword, a sharp pain in his lower leg told him he'd been hit.

To pause to acknowledge the wound would be his and Jacyn's death sentence so Logan pushed on. A Raven clutched his gut and fell, blood spilling over his hands. Pride pulsed through him with the realization Jacyn had shot the son of a bitch. Logan twisted his sword and sliced the midsection of the third. "We need to run." He tugged on Jacyn's arm. "They may be down now, but not for long."

"You're crazy," Jacyn sputtered, looking even more pale than before. A fine sheen of sweat dotted his upper lip and he trembled from head to boot.

Logan could smell the rank stench of fear rolling off him in waves and he knew he had to get Jacyn to safety before the events of the day hit him any harder. "No I'm not. Now let's go." Logan tugged on his arm, but the male didn't budge.

"I shot that one in the stomach. Even if he's not dead yet, he'll bleed out before too long," Jacyn babbled, his eyes going from fearful to the glassy look one gets when they're shutting down. "If he does survive, then he'll die from secondary infection. The first one you hit with your sword, you cut him in a major artery. I think he's already bled to death. As for the second—"

"Snap out of it!" Logan growled as he pointed to one of the Ravens. "Does it look like he's out for the count?"

The Raven Jacyn had shot stumbled to his feet. The blood continued to pump out of the wound and drip to the floor. The bright red drops making loud smacking sounds as they hit the ground. "Ouch." The Raven grinned, his teeth bloodstained. "The kitty stung me a bit."

"No! No! No!" Jacyn shook his head, his eyes so wide with fear they looked ready to bug out of his head. To his credit, he didn't drop the gun in shock. Instead, he leveled it on the Raven again. "There is no way you should be talking, let alone standing."

Before the Raven could respond, Logan pulled out a throwing dagger and launched it, burying it up to the hilt in the Raven's throat.

The male let out a gurgled protest as he brought his hands up to claw at the weapon.

“It’s time to leave,” Logan ordered.

This time Jacyn obeyed, running at a breakneck pace as he followed Logan out of the remains of the store. A burst of gunfire behind them told him one or more of the other Ravens were up and kicking again.

They ran to the parking lot and Logan reached out to grab Jacyn before the paramedic tried to take off. Just as his fingers were closing around the male’s wrist, half a dozen dark shadows came from the sky. Larger than their regular animal counterparts, Raven shifters were the size of a large dog and they were ten times as mean. They swooped down and just before their claws touched the ground, they shifted to human form.

“This is not happening,” Jacyn stammered under his breath.

His eyes were wide and wild and Logan knew he’d lost him.

“I’m just stuck in one of my crazy nightmares again.”

Logan brought up his sword to fight back, but several of the Ravens shot at once. They aimed all of the guns at him and not Jacyn, so it was Logan who took a couple of hits. His body jerked from side to side before he felt his legs give out from under him. He landed face down on the hard, cracked asphalt.

The sounds of Jacyn’s yells hit Logan’s ears and he craned his head up enough to see three Ravens lift the paramedic off the ground. Even though he fought and cursed for all he was worth, they still managed to get him over to the ambulance. The Glock he had been holding was a few feet from Logan on the ground.

Logan snarled, outraged, the jaguar in him fighting to get out. A strange surge of protectiveness that he’d never felt toward another went through him. It took every bit of self-control he possessed not to give into instinct and shift right then. He fought it since he was out in public. It would be damn hard to explain a huge jungle cat walking down the streets, even in LA.

The Ravens were shoving Jacyn into the back of the ambulance, one of them pausing long enough to give Logan the finger. Then another loud snarl came, only this time it came from inside the ambulance. The vehicle shook back and forth and the sounds of screams and yells echoed through the night. There was another snarl—the sound of the unmistakable pitch of a jaguar. The eyes of the bird-flipping Raven were so huge they nearly bugged out from his pale face before he jumped into the back of the ambulance and slammed the doors closed.

“Not a good time to have your first shift, Jacyn,” Logan muttered under his breath as he watched the ambulance race away. He tried to get back up so he could chase it, but his knees gave out and he landed heavily on his ass. To make things even better for his crap hole of a day, it started to rain. Hard.

“Fuck!” he yelled. A sense of panic hit him at the thought of his jaguar being at the mercy of their enemies.

My jaguar? Now where in the hell did that thought come from? He’s a mission, nothing more. Cocking his head to the side, he picked up the distinct sound of sirens coming. Lots of them. And from the sounds of it, company wasn’t far off, with him being right in the middle of a warzone and carrying some weapons that would never be legal in this country.

Biting his bottom lip to keep from crying out, he managed to get to his feet. It was hard going and hurt like hell, but he somehow staggered back to the abandoned house that he'd been hiding beside earlier. If anyone in the surrounding houses saw him, they didn't offer to help. But then again in this neighborhood, they all tended to duck for cover and stay away from the windows when they heard gunfire.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, he was back in his previous hiding spot. He groaned as he realized he was two seconds from passing out and lying on a ground covered with the grossest rubbish imaginable.

His body shivered and trembled, partly from the shock of blood loss and partly because the shift was coming on him. The jaguar was now demanding to come out so his body could heal. As Logan closed his eyes and gave in to it, he only prayed that some cop didn't decide to search the area too carefully. Because he or she would be in for one hell of a surprise.

When Logan regained consciousness, the rain had passed and the sun was out, high in the sky, letting him know he'd been out for a while. He was still in jaguar form and curled up in a tight ball. With a yawn, he stretched out, then shifted back into human form. A quick pat down told him that, while his clothes were full of tears and crusty from dried blood, his wounds had all healed themselves.

Which meant he could no longer put off the inevitable. He closed his eyes and sighed with disgust. The most degrading task lay ahead of him. The most vile and gut crunching thing he could think of, but he had no way to avoid it. Not if he wanted to get to Jacyn before the Ravens killed him. With all the time that had been lost while he was unconscious, Logan would be lucky if they hadn't already done so. Taking his cell phone from the inner pocket of his coat, he flipped it open and called home base. *Whoever said that home was sweet was one seriously delusional idiot.*

"Where in the hell are you?"

Not a *hello*, not a *how are you*, not even a *go fuck yourself*. Yeah, he loved his life at moments like this. Made him wonder if the rogue shifters didn't have it all right. "Hey, Rat. I miss you, too." Logan winced when he noticed his foot was resting in the remains of a rotten orange. At least he thought it was an orange. So far gone, it had lost all of its shape and most of its smell.

"You report that you may have found one of the lost shifters and then go completely off the radar. Not cool, dude," Rat drawled slowly. "Mitchell has been trying to get in touch with you for hours."

"Well tell our holiness that I'm so sorry to keep him waiting. Inconsiderate me got shot and was unconscious." Although Logan truly admired and respected their leader, not even he was safe from Logan's rancor at times like this.

"Shot?" Rat's voice registered disbelief. "Are you going to be okay?"

"Do you really care?" Logan grunted as he got to his feet.

"No, but I have to put up appearances," Rat shot back, his words dripping with hate. A cheetah shifter with an attitude a mile wide, he'd never made it a secret he despised most everyone around him, especially Logan. For some reason though, the jerk was undyingly loyal to Mitchell.

"I need you to do me a favor." Logan winced. Having to ask for anything from this asshole was bad

enough almost to cause physical pain.

“I already told you, I don’t fuck jaguars,” Rat deadpanned. “I especially wouldn’t do a black one. I have a white comforter and you guys shed like crazy.”

Logan heard a clacking noise in the background that told him the ass was typing away on his keyboard. While Rat may be a jerk, he was the best hacker they had and never more than two feet from a computer. “Just as I was closing in on the lost shifter the Ravens attacked. They shot up a store and killed a human before capturing Jacyn.”

“You let them take Mitchell’s long missing brother?” Rat let out a low whistle. “You are seriously screwed once he finds out and not in a good way.”

“It gets even worse. The reason the Ravens and I were able to track him down so easily was because his jaguar scent was strong. As in about to have a first shift strong.”

“Shit,” Rat breathed. “Are you saying that we are about to have a feline shifter turn for the first time and the poor sap is going to do so while in enemy hands?”

“Yeah and I think the stress of the attack brought it on even sooner. He was starting to show signs of shifting as they grabbed him.” They both were silent as the implication really sank in. Not only did Jacyn not have any idea of who he was, but he was about to be bitch-slapped with his animal side without any warning. If a shifter society had raised him, he would have gone through years of schooling on what to expect during his first shift. How to handle it so it wasn’t so painful. Not only was Jacyn going to have to do it under fire, but it was going to hurt like a son of a bitch because he would be fighting it. “They took him away in his ambulance. Don’t those things have GPS tracking on them?”

“Yes, they do. Give me ten and I’ll find you the location.” Rat sighed.

Logan could almost see the jerk running his hand through his dyed hair in frustration. The cheetah usually kept it jet black with bright blue highlights running through it. Maybe the vain asshole did it because he thought it contrasted so nicely against his white comforter. “Thanks,” Logan gritted out between clenched teeth. It sucked having to be nice to the jerk.

Rat just grunted in response before he disconnected the call.

While Logan waited, he peered around the house, checking out the store. Yellow police tape surrounded it and several official looking cars and vans were parked everywhere. The fact they hadn’t stumbled on him last night was a damn miracle. Must have been because of the storm. It wasn’t very often things swung his way, but for once, he’d managed a bit of luck. After exactly eight minutes, his cell went off. Flipping it open, he barked, “Tell me you got something.”

“Yes, I do, I was able to pinpoint the location of the ambulance. You do realize they probably already dumped it. Not only that, but I’m sure the cops have already tracked it down, too. I don’t think they’ll be any help for you. Unless you plan on walking up to them and explaining that you are a soldier for a feline shifter general who ordered you to hunt down his missing brother.”

“Your sarcasm sucks,” Logan growled.

“Hey, you never know,” Rat went on as if he hadn’t heard him, “maybe they’ll even be willing to help you out with your problem. Of course you may want them to bring along Animal Control since you’re

going to have over two hundred pounds of pissed off jaguar on your hands.”

“Just give me the damn location.”

Rat did, but as he was finishing up, he just had to add one more zinger. “Oh by the way, Mitchell knows and he’s not real happy right now.”

“Is he on his way?” Logan asked, trying hard to hide the fact his stomach was flipping in panic.

“He’s all the way across the country following a lead on another one of his brothers so he sent someone else to come help you,” Rat informed, sounding way too cheerful for Logan’s liking.

“Who did he send?” Logan clutched the phone so tight it was a wonder the thing didn’t splinter into pieces.

“He’s sending Dumb and Ass,” Rat chuckled, using his nickname for Kevin and Jared, a mated couple of panthers.

Logan closed his eyes with a groan. Could this mission possibly get more F-U-B-A-R?

### Chapter Three

F-U-B-A-R—Fucked up beyond all recognition. That was how his whole life seemed right now. Jacyn moaned in pain as he sat up and tugged on the long chain connected to the wall. The captors hooked the other end to a leather collar wrapped around his neck. No matter how many times he’d tried, he hadn’t been able to find a clasp or buckle to take the damn thing off.

So here he was, cold, hungry, scared and tied up like a frigging dog. Not exactly what he had planned for the weekend. Not that he ever had any real plans, but they sure as hell never consisted of being kidnapped by a group of psychos. Trembling from fear, he wondered what exactly had they planned for him. Jacyn eyed the steel door with apprehension, wondering when they would be coming for him.

Taking a deep breath, he tried to push the anxiety back. While he would love nothing more than to curl up into a fetal position and give into the fear, that wouldn’t get him out of here. He was going to have to get his head together and figure a way out.

Scanning the area around him for escape exits, he found none. The only light was coming from a window that was so high up he couldn't reach it even if he was standing, there were more shadows than sunshine in the room. It was a prison cell and it looked it, right down to the gray concrete walls and floor.

The only furnishing was the dirty mattress he was sitting on and a bucket in the corner for him to use to relieve himself. He shivered, this time not out of fear, but from cold. He still wore his uniform, but they'd taken his jacket. They'd also snagged his boots. Maybe it had been because he had kicked them so many times while they still had him in the back of his rig. Once he'd missed and totally destroyed one of the cabinets lining the inside of the ambulance.

He frowned about the damage. Surely, his company wouldn't dock his pay for that, would they? It did happen while they accosted him so it wasn't as if he'd done it on purpose.

He realized he was pondering something as trivial as damaged work property when he probably wasn't going to live long enough to see tomorrow, let alone next payday. A hoarse laugh burst past his cracked and swollen lips. He must be losing it or the drugs they used on him were still in his system.

He didn't doubt they'd doped him up either. What else could explain the hallucinations he'd had last night. First, the guys switching from birds to humans, then the whole trip in the ambulance. The memory of the ride still only came to him in snapshots of brief flashes of pain, fear and horror.

He remembered fighting and screaming. He remembered them strapping him down to his own damn cot. Then he remembered how scared and angry he'd got and how he had—roared and slashed at them with his claws?

Impossible. No, it was the drugs messing with him, although he couldn't remember when they could have slipped him something. Maybe they had snuck in before he'd got to the store and put stuff in the coffee. Jacyn shook his head, the collar rubbing painfully against his raw skin. That still didn't make sense. He was a nobody, had no real friends, no family, so why would anyone want to target him?

The handle of the door rattled.

Jacyn's heart raced in his chest as fear prickled down his spine. Someone was coming in and he had a sneaky suspicion it wasn't the Prize Patrol delivering a big-ass cardboard check. Even though it made him groan in pain, he scrambled to his feet so he could be better prepared for attack.

If they thought he was going to go down without a battle, they were sadly mistaken. He had been fighting all his life and he sure as hell wasn't going to stop now. Balling his hands into tight fists, he braced himself and put on what he hoped was a badass face.

Two of the thugs from the previous night came in. Though they both had the same dark hair and eyes, one stood taller and had more muscles. *The alpha*. As soon as that thought popped into his head, Jacyn wondered where it came from. It rang true though, just by the way this guy moved with a cool, deadly self-confidence, left no doubt he led and wasn't afraid to kick some tail while doing it.

"Where's Patrick?" Jacyn asked, not even bothering to hide the disdain in his voice. He wanted a piece of his partner most of all. *Former partner. Remember that, because there is no way in hell I'm working with him again after this.*

"He's still sleeping off all the wounds you gave him," the alpha supplied as he stepped closer and

crossed his arms over his chest, a bored look on his pasty mug. The whole situation seemed like one huge yawn to the guy.

“I didn’t do anything to him,” Jacyn denied even as some weird fleeting flashback came to him. A giant paw swiping out and catching Patrick across the throat. A bright red spray of blood. A victorious thrill going through him at knowing he’d caused the enemy some hurt. Jacyn shook his head, more to deny his inner suspicions than at the kidnapper. “Look, I don’t know what you guys are playing at, but you got the wrong guy,” Jacyn said with much more calm than he felt. “I’m just a nobody.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, my little feline.” The alpha took a couple of steps forward so he was too close. “You’re probably the biggest catch of my life. Once Mitchell finds out I have his little brother, the bastard’s going to go crazy. Especially when I start sending you home to him, piece by piece.”

Jacyn shuddered when the man reached out and caressed his cheek. While he would have loved to have backed away from the foul touch, he knew to do so would make him look afraid and weak. Instead, he leveled a glare at the alpha and really let his disdain show. “You must be as fucking stupid as you are ugly,” he snapped, his anger taking over all his reasoning. “I don’t have a brother. How many times do I have to tell you that you have the wrong person?”

The alpha brought his hand up and slapped Jacyn hard on the cheek. His head whipped back and he could taste blood as his teeth rattled together. Before he could recover, the alpha grabbed a handful of his hair. Jacyn bit back a grunt of pain as the man jerked hard.

“I’m going to let that statement of yours slide because I know you’ve had a bad night, but don’t push your luck again. Now if you’re willing to shut your mouth for more than ten seconds, I’ll let you know everything.”

“Fine,” Jacyn hissed in pain. “Since you have me chained to the wall it’s not like I can exactly walk away.”

“You do have a brother and he’s been looking hard for you and other lost shifters. He wants nothing more than to find you so he can strengthen his ranks, but the last thing I want is more felines fucking up my life.”

“Feline shifters?” Jacyn sputtered, even as he continued to recall the bizarre flashbacks. “Are you huffing paint or something?”

“Boy, he sure is a shift-tard,” the beta said with a snide smile. “He really has no clue. No wonder he screamed like a girl in the ambulance. It must have been the first time he turned.”

“Be nice to Jacyn. He wasn’t raised as a shifter so of course he doesn’t realize who he is,” the alpha chided as he leaned in even closer.

The man had a strange smell around him, rank and wild. Jacyn had to swallow down the nausea that slammed into him. The alpha on the other hand didn’t seem to be having any problems with the close contact. He leaned forward, buried his nose in the crook of Jacyn’s neck and breathed in deep.

“I’ve never liked the smell of felines before, but you’re nice,” he whispered.

Jacyn had to work hard to fight down a shudder of revulsion.



“What are you doing?” the beta barked, his black eyes glittering with anger.

“Oh come on, Curtis. What’s the big deal? We both know the cats like to go both ways. He’ll probably love it.”

Jacyn was stunned when a low rumble started to build up in his throat. He’d been pissed off plenty of times in the past, but he’d never made a noise like that before. It sounded...animalistic? What if the hallucinations from last night had been real memories? As impossible as it all seemed, it was beginning to be the only thing that made sense. Maybe they hadn’t drugged him after all.

“Think about my offer,” the alpha cooed as he nuzzled the side of Jacyn’s face. “Believe it or not, I’m all you have right now. Even if you could escape, you’re wanted by the human police.”

“For what?” Jacyn demanded. “Getting kidnapped? Last I heard that wasn’t a crime.”

“You have a shot up store, a dead human and a missing ambulance. Of course, suspicion is going to land on you. Even more so now that several *witnesses* came forward to tell the police that they saw a paramedic snap and start a murderous rampage.”

Jacyn’s gut clenched. He knew without a doubt those witnesses were the very same guys who had attacked him the night before setting him up. “So I’ll just turn myself in and tell them the truth,” he shot back with much more bravado than he felt.

“And tell them what? That a whole bunch of bird shifting men came and attacked?” The alpha gave a snide chuckle, showing off several rotten teeth.

Gah, just when Jacyn thought he couldn’t get any uglier. The alpha pushed him backward and leaned in even closer so his body was pressing Jacyn tight against the wall.

“Don’t fight, fight, I don’t care. In the end, you will cave and be begging me to fuck you. They always do.”

“You try to touch me and what I did to Patrick will seem mild compared to what happens to you,” Jacyn snarled. That was what he did, too, a real jungle cat-like snarl followed by another rumbling growl. All a sudden the room came into sharper focus. The bleak gray more stark, the dim light almost blinding and the smells harsh. It was almost too much and his head swam as everything overwhelmed him. Jacyn fought it and made sure to keep his face clear of any fear, doubt or anxiety.

“Oh, I like your spirit,” the Alpha spat as he tugged Jacyn’s hair again. “I’m going to have fun breaking you.”

A loud explosion made them all jump. The man threw Jacyn away from him with a curse and turned to his companion. “That better not be what I think it is or someone is going to die.”

They bolted from the room, slamming the door behind them.

Jacyn sank to his knees, relieved even though there were another couple of loud booms. Anything, even buried alive, had to be better than whatever the man had planned for him.

There was another series of loud noises, but they were smaller than the other ones, and much closer as in outside his room. Jacyn sprang back to his feet, ready to battle whatever was coming next. Given how

crazy things were, it could be anything on the other side. The door flew open and this time, instead of the attackers, it was Logan.

“You,” Jacyn breathed, strangely reassured by the sight of the dark, hulking male. He even let himself fall back down onto the dirty mattress. His legs were so weak and he had a feeling he would need to conserve his energy.

“Yes, me,” Logan replied, his jaw set in a grim line as he crossed the room and knelt beside him.

“I thought they killed you.” Jacyn looked him up and down and saw no signs of injuries. Logan had changed his clothes, although the new outfit was all black, too, and it fit just as nice as the previous outfit had.

“Nah, all they did was piss me off more.” Logan examined the collar around Jacyn’s neck.

“I can’t figure out how to get it off.” Jacyn winced when it pulled against his tender skin. Even though he’d only had it on for a few of hours, the thing was obviously not supposed to be comfortable. A slight shiver went through his body as Logan’s fingers brushed against his flesh. When he leaned in closer, Jacyn felt the heat coming from the tall man’s body. Nice. It almost made the whole kidnapping worthwhile. Thankfully, Logan didn’t seem to notice Jacyn gawking at him, too caught up in trying to get him free.

“It’s a special collar made just for our type. It won’t come off by traditional methods and if we shift, it adjusts to fit our new size.” Logan pulled out a dagger from inside his long coat. Made from silver, tip to the hilt, it had some strange dark markings etched in the blade. He leaned in to examine the collar.

Leaning in so close Jacyn could smell him. He noticed that the man had a peculiar scent, too. Unlike the Raven though, his was earthy and much nicer. “You mean when I shift into a cat?” Jacyn hedged, still not sure if he was ready to face the truth.

“Yes, that’s exactly what I mean,” Logan answered in a hard voice.

“What kind?” Jacyn gulped.

“Do we really need to have this conversation now?” Logan sighed. “Like when I’m not trying to get us both out of here before the Ravens make us their next meal.”

“Just tell me I’m not some wimpy type of cat like a calico or a tabby.” Jacyn knew he was babbling like an idiot, but couldn’t stop himself.

“You’re a jaguar. Is that big and bad enough for you?” Logan sounded exasperated enough to leave him behind.

“Yeah.” Jacyn pulled back, alarmed when he saw Logan raise the dagger. A cold sweat broke out over his body and his skin tingled from the release of adrenaline. “What, did you break in so you could kill me yourself?”

“Mitchell so owes me overtime pay for this one,” Logan muttered under his breath. He growled, “No, this is the only thing that will take that collar off. Unless you would like to try to live the rest of your life with it on.”

“Are you one, too? A shifter?” Jacyn asked as he gazed into Logan’s green eyes. A strange flutter went through his stomach both from fear of having to trust a complete stranger and from something else he didn’t dare dwell on.

“Yes, I’m a feline shifter and you don’t need to worry. I don’t turn into a calico or tabby either.” A small smile formed on Logan’s full lips.

There was another explosion, which made Jacyn jump as he let out a loud curse.

“You need to trust that I’m the only one who can help you.” Logan brought the blade back up and cocked one brow in a silent question.

“Okay, go ahead.”

Jacyn must not have sounded convincing enough because Logan hesitated. “You’re not going to try to run away from me again, are you?”

“No,” Jacyn replied bleakly. “I have a feeling that no matter where I run, I wouldn’t be safe from these guys, would I?”

“Not on your own, no. But if you go with me, I promise I’ll do everything in my power to protect you and get you back to your real family.”

The solemn way Logan spoke that vow gave Jacyn hope for the first time since he’d woken up to this nightmare.

## Chapter Four

Logan slid the tip of his blade under the heavy collar and sliced it in half. His gut clenched in pity when he saw the raw strip of flesh underneath. The Ravens made it out of special leather that felines were allergic to, in order to weaken them even further. Jacyn had to be feeling a ton of pain and yet the guy hadn’t voiced one word of complaint.

A large purple bruise marred his jaw and his lips were swollen. The Ravens obviously had used the poor guy as their own personal punching bag. When he moved around, Logan had caught how brief expressions of pain flickered over Jacyn's face, as he gingerly cupped his side. It was obvious that he had bruises on more than just his jaw.

Logan cursed under his breath. That made it all the harder. Jacyn would already be sore all over from the shift, now he would be hurting even more thanks to the beating. Not good. He needed to move quickly and do it now. "Are you ready for this?" Logan tried hard not to let his doubts carry over into his voice.

Jacyn staggered to his feet and gave a nod.

Logan couldn't help but feel a bit of respect for the guy. He was handling all this a whole hell of a lot better than most others would. Shit, by all rights the guy should be curled in a ball crying for his mommy. Not Jacyn. He was facing this challenge head on and not even flinching. But then again, since he was related to Mitchell, he came from good pedigree.

"I'm ready." Jacyn winced as he fingered his raw throat.

"Here take this back and don't lose it this time," Logan quipped as he pulled out the Glock and handed it over. He chose to arm up with his sword again.

Another boom rang out. This one was much louder than the others were.

Exactly the cue he had been waiting for. He wasted no time. Jerking his head in the direction of the door, he indicated to Jacyn it was time to leave. "Follow me," he ordered. "I have my car parked out back and we're going to get away as fast as we can. No matter what, you stick with me, hear?"

"Gotcha. I'll be on you like Angelina on a third-world orphan."

Logan had to stop himself from laughing at that comment. Funny and brave. If he wasn't too careful, Logan might actually start to like the guy. Holding tight to his sword, he ducked his head out and looked up and down the narrow hallway. The floors were wet and dreary, but blessedly empty and for that he could have kissed someone.

He edged his way out, body tense in anticipation of being attacked, but nothing came. He turned to tell Jacyn to follow him, but found him already close behind. He had the Glock raised and the cold rage in his eyes let Logan know the paramedic wouldn't hesitate to use the weapon.

"Who else is helping you?" Jacyn asked as they made their way down the hallway.

While they weren't running, Logan set a pretty fast pace, wanting to get the hell out of there. "A group of rogue felines that nested in this area."

"Rogues?"

"Shifters that have broken allegiance with any type of formal coalitions. They live by their own rules and are usually all-around assholes." Logan cocked his head to the side, listening to see if they had company coming, but there were no telltale sounds of footsteps coming their way.

"If they're loners then why are they helping us?" Jacyn asked.

Logan would have gotten sick of the interrogation, but he reminded himself how all this was new to the guy and cut him some slack. If the roles had been reversed, he would be damn curious, too. “They’re helping because I paid them a shit load of money to do so. We need to hurry up though because I don’t know how long they can be a distraction. Once the Ravens figure out what’s going on, they’ll be hightailing it back to your cell.”

“Don’t we have someone from your, er...coalition that we could call for help?”

They turned the corner. One lone Raven stood guard. By the way he carried his weapon in a death’s grip and how his black eyes were nearly bugging out of his head, it screamed his inexperience. Logan swung his sword down and into an arch, taking the kid’s legs out from him. Sure, it probably hurt like hell, but it wasn’t a deathblow. They went a few more steps before Logan answered Jacyn’s question.

“*Our* coalition is several hundred miles away. A couple of them are coming to help us, but they’re still many hours out. So right now I have to get help where I can.” Even if it came from a half dozen drug-addicted felines. He didn’t add that last part out loud because he didn’t want Jacyn to worry more and lose focus.

Another guard ran down the hall.

Just as Logan raised his sword, a loud gunshot rang out. The Raven clutched his gut as he crumpled to the ground. Turning, Logan saw Jacyn, arm raised, the Glock still out and ready. Logan reached over and grabbed him by the front of the shirt. “Well that’s one way to let them know that we’re here. That gunfire is about to bring us a whole bunch of unwanted visitors. Let’s go. We’re almost to the backdoor.”

Running now, they quickly made it to the door, pushing it open, Logan led Jacyn to the small alley. In it was Logan’s pride and joy—a black Dodge Challenger in mint condition because he treated it better than a lover. It got him out of more than one mess.

They both got in and Logan turned it on, the engine purring to life. He smiled to himself as he ran his hand over the dash. His baby had never let him down. Flooring it, he peeled out just as another explosion rocked through the building. A large fireball ripped out the roof and illuminated the sky.

Okay, the rogues may have gone a bit overboard with that one. The local PD was sure to come now. He groaned as he mentally kicked himself for forgetting how this gang just loved to play with all things that go boom.

“Shouldn’t we wait to make sure your friends got out okay,” Jacyn asked as Logan started to put as many miles between them and the Ravens as possible.

“They’re not my friends,” Logan quickly pointed out. “Plus those guys are more than capable of taking care of themselves.”

“Oh.” Jacyn fell silent for several moments, then turned his head to peer out the window.

Logan noticed how the headlights from passing cars reflected off the highlights of the male’s brown hair. Not just brown, but several different shades, making almost a speckled pattern. His fingers itched to reach across the car and touch it, to see if it felt as soft as it looked. Hell, who was he kidding? What he really wanted was to pull the car over so he could get real up close and personal with Jacyn. Logan

yearned to hold the male tight to him so his scent covered every single inch of Jacyn's body.

Yeah that one would go over like gangbusters with Mitchell. *Here, I found your missing brother and he now stinks of me. I'm sure you won't mind if I take him as my lover.* The chances of Mitchell saying yes to that were slim to none and slim just waltzed out the door.

"Where are we going?" Jacyn finally broke the silence. He turned to look at Logan.

"Flint, Michigan." Logan white knuckled the steering wheel as he directed his gaze forward. Maybe if he avoided looking at Jacyn, he wouldn't want him so much. God, where had this come from? He hadn't felt this drawn to someone in years. That had been just fine, too. A loner, Logan had convinced himself he didn't need anyone. Now all of the sudden a pair of cute brown eyes and a nice ass changed all that.

"Why do they live in Flint?" Jacyn hedged, a worried expression playing across his soft features. "Am I bugging you with all my questions?"

"Yes," Logan admitted. "That's okay though. You have a right to know who you are."

"How can you be so sure that I really am the one you're looking for?"

"Easy, you look a lot like your brothers. Plus, you have the distinct scent of a jaguar." Logan didn't add how he'd heard snarls coming from Jacyn earlier in the ambulance.

"*Brothers?*" Jacyn's outrage echoed in close confines of the car. "As in more than one? What else aren't you telling me?"

"What did you expect?" Logan cocked a brow. "Both times we've met have been while under gunfire. You'll have to excuse me for not laying your whole bio out. Next time we're under attack, I'll crack out the flow chart and diagram your whole family tree for you."

"Has anyone ever told you that you're an asshole?"

"Daily," Logan responded without hesitation.

Jacyn's gaze drifted to the door handle before it zoned back on the speedometer. He nibbled on his bottom lip and looked to be thinking so hard, it was amazing smoke didn't pour out of his thick skull.

"Don't even think of bailing out of the car," Logan snapped.

"I wasn't," Jacyn denied, even as the look in his eyes screamed his guilt.

"All it will do is give you a bad case of road rash and piss me off when I have to turn the car around to come back to get you."

The silence stretched out for several seconds, before Jacyn chuckled.

For the first time, Logan saw him smile. It made him look boyish and even sexier if that were possible.

"Okay, I'll stay put since you went to so much trouble to rescue me. I don't want to look ungrateful or anything."

“I’d appreciate that.” Now it was Logan who smiled. He couldn’t help but appreciate Jacyn’s razor sharp sense of humor.

“Exactly how many brothers do I have?” Jacyn asked, getting serious again.

“You have two brothers and one sister living at the compound. We think there are three more brothers though living with the humans like you’ve been.”

“What are their names?” Jacyn rested his cheek against the headrest of the seat. His lids were heavy with sleep. It always took a lot out of the body the first time a shift happened. Most felines crashed for days after.

“You already know about Mitchell. Brent is from his litter and he lives at the compound, too. You remind me a lot of him since you both have the same smartass sense of humor.” Logan didn’t add that Jacyn was the more attractive one though.

“You said I have a sister, too?”

“Yes, she’s your littermate and her name is Cassandra. Now she’s more like Mitchell. If you piss her off, she’ll kick your ass for it and then buy you coffee the next day like nothing ever happened.” Logan smiled, despite temper, he had a soft spot for Cassie. The sister he never had.

“If she’s with the others then how is it I ended up living with humans?” Jacyn stammered on the last part, seeming to trip on the word *humans*.

“That’s kind of a long story and goes back before any of us were born.”

“We’ve got time. It’s going to take a while to get to Michigan.” Jacyn smiled.

Logan knew he couldn’t deny him. “We belong to an ancient race. Although we’re all half-human, feline shifters come from all cat species. We have jaguars, cheetahs, lions—you name it. While we may have some prejudices and bickering between the different breeds, we’ve always managed to live in peace with one another. From what I hear, it’s that way with the canine shifters, too. Although I’ve never gone to one of their dens to find out whether it’s true.”

“So how do the Ravens fit in?” Jacyn shifted in his seat, a brief wince of pain crossing his bruised face.

“It’s not just the Ravens, but all the bird shifters that hate us. There just happens to be an influx of Raven shifters in the States so that’s who ends up fucking up our lives the most.”

“Why do they hate us so much?”

“Get this clear, Ravens don’t just hate felines, they hate everyone. There have been two canine breeds hunted to extinction, thanks to them. One thing about those flying bastards is they are good at what they do and that’s destroying lives. Right after you were born, they launched a series of simultaneous attacks. The chaos separated several families. Until recently, we thought we’d lost a lot of children. Now we’re finding out that many of them are alive and somehow ended up with humans raising them. Almost a whole generation of lost shifters. As soon as Mitchell found out, he ordered us to start tracking them down and bringing them back home where they belong.”

“How many of us are there?” Jacyn’s eyes were wide with shock.

“Dozens—maybe hundreds. Mitchell wants all of you back so he can protect you, but he’s also worried about possible exposure. While we may do some operations for the human government, most people don’t even know we exist.”

“Feline shifters work for the government?” Jacyn wrinkled his nose in confusion.

“There’s a terrorist group working within the states and overseas. Around five years ago, they somehow stumbled across the existence of Ravens. They offered the birds a whole hell of lot of money to come work for them. Since the Ravens have no love for the government, they jumped at the chance. Therefore, the military came to Mitchell and asked for our help in fighting the Ravens. He had no choice but to agree. Not only do we need the money, but they threatened to expose us to the rest of the human race. “ Logan felt the same bitter resentment rise in him that came whenever he thought about how the ruling humans had the feline shifters by the balls.

“Is it really that important to keep what we are hidden?”

“Since humans don’t take kindly to the supernatural, yes and now that we have a bunch of untrained felines running around, things have gotten even more froggy. The last thing we want is some unsuspecting sap to shift into a jungle cat and announce our existence.”

“Kind of like what I did?” Jacyn asked sheepishly.

“At least you did it in the back of an ambulance and the only ones who saw it were non-humans.”

“I guess.” Jacyn didn’t sound too convinced.

“You asked why we’re living in Flint. It wasn’t by choice. While the city is nice and big, it gets pretty cold, but it’s ideal because we can easily blend in there. Mitchell is hoping to regroup and build our numbers back up so we can start fighting for our own gain instead of constantly having to live under the boot of the humans.”

“How’s that working for him?” Jacyn’s voice was getting groggy with sleep again.

“Slow, but we’re starting to make some progress. Your brother is a damn good leader and I’m proud to serve under him.” A lump of emotion choked Logan up for a bit. When others had looked down at him, Mitchell had always accepted him. By opening his arms and letting Logan into his coalition, he’d done more than that. For the first time in his life, Logan had a family and a place to call home.

He owed Mitchell so much and that’s why Logan would do everything in his power not to fuck it up by falling for the coalition leader’s brother. No matter how much he wanted Jacyn.



## Chapter Five

Logan drove for a few hours before he finally pulled off to a lower class hotel. The night had faded and the sun began to crest, but he still didn't feel tired. Jacyn had grown silent, but only because he'd fallen asleep. It sure wasn't for lack of wanting to pepper Logan with more questions.

Logan took the time to study the jaguar shifter more closely, finally being able to openly gawk without someone catching him. Even with the bruises, Jacyn had an elegant kind of beauty that demanded attention. With full sensual lips that brought forth all kinds of erotic images, to his dark lashes that were so long they nearly feathered his highly arched cheekbones. So sexy. So handsome. So out of Logan's league it wasn't even funny.

Giving a sigh of regret, Logan exited the car and went to the office. He got only one room since they would only be crashing a few hours and he didn't want to leave Jacyn unguarded more than necessary. It was bad enough the jaguar would be vulnerable while Logan went shopping for supplies.

A light sprinkle had started, dusting Logan's skin with moisture when he went back outside. Even though he knocked gently on the window, Jacyn still came awake with a start, shooting straight up, eyes wide in fear. He recovered quickly as he locked gazes with Logan. A relieved smile passed over his face as he cheeks grew red with embarrassment.

Jacyn opened the door, but didn't get out of the car yet. "What's going on?" he asked as he gazed over at the hotel.

"You need to crash and recoup for a few hours and I need to get you some new clothes. You can't go around in bloody stuff. It tends to make people talk."

Jacyn nodded and got out. They'd taken exactly two steps before the questions began again. "How come when we shift back our clothes are still on?" Jacyn frowned as he looked down at his uniform. "In the movies, they always get all torn up. The fact that mine are still okay besides the blood from my injuries, kind of freaks me out."

Logan stopped dead in his tracks so he could level an incredulous look at the man. "In the past few hours you've been kidnapped, shifted into a jaguar, been chased by giant homicidal birds and none of that affected you. Yet when you stop to think about what happens to your clothes when you turn, that's what gives you the heebies?"

"Well yeah," Jacyn shrugged, "I can't help but wonder where exactly they go."

"They go up various body orifices," Logan deadpanned before he started walking again.

"Really?" Jacyn called as he followed.

“No, I’m bullshitting you.” Logan ducked his head to hide the smile threatening to come out. “You have to stop being so gullible or they’re going to have a field day with you back home.”

“I’m not worried,” Jacyn drawled. “I have two big brothers who will look out for me.”

Logan snorted. Knowing Brent, he would be the one dishing out most of the abuse. The guy wasn’t a bully or anything, but he did like a good practical joke too much. It had caused Mitchell more than one headache since he always had to be the one to clean up the messes.

They got to their room and Logan carefully opened it, scoping out all the corners for hidden danger. If Jacyn thought it strange that they were bunking together, he didn’t mention it. Instead, he hung back until Logan indicated all clear. “I don’t like having to leave you while the Ravens are still hunting us down, but we need supplies and I can’t take you with me while you’re in those bloody clothes.” Logan went to the small bathroom and made sure it was empty.

“Plus I don’t have any shoes either.” Jacyn pointed down to his filthy, tattered sock-covered feet.

“Well they do have a sign outside all stores-- *No shirt. No shoes. No service*,” Logan joked, surprising himself.

“I guess I wouldn’t fit your pants or shirts.” Jacyn flicked a glance over Logan. While they were both tall, Jacyn had a lot less bulk.

“No, I don’t think so,” Logan replied in a husky voice.

Jacyn was still eyeing him up and this time it wasn’t to check out the size of his clothing. No, there was a spark in the man’s brown eyes that couldn’t be anything other than desire.

Logan found himself rooted to the ground as his cock swelled. Jacyn started to walk forward, his gait slow and smooth. Even though Logan knew he should be leaving, he couldn’t seem to make his legs move. He just stood there like a frigging idiot. Jacyn didn’t stop until he was a couple of feet away from Logan.

“The Ravens told me something interesting.” Jacyn bit his bottom lip.

Logan realized it must be a nervous habit. “What was that?” Logan’s voice came out hoarse because his mouth was dry. Maybe Jacyn wasn’t the only one anxious.

“That most feline shifters are bisexual. Is it true?” Jacyn’s tongue darted out to lick his lips. The move unintentionally sexy.

Logan bit back a groan as he thought about how nice it would feel to have that tongue on him. “Yes, it’s pretty normal for us.” They were treading on dangerous ground and Logan knew he should put a stop to it. Instead, he found himself taking a step closer so he could drink in Jacyn’s smell. He nearly snarled in appreciation when he also detected the scent of desire coming from the man.

“Are you?” Jacyn asked, his voice a mere whisper.

“Am I what? Normal? Hell no,” Logan joked, trying to switch the topic, but Jacyn had his teeth into the topic and it didn’t seem like he was willing to let it go.

“You know what I mean.” Jacyn blushed. “Do you like guys?”

“Would it matter to you if I did?”

A wry smile played at the corners of Jacyn’s mouth. “Would you kick my ass if I said yes?”

Logan laughed. God help him, but Jacyn’s sense of humor made him all the more attractive. “Yes, I like being with other men.”

“Do you have someone special back home?” Jacyn ducked his head to the side, the blush on his face getting deeper.

“No and there’s a reason for that.” Reaching out, he used his fingers to nudge Jacyn’s chin up so they could lock gazes. “I’m not good enough for you. Once you get home and learn about how things work, you’ll realize that.”

“That’s not true.” Jacyn moved closer so his thinner body brushed against Logan. “There is nothing anyone can say that will change the way I feel about you.”

If only that were true. “Just trust me, you will.” Logan feathered his thumb against Jacyn’s jaw line.

“Then just tell me now. What is so bad that nobody would want to be with you?”

“I’m a black jaguar and we’ve always been looked down on. Some consider us a birth defect.”

“So, that doesn’t mean a thing to me.” Jacyn brought his hands up and rested them on Logan’s hips.

Even through his leathers, Logan could still feel the heat of Jacyn’s touch. It made the throb in his cock almost painful with need. “That’s not all of it. It gets worse. Both of my parents were rogues.”

“I don’t care.”

“You don’t get it,” Logan growled as he stepped away. Instantly, his heart ached to be near Jacyn again, but he forced himself to ignore it. “Rogues are the lowest of the low. Most of them have been driven out of their coalitions because they’re criminals or addicts. They’re only one step above Ravens.”

“That’s your parents, not you.”

“With shifters you are who your parents are. As much as I’m attracted to you, I’m not going to drag you down with me.”

Jacyn opened his mouth to argue.

Logan cut him off, “We don’t have time to keep going over this. We have to keep moving so the Ravens don’t catch up. As it is, you’re only going to get a couple of hours sleep. You’re tired and weak and you need all the rest you can get.”

“I feel just fine,” Jacyn argued, his mouth turning down into a small frown. While he may be trying hard to hide it, his feelings had been hurt.

Normally Logan couldn't care less about stepping on other's emotions. With Jacyn, however, there was a huge pang of regret. He wanted to go over and...what? Apologize? Hug him? Kiss him? Pin him down to the bed and screw him senseless? All of those weren't good ideas or options. Instead, he went to the door. He couldn't resist adding some last minute instructions, "Don't open this door for anyone but me, and stay away from the windows. I'll be back soon."

"Promise?" Jacyn gave a nervous chuckle. "I mean you're not going to ditch me here, are you?"

Even though he acted as if he were teasing, Logan detected the underlying worry in that question. It made him wonder just how many times Jacyn had been abandoned in the past. "Of course I won't leave without you," Logan said, gruffly. "My mission is to bring you home and that's what I intend to do."

\* \* \* \*

After Logan left, Jacyn laid down on one of the double beds and replayed the previous day's events. The one thing that kept coming up in his mind repeatedly was Logan.

Despite his warnings to stay away, Jacyn felt even more attracted to the man than before. When they had stood so close to each other, he'd been so certain that Logan was going to kiss him. His cock had grown hard in anticipation, every nerve ending in his body alive with excitement. Then Logan had pulled away, Jacyn felt so disappointed he'd almost cursed out loud.

Funny that's what bothered him the most. In the span of a day, he'd lost his home, his job and everything he'd worked to build up. All of it paled in comparison to how it had felt when Logan had cock-blocked him.

Fuck, what was wrong with him? He'd never fallen for someone this hard and this fast, yet he was so far gone for Logan, all rational thought had fled out the door. Jacyn shook his head, disgusted at his lack of control. The Ravens must have knocked all his common sense out of his thick skull while they were beating him. With all the emotions swirling around inside him, he didn't think he would ever get to sleep, but before he knew it, he'd drifted off.

When he woke up, a glance at the bedside clock told him two hours had passed. Logan was gone, but there was a bag at the foot of the bed. Jacyn sat up and opened it, smiling when he saw it was clothes. Although it was jeans and a t-shirt, they were all black. The color Logan wore. Digging deeper he found that even the boxer briefs were black.

Logan was nowhere to be found, but the rumpled sheets on the other bed showed he'd crashed for at least a little while. Jacyn stood and stretched, wincing from his injuries. The paramedic in him did a quick inventory.

Left side tenderness, probably a couple busted ribs. Since I'm breathing okay, it didn't damage my lungs. Back hurts like hell, but unless I start pissing blood, I don't think I need to worry about kidney damage. My gut isn't tender so I probably don't have internal bleeding. Maybe when I shifted I healed some. Logan obviously healed somehow, so that makes sense.

Jacyn went into the bathroom and took the hottest shower possible, wanting to get the stench of the Raven prison off his skin. Once he was as clean as possible, he got dressed in the clothes Logan had bought him and went back out. A thrill of excitement went through him when he saw Logan there.

"I hope you like burgers and fries," Logan said as he set several fast food bags down on the table.

"I love them." Jacyn's stomach growled in appreciation as the scent of the artery-clogging food hit him. "Although I'm so damn hungry I would eat just about anything right now."

"Shifting will do that to you." Logan's tone was brisk and all business. He kept his gaze averted, avoiding any eye contact.

An obvious stay-away message, but it didn't fool Jacyn for one second because he'd used it himself countless times in the past.

"Eat up, because we have to leave." Logan went into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him. A couple of seconds later, Jacyn detected the sound of the shower turning on. Jacyn debated on whether he should strip down and go join Logan. In the end, he decided to obey orders and eat instead. He was just polishing off his third burger when Logan came back out. Dressed in jeans instead of his usual leather pants, he finished off the casual look with a black short-sleeved tee. His hair looked even darker than normal since it was wet and slicked back.

He still had that hard look on his face. One meant to push Jacyn away. Instead, it made him desire the black jaguar even more. He now saw the wounded side of Logan's soul and wanted more than anything to heal it. Perhaps his destiny was to save Logan just as Logan had saved him.

"You ready?" Logan grunted as he started shoving his dirty clothes into a duffle bag.

"Not quite." Jacyn took a deep, steadying breath. Time to make his move. He only hoped that Logan didn't push him away for good this time. "There's just one last thing I need to do."

"What?" Logan didn't even look his way.

"I realized that I completely forgot to thank you for coming to break me out." Jacyn forced himself to stand and walk over to the man.

"It's no big deal. Like I said, part of the mission." Logan zipped up the bag and turned around. "Now let's get going."

Before he lost his courage, Jacyn rushed the rest of the way across the room. Standing so close their bodies pressed together, he tilted his head up so their lips were just a mere breath apart. "It was a big deal," he said as he wrapped his arms around Logan's waist. "You found me when I was lost in more ways than one." Closing his eyes, he kissed Logan and he tasted just as good as Jacyn had hoped.

## Chapter Six

Logan jerked in surprise when he felt the softness of Jacyn's lips pressing against him. Shit, he couldn't allow this to happen. Logan raised his hands to push the man away instead, he found himself plunging them into Jacyn's hair, pulling him closer so the kiss could be even more intense. Just one kiss. One taste. Then maybe he could forget about this stupid infatuation he had for Jacyn. Slanting his mouth over Jacyn's, Logan started to return the passion and then some. Jacyn groaned as Logan slipped his tongue inside his mouth.

The jaguar had a sweet, yet wild taste to him that made Logan's cock jerk in need. The flavor was so addicting that when Jacyn pulled his mouth away, Logan almost whimpered in disappointment. He found that Jacyn had much more for him though. With the softest of touches, he feathered kisses, down Logan's cheek, jaw and throat. It felt so good, that he tilted his head to give Jacyn better access. The man started to suck and gently bite, probably leaving behind a hickey, but Logan didn't give a damn because it felt too good. "You have no idea what you're starting," Logan moaned as he rolled his hips forward so his erection brushed against Jacyn.

"I've done this kind of thing a few times before so I know exactly what I'm starting," Jacyn teased. Sliding one hand slowly down the length of Logan's body, he caressed his cock.

Logan hissed in pleasure. Even through the thick denim of his jeans, Jacyn's touch set him on fire. He pulled the paramedic even closer, so he could rub against him. It was so damn wrong, but Logan wanted every inch of Jacyn's body drenched in his scent. At that moment, Logan would have killed to keep him.

"Just give me this one time, please," Jacyn whispered before he dropped to his knees in front of Logan. He put his hands on the waistband of Logan's pants, but didn't make any other move. Instead, he lifted his beseeching gaze up, seeking permission.

"Yes. God, yes," Logan replied in a thick voice. "I'll agree to anything so long as you suck me."

Jacyn grinned, a triumphant gleam going through his eyes before he popped open the button on Logan's jeans and slowly lowered the zipper. "Commando—I thought so," he crooned as he pulled out Logan's erection and slowly stroked it.

"What can I say? I hate a panty line," Logan joked, trying to hide the fact that he was trembling, how his breath was hitching and that his heart was racing.

"You're so big." A small frown of concern played across Jacyn's features as he slowly ran his finger along the sensitive underside of Logan's cock.

"Don't worry, you'll be able to take it all." That seemed to placate Jacyn because he licked the tip of

Logan's cock, his hot tongue making a slow lazy path along the head, while he pumped the shaft with his hands.

"Fuck, you taste so good," Jacyn declared right before he parted his lips and wrapped them around the shaft.

Logan threw his head back and let go of all his anxiety, concerns and doubt. Everything now centered on Jacyn and the pleasure his mouth created. Damn, the paramedic knew his way around a cock. When to be gentle. When to suck hard. Most of all he knew when to pull back so Logan didn't come too soon. It was pure torture and Logan wanted it to never end.

At one point, Jacyn stopped long enough to give him a confused look. "Are you purring?"

"Yeah," Logan admitted, more than a little embarrassed at his lapse in control.

"I made you do that?" He smiled that impish grin of his. "How cool is that?"

Before Logan had a chance to reply, Jacyn once again wrapped his lips around his cock. He sucked in so hard that his cheeks hollowed out. The pleasure so intense that Logan had to grab the walls to support his weight so his legs didn't give out from under him.

Finally, it was too much and he threw his head back with a moan as he came, his cock shooting jets of semen into Jacyn's hot mouth. "So good," Logan panted, his mind too fuzzy with lust to form a more cohesive sentence.

When it was over, Jacyn let Logan's cock slip from his swollen lips, but he didn't get up. Instead, he rubbed his cheek against Logan's thigh. Even though he didn't realize it yet, Jacyn was giving into natural feline instinct and marking his territory with his scent. It should have made Logan want to push him away instead, it made him want to bring Jacyn even closer.

Hauling him to his feet, Logan caught Jacyn's lips in a brutal, possessive kiss. He tasted the salty flavor of his own cum on the paramedic's tongue and it almost drove Logan over the edge. Hell, whom was he kidding? He'd already taken a swan dive off the edge the minute Jacyn had dropped to his knees and looked up at him with those brown eyes. "You are so fucked," Logan promised with a growl.

"God, I hope so." Now it was Jacyn doing the purring.

Logan doubted he even realized it. Still kissing him, Logan led Jacyn to the bed and they tumbled down to it with Logan ending up on top. His cock was still out and it grew hard again, pressing into Jacyn's body. "You just had to keep pushing things, didn't you?" Logan rumbled, although he felt no real anger.

"I can't help it. If I see something I want, I don't hold back, but reach out and grab it." Jacyn thrust his hips up.

Logan felt the hard length of his erection straining against his jeans. Logan's mouth watered with anticipation. Before they were done, he would taste that cock, along with every other inch of Jacyn's body. Maybe then he would finally be able to get the paramedic off his mind. Logan slid his hand between their bodies and started to work the button on Jacyn's pants.

There were two hard knocks on the door followed by three slow scratches. As soon as Logan heard it, he knew the party was over. With a groan, he pulled his hand back.

“Is it the Ravens?” Jacyn asked, his voice sharp with fear.

“No, worse. Dumb and Ass.” Logan sighed as he got up and tucked himself back into his jeans. “That’s the knock we use to indentify ourselves as *friendlies* .”

“Their timing sucks,” Jacyn grumbled as he sat on the edge of the bed, his hair messed up and his lips still swollen.

The other shifters would take one look at him and know just what they’d interrupted, but there was no way Logan could put off answering the door. Going over to it, he pulled out a Glock and called, “Identify yourselves.”

“It’s Sven, I’m here to give you the massage with a happy ending that you ordered,” Jared’s all-too-familiar smartass voice answered. The sounds of Kevin’s chuckles followed.

Logan rolled his eyes as he answered it. He still kept the gun out until the two shifters were inside and the door locked again. Once they were in, Logan made the introductions. “Jacyn, meet Jared.” Logan waved over to the taller of the pair—well built, his dark hair shaved close to his skull. The only things friendly about him were his dancing green eyes and warm smile.

“Nice to meet you.” Jared nodded as he stared at Jacyn. No doubt he was taken aback by how much he looked like his jaguar brothers.

“This scrawny bit of fur is Kevin.” Logan pointed at the other shifter. Several inches smaller and with a mop of dark hair, the panther shifter appeared harmless. Looks were very deceiving though because Kevin had a vicious streak in him when it came to fighting. Logan had once seen the guy take out three Ravens all by himself. The man hadn’t even been winded after it either.

That didn’t mean Jared wasn’t protective of his mate though. He always made sure he had Kevin covered at all times. Even now, he had his large body between him and Jacyn. Logan almost snorted and called Jared a mother hen until he realized he’d taken the exact same position...only he was protecting Jacyn.

It didn’t go unnoticed by Jared either. A slight smirk passed over his mouth as he gave Logan a knowing look.

“Nice to meet you,” Jacyn said before he walked around Logan and offered his hand out to shake. Neither Jared nor Kevin took it.

“Shaking hands is so human,” Kevin snorted. “You have a lot to learn about our customs.”

“Sorry.” Jacyn dropped his hand. “What’s the way you guys do it?”

“Haven’t you ever watched animals?” Kevin slowly shook his head. “We do it just like them. We sniff each other’s ass.”

Jacyn’s mouth opened and closed a few times as a look of pure horror and revulsion spread over his face. Had it been anyone else but him, Logan might have found it funny.

“Ignore them,” Logan advised Jacyn. “They’re just pulling your leg because they think it’s so fucking



hilarious.”

Jared and Kevin burst out laughing. “Don’t get all pissy, Logan,” Kevin gasped out. “Just because you wouldn’t know a good joke if it came up and started to dry hump your leg.”

“Are they always like this?” Jacyn gave them a wary glare.

“No, they’re actually holding back some because you’re new. Usually they’re ten times worse.”

“I can see how they got the nicknames Dumb and Ass then.” Jacyn flicked one more look of disgust over the pair before he went to the bathroom and shut the door.

“Do you think we upset him?” Jared asked, sobering. Not even he wanted to be on Mitchell’s bad side, and insulting his brother would be one sure fire way to get there.

Logan thought about letting the panther hang for a while, but decided against it. “No, if you had you’d know it because I would be at your throat already,” he snarled, lifting one side of his upper lip.

“You’re awfully protective of Mitchell’s little brother,” Jared said slowly. “I wonder how our fine leader is going to like that?”

“Probably not any more than he’s going to like how Jacyn is saturated in Logan’s scent.” Kevin shook his head. “And people think I’m the crazy one. Dude, you must have one serious death wish to be messing with Mitchell’s brother.”

“It’s not what you think,” Logan denied, even as he recalled how sweet Jacyn’s mouth had tasted.

“Really?” Kevin cocked a brow. “Then how exactly did you get that massive hickey on the side of your neck?”

Logan started to raise his fingers to his throat in a guilty gesture before he caught himself and jerked his hand back down. “That’s none of your business.”

“Hey, I couldn’t care less.” Kevin raised his hands up in the classic peace-pose. “I happen to think it’s great you finally found someone. Maybe now you won’t be such a bastard all the time. I’m just letting you know Mitchell might want to skin you and mount your pelt to the wall for it.”

“And before you even say it, it’s not because of who you are or your parents either,” Jared added. “Despite what you think, you’ve more than proven yourself to us.”

“Sure, if you say so.” Logan quashed down the bitterness as he crossed his arms over his chest.

“Mitchell is going to be very protective of Jacyn. Look how he is with Cassie and Brent.”

“Don’t worry,” Logan grunted. “There’s nothing going on between us so there’s nothing for Mitchell to get his fur ruffled over.” Jared and Kevin didn’t argue, but they did exchange looks that said they didn’t believe him. Luckily, Logan was saved when Jacyn came out of the bathroom.

“We need to get going. The Ravens are getting closer,” Jared said, his gaze never leaving Jacyn. “I see they really worked you over good.”

“It’s no big deal.” Jacyn shrugged. “I’ve had worse.”

“It would be better if you shifted,” Kevin advised.

“Why?” Jacyn directed the question to Logan.

It shouldn’t have pleased him so much that he was the only one Jacyn trusted for the answer, but it did. “When we shift it heals any small injuries we might have,” he said. Noticing one side of Jacyn’s hair a bit messed up, Logan had to stop himself from going over to smooth it down.

“That’s how Logan was able to recover from his gunshot wounds so he could rescue you,” Kevin supplied.

“You got shot the other night?” Jacyn’s gaze traveled over Logan’s body.

“It was only a few times and I’m fine now.”

“You were shot!” Jacyn nearly yelled, his face twisted in outrage. “How can you even say you’re okay?”

“Because I am.”

“Take off your shirt,” Jacyn ordered as he came closer.

“Why?” Logan darted a look over at Dumb and Ass who were smirking away as they enjoyed the show.

“I need to check your injuries. Are the bullets still in?” Jacyn grabbed the hem of Logan’s shirt.

Logan reached out and stayed his hands. “No, they worked their way out of my body when I shifted.”

“It doesn’t matter. I need to check you out. You could still get an infection.” Jacyn’s brow creased in concern.

It took Logan a few seconds to respond. In all of his life, nobody had given a crap about him. The fact that Jacyn actually cared made an ache build up in his chest. “We don’t get infections or any of the other things that affect humans.” Logan had to force the words past the lump in his throat.

“It’s true,” Kevin chimed in. “That’s one of the reasons why we live several hundred years. It takes a lot more than just a few bullets to take us down.”

“This concern for Logan is sweet,” Jared drawled, “but we really do need to hit the road.”

“You can just wait,” Jacyn snarled, his eyes flashing with fury. “I’m not going anywhere until I’m sure he’s okay.”

Logan felt like he’d been punched in the gut. Not only had Jacyn wanted to look after him, but now he was defending him. Him, the son of Rogue shifters. Even after everything he’d told Jacyn, he still didn’t look down on him. Instead, he had sided with him against other felines. It was so humbling, nice and made him feel so good he could have taken on a whole army of Ravens. *Shit!* Logan knew then he was in deep trouble because despite all his best intentions at that moment, he’d fallen hopelessly in love with Jacyn.

## Chapter Seven

Ignoring the two smirking newcomers behind them, Jacyn put his hand on Logan's chest and gently pushed him down, making him sit on the bed. Even though he had an audience, Jacyn didn't care. Nobody was going anywhere until he checked Logan over and assessed his injuries.

"This is just a big waste of time," Logan grumbled, though the corners of his mouth kicked up into a smile. He did lift his arms for Jacyn when he pulled on the hem of his shirt this time though.

The only problem was as soon as Logan's naked chest was exposed, Jacyn completely forgot about everything else. Tan, muscular, it didn't have one ounce of fat on it. Mesmerized, Jacyn, stared at it as he ran his tongue over his lips. If he had one dying wish, it would be just to have a few more minutes alone with Logan so he could slowly lick every inch of that tight body.

"How come you never look at me that way anymore, sweetie?" Jared grinned as he directed that question to Kevin.

"Like what?" Kevin grunted.

"Like you can't wait to get me into bed and under you."

"Shut up, guys," Logan snapped.

Jacyn flushed, from both anger and embarrassment. Okay, maybe he had been salivating over Logan, but did those two jackasses have to point it out?

Jared's phone started to ring and he went outside to answer it.

"This is amazing," Jacyn proclaimed, lightly touching Logan's stomach. "I don't see any wounds at all. Were you shot somewhere else?"

"No. I told you, we heal quickly if we're well enough to shift." Logan sucked in a breath as Jacyn allowed his fingers to trail up his chest.

Jacyn smiled to himself. It was nice to see that he wasn't the only one feeling this attraction. His head tilted just enough, he licked his lips again, nice and slow, so there was no way Logan could miss it. All the while Jacyn kept his gaze down, directed on the man's groin.

"You would heal, too, if you shifted," Kevin spoke up, interrupting Jacyn's lustful thoughts.

Jacyn froze as a bit of fear slid down his spine. He didn't remember much from when he turned into a jaguar the night before, but he did recall it had hurt—a lot. "No thanks," he said adamantly as he stood.

"Not to be a dick, but you have to," Kevin insisted without an ounce of remorse. "We need everyone one hundred percent in case we get attacked by Ravens. We can't fight if we have to compensate for your injured ass."

"Enough!" Logan snarled as he sprung to his feet.

"I'm sorry if the truth hurts the little jaguar's feelings, but it's true." Kevin took a step forward, his blue eyes turning darker with fury.

Jacyn stood, too, because looking at the guy, he was ready to attack. Jacyn realized that despite the fact he was smaller than his buddy, Kevin was by far the most dangerous of the two. "Don't worry about having to drag me anywhere. I can take care of myself," Jacyn snapped. For some reason he sensed the best defense against this guy was to throw back some aggression.

"Somehow I doubt that." Kevin curled his fingers into fists as he flicked a disgusted look over Jacyn's body. "You don't look like you could fight a hummingbird let alone a battle-trained Raven. So you're already going to be a handicap to us healthy. Hurt like you are, you're a fucking death wish."

"So tell me, which one are you, Dumb or Ass," Jacyn countered. "From the way you're acting, either one would fit you."

Kevin growled and took a threatening step closer, but Logan quickly stepped in between them. "Back the fuck off," he snarled at the panther.

Even though his back was to Jacyn, he could feel the anger rolling off Logan. He only hoped it wasn't directed at him. Since he had no clue about how the shifters lived and what their rules were, for all he knew he could have just broken one by getting in Kevin's face.

"You need to stop coddling him and make him shift." Kevin nearly yelled, his face distorted by rage.

"And you need to shut up," Logan replied in a much calmer tone. "He's just learned what he is so we need to give him some time to adjust. He only turned for the first time the other day. It's not like he had years of training to get ready like you did, Kevin."

"You didn't have anyone guiding you, but you seemed to manage just fine," Kevin argued.

Jacyn stepped to the side. A brief flicker of emotion crossed Logan's face and Jacyn wondered about it. Even if Logan's parents had been Rogues, wouldn't they have at least taught him what to expect when shifting and stuff? From the way Kevin talked, he made it seem that Logan had faced it alone.

"Shift," Kevin demanded, his cool glare directed at Jacyn.

“No,” Jacyn stepped around Logan so he could face off on the guy one-on-one.

“Stop being such a pussy and do it.”

“Fuck off.”

“Such language,” Jared quipped as he came back in the room, the phone still in his hand. He stopped, cocking one brow when he saw Jacyn facing off against Kevin. “Can’t I leave you guys alone for five minutes?”

Jacyn tensed as he waited to see how this would all play out. Would Jared take offense and attack? If so, would Logan get hurt in the fallout? There was no doubt in Jacyn’s mind that the man would jump to protect him. He almost sighed in relief when Jared smiled and held out the phone.

“Mitchell wants to talk to you.”

Jacyn stared stupidly at the phone. His pulse hammered as he realized that on the other end was his brother. One that, until a couple of days ago, he’d never known had existed. What if, as soon as Mitchell heard his voice, the man realized this was a huge mistake and they had the wrong jaguar? What if he just wanted to talk to Jacyn to tell him to get lost because they had never wanted him in the first place? Or worse, what if he turned out to be a huge disappointment? Just by listening to the way the others had gone on and on about how great Mitchell was, how could Jacyn possibly have a chance of even coming close to being his equal?

Logan came up behind him and touched Jacyn on the shoulder. “It’s okay. He’s going to be so happy to finally meet you. He’s the one that sent me out to find you so we already know he wants you. Just think about that.”

Jacyn leaned back against Logan, taking support and comfort from the warm touch of his body. He gave one jerky nod before he reached out and took the phone from Jared. As he lifted it up to his ear, he could feel the gazes of the other shifters on him. “Hello.” He was happy that his voice didn’t sound as shaky as he felt.

“Oh God,” a deep voice breathed. “I can’t believe it’s really you.”

“Ah...” Jacyn trailed off, not knowing how to respond. Finally, he settled on. “Yeah, it is.” He cringed, that was real eloquent there.

“I’m so sorry I wasn’t there when you had to find out about all this. I know it must be a whole lot to take in and I should have been the one to tell you everything.”

Mitchell apologized with such a sincere tone Jacyn knew he meant it. “That’s okay,” Jacyn settled further back into Logan’s chest. “Logan was here and he’s been great.”

“I’m sure he has and you can trust him.”

“I do, completely,” Jacyn replied. There was a long pregnant silence and Jacyn winced as he realized he had popped off with that response a little too fast. Earlier, when he’d been in the bathroom, he’d overheard Kevin and Jared lecturing. The last thing he wanted was to get Logan in trouble. He stumbled, trying to recover, “What I meant is, he did rescue me twice from the Ravens so of course I know he’s trying to help me.”

“Yes, he did,” Mitchell didn’t sound too convinced though.

“So do the others know about me yet?” Jacyn asked, steering the conversation away from Logan.

“Are you kidding?” Mitchell chuckled. “Cassie is so excited that it’s all I can do to keep her from coming out to get you. I would let you talk to her now, but she’s out on a mission. She’s missed you so much. We all have.”

“Oh.” Jacyn clutched the phone tight, not knowing what to say. It wasn’t like he could return the sentiment. How could he miss something he never knew he had?

“I realize you probably have a million questions and I promise as soon as you get home, I’ll tell you everything you want to know.” Mitchell’s voice sounded a little rough.

Was it because he was getting choked up? That hardly sounded like the leader he’d heard about. “Cool. Logan says we should be there soon.” Jacyn could hear the muted conversations of the shifters in the room with him. There was some arguing, a chuckle and then Kevin and Jared rushing around to load up the gear. Logan still stayed by Jacyn’s side.

“Sorry, but it’s going to take a little longer,” Mitchell said. “I need you guys to check up on something for me. A pack of canines in your area just got a report that someone attacked a family of Rogue felines last night. So I need Logan and the others to check it out for me.”

“Okay.” There he went with another one-word answer. If he kept this up, Mitchell would think he was a moron.

“I want you to keep your head down and let the others handle the situation though,” Mitchell ordered.

“Sure, no problem.” *Woo hoo! Three words, someone better stop the presses.*

“I mean it,” Mitchell continued to hammer out the commands. “Do not engage the enemy, no matter what.”

“Believe me after the way things ended last time, I’m not eager to play around with these jerks again. I’ll stay out of it.”

“Good.” Mitchell’s sigh sounded relieved. “Because I couldn’t stand losing you again.”

Finishing his conversation, Jacyn hung up the phone and handed it back to Jared. He didn’t say anything and was grateful when the others didn’t badger him with questions. Truth was, if someone had asked him how he felt right now, he wasn’t too sure he would be able to give an answer. While he was overjoyed to finally be able to talk to Mitchell, the whole prospect of entering this new, violent life made Jacyn more than a bit apprehensive.

Since he and Logan had only planned on crashing a few hours to begin with, it didn’t take long to load everything into the car and get moving again with Kevin and Jared following in their Land Rover.

“So are they a couple?” Jacyn asked even though it was obvious they were. Just watching the way they

acted around each other showed how much they cared about one another.

“Yeah, they’ve been mates for a couple of years now. Personally, I don’t see how Jared can put up with Kevin.”

“He’s a...” Jacyn trailed off, trying to think of a good insult.

“Jackass, dick, asshole?” Logan supplied for him.

“Yeah, all three rolled into one angry package.”

They both laughed and Jacyn noticed, not for the first time, how when he smiled, Logan’s features grew so soft and sensual. Jacyn wanted to reach across the car and caress his cheek, but resisted, not knowing how Logan would react.

Ever since Kevin and Jared had interrupted them, neither he nor Logan had touched on what had almost happened. Jacyn was both frustrated and confused. The only thing he did know was that if he had to go the rest of his life not being able to hold and taste Logan again, he would be forever miserable. So how could he convince Logan that he wanted to be with him no matter what? Despite their differences, or what others thought, or even if Mitchell ordered them apart. “Have you ever thought about going Rogue?” Jacyn asked.

Logan shot him a surprised look before he answered. “Not since your brother took me into his coalition. He trusted me when nobody else ever had. For that I could never betray him by leaving.”

“How would that be betraying him?” Jacyn realized again how much he had to learn about the shifter ways.

“Mitchell needs every fighter he can get if he ever wants to defeat the Ravens. It’s bad enough that he’s losing men in battle. For me to leave just because I don’t want to be part of the coalition would be selfish on my part and a dishonor to all Mitchell has done for me.”

“That makes sense.” A bleak feeling came over Jacyn. So much for them running off so they could be together. “If Rogues are so anti-coalition, then why are we going to help this family?”

“Unlike most, Mitchell isn’t willing to throw shifters out like yesterday’s garbage just because they decide to leave the coalition.”

The bitterness in Logan’s voice when he said that sentence felt like blow to Jacyn’s chest. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to insult your parents,” Jacyn rushed out, feeling like a complete jackass.

“I know you didn’t.” He pressed his lips together in a hard line before, he added, “Besides my parents weren’t exactly gems anyhow.”

“Did they hurt you?” Jacyn’s gut clenched at the thought of anyone harming Logan.

“Not that often, usually they were too drunk or high to even notice I was in the room. They both slowly killed themselves and died when I was still pretty young.”

“Who took care of you then?”

"I lived on the streets for a few years until Mitchell found me and gave me a home." A ghost of a smile played on Logan's lips. "My first real one ever. Nevertheless, I shouldn't complain too much. You grew up alone, too."

Yeah, he had. Jacyn still had bitter memories of those years. Of not knowing why he had been cast aside. All those times he had felt so alone and so different from everyone else, too. Now he knew why. It was because he *was* different. "It wasn't too bad." He gave an indifferent shrug.

"I'll let you in on a little secret," Logan said softly. "I can tell whenever you're lying to me because you have a shitty poker face."

"I do not," Jacyn protested.

"Yeah, you do. You bite your bottom lip and look at the ground."

Jacyn realized he was doing exactly that. He laughed. "I'm that obvious?"

"Yeah, but that's okay. I like it." Logan reached out and ran the back of his knuckles against Jacyn's jaw.

Jacyn shivered, his body singing from the contact. "So does that mean if I keep doing it you'll get a room for just you and me tonight?"

"Are you sure that's what you want?" Logan asked, looking away from the road long enough to give a heated glance at Jacyn.

"Yes, I've never wanted anything more in my life. I want to finish what we started and if Kevin and Jared even think of interrupting us this time, so help me, I'll shoot them."

"Ouch." Logan grinned. "That wouldn't be good for them. I've seen how good you are with a Glock."

"I told you I knew how to handle a gun."

"Yeah, I seem to recall you mentioning an old lover teaching you."

Jacyn ducked his head, but this time it was to hide the triumphant grin. Logan sounded jealous. That had to count for something, didn't it? Right now Jacyn would take what he could since he had only a day left to convince Logan they belonged together because he had no doubt the man would push him away once they got home.

"We're almost there," Logan said, getting all business-like again. "I want you to promise me that no matter what, you'll stay in the car."

"Mitchell has already given me the same speech. I'll make sure I stay out of trouble."

"I mean it," Logan hammered. "No matter what happens, don't leave the car."

"I won't go anywhere, I promise."



## Chapter Eight

Before he even cut the engine to the car, Logan knew they were too late to save the family. The old farmhouse and the surrounding wood were silent. Only death and suffering brought that kind of silence. No wind rustled through the leaves. No birds sang. It was as if everything had taken a collective breath of fear and was holding it in. He got out and went to stand at the front of the porch. As Jared and Kevin came to join him, Logan could tell by the tense way they carried themselves that they sensed the same thing he did.

“I don’t like this,” Kevin growled as he looked up into the sky.

“I agree, this whole thing reeks,” Jared said as he pulled his daggers out and held them, one in each hand.

They were right. This seemed too remote, too quiet, as if the Ravens had picked this house and family for a reason. Then the answer came to him like a gunshot. *This was all a setup.* The Ravens had set up one big fat kitty cat trap and stupid fucks that they were, they had walked right into it. “Jacyn!” Logan roared as he turned to the car.

It was already too late. The sky seemed to come alive with huge black birds. Half landed and shifted into human form while the others continued to fly and circle around the felines. One dove down and attacked Logan, hitting him in the chest and taking him to the ground. He roared again, getting a mouthful of dirt in the process. The entire time, he continued to kick, bite and scratch, desperate to get a glance at the car. A gunshot ripped through the air and he heard Kevin let out a yell of pain.

Logan had dropped his sword in the scuffle and reached out blindly until his hand hit the hilt. He wrapped his fingers around it and brought it up, the blade slicing through the Raven’s throat. It let out a keening cry before it fell to the side, blood pouring from its wound.

Logan staggered to his feet and looked over at the car. His heart dropped when he saw the passenger side door open and no sign of Jacyn. Another Raven jumped on Logan and he swung his sword at it, all the while shouting Jacyn’s name.

“He’s over helping Kevin,” Jared yelled right before he plunged one of his daggers into a Raven’s throat.

Logan looked over and saw Jacyn kneeling by Kevin. The jaguar was using his own shirt to try to stop the flow of bleeding on a nasty leg wound the panther had. Kevin kept trying to shove him back to the

car.

Logan sucked in a sharp breath when he saw three Ravens baring down on the pair. What was worse was he and Jared were too far away to do anything.

“Run, you idiot,” Kevin screamed as he shoved Jacyn away from him. In the next instant, Kevin shifted to a black panther. The cat snarled before it launched itself at the Ravens.

Jacyn paused, his eyes wide with fear. Two more Ravens attacked and he snapped out of his trance. Turning, he did exactly what Logan hoped he would do. Ran as fast as possible from the fight.

\* \* \* \*

Jacyn pumped his legs as hard as he could, but could hear the pounding feet of the Ravens behind him. Since they were in human form, they had functioning lips and they made use of them.

“Here kitty, kitty, kitty,” one sang.

Jesus that joke was getting old. If Jacyn had the breath to talk back, he would have told them to think of something new, but he was already sucking wind so he just focused on getting the hell away. Why, hadn’t he listened to Logan? All he had to do was stay in the car and keep out of trouble, but no, he had to go and disobey. A gunshot rang out, hitting a tree limb right above his head. Jacyn flinched, but never broke stride.

The mocking laughter of the Ravens filled the air.

He had meant to stay put, just like Logan had ordered, but then he’d seen Kevin injured and down and the paramedic in Jacyn had taken over. Before he could stop himself, he left the car and ran right into the battle so he could help him.

A Raven lunged forward and tried to tackle Jacyn around the waist. The only reason he wasn’t taken down was because he fainted to the right.

The Raven hit the ground and let out a loud groan.

The thing that sucked most about this was he didn’t even like Kevin. He was going to die and it was all for some ungrateful jackass. The irony was so bitter that Jacyn would have laughed if he had enough wind left in his lungs to do so.

Another shot rang out and this time it hit its mark. Jacyn let out a yelp of pain as he felt a hot burning in his right side. He staggered, but kept running, knowing that to stop would mean his death. Putting his hand over the wound, he felt the warm stickiness that told him he was bleeding badly.

The Ravens cackled before they fired again. This one caught him in the shoulder. Jacyn fell forward, crying out in agony. He tried to push himself up, but a Raven came up and put his boot in the small of Jacyn’s back. He froze when he felt the cold, hard barrel of a gun pressed into the nape of his neck.

“When you get to hell, tell your mommy and daddy I said *hi*,” the Raven sneered.

Jacyn’s vision became a red hazy cloud as rage washed over him. His lips peeled back into a snarl and he could feel his canines growing into fangs. Fingernails became claws as they dug into the moist earth.

He was doing it, shifting into a jaguar. Instead of fighting it, Jacyn relaxed and let the cat out. The last thing he heard was his own roar and then the terrified screams of the Ravens.

\* \* \* \*

In jaguar form, Logan stopped in his tracks, going still as the sounds of a cat’s scream ripped through the woods, followed by human sounding yells of terror. The voices were loud and it was hard to make out what they were saying, but none of them sounded like Jacyn.

Logan took off running toward the source. Beside him were Kevin and Jared, both in their panther forms. Since they were in animal bodies, Logan projected his thoughts to the others. *Damn it! I told him to stay in the car.*

Strangely, it was Kevin who came to Jacyn’s defense. *Go easy on him. He came to help me.*

For that, I consider him brave. It takes a lot of guts to jump into the middle of a battle to aid someone that you’ve just met, Jared added.

He still should have never come out. We already told him that gunshots don’t normally hinder our kind. Logan cocked his head, hoping to hear anything that would let him know Jacyn was still alive, but all was silent again. His heart hammered in his chest as fear clawed at his senses. If something happened to Jacyn, he didn’t think he could live with it.

Cut the guy some slack. This is still all new to him. When he saw me hurt, he probably just acted on instinct. You did say he’s a paramedic, Kevin continued to argue Jacyn’s case.

If Logan hadn’t been so ball-numbing terrified, he may have found the situation amusing. Kevin never cared about anyone but Jared. Logan didn’t have time to dwell on that, however. All his thoughts and efforts were focused on Jacyn and finding him. *Don’t be dead. Please, don’t be dead.* He chanted repeatedly in his head. Maybe if he silently recited that prayer enough it would be true.

He’s not dead. Jared reassured. *It wasn’t his voice we heard screaming.*

Logan hadn’t realized he’d left the mental link open until then. In his worry over Jacyn, he was getting sloppy. The felines crested a hill and that was when they found him. Lying in the middle of Raven bodies, a jaguar was on its side. Logan breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the steady fall and rise of the cat’s side. Jacyn was alive.

Not breaking stride, Logan shifted to human form and ran the rest of the way to Jacyn. He was vaguely aware that he had to step over the bodies of the Raven to get to the jaguar, but Logan pushed that all to the back. Right now, all he cared about was getting to his man and making sure he was okay.

“Holy fuck in a bucket,” Kevin breathed out in awe as he looked at the carnage around them. “He totally went berserk on those Ravens.”

Logan ignored him and crouched down next to Jacyn. He was curled up, his head tucked under his paws, trembling. Logan tentatively reached out and ran his fingers over the tawny brownish fur. It had large irregular shaped black blotches marking it and it felt so soft under his hand. “It’s okay, I’m here now,” he cooed in a tender voice. Jacyn lifted his head and peered at him. Although the jaguar’s eyes were amber and had the distinct long vertical pupil of a cat, Logan could still detect Jacyn’s human soul there.

*What the hell?* Jacyn’s panicked voice sounded in Logan’s head.

“It’s fine.” Logan continued to run his hand through the jaguar’s fur.

No, it’s not! I just ate those guys to death! The cat started to tremble even harder as it let out a low whine.

“You were protecting yourself. If you hadn’t killed them, they would have murdered you or worse.” Even though the danger of that happening had passed, Logan’s gut still clenched at the thought.

The Ravens were right to lock me up. I’m a menace.

“No, you were just cornered and had to fight your way out. Anyone of us would have done the same thing. That doesn’t make you dangerous or criminal.” Logan stroked the side of the cat. “Come on, shift back for me.”

I don’t know if I can.

“Of course you can. Do it for me, babe.”

Will it hurt?

“Not if you just let it happen and don’t fight it. I’ll be with you the entire time, I promise.”

A shimmer of bright yellow energy traveled up the cat’s body and within the span of a millisecond, Jacyn was back into his human form. He gazed down at his hand, perhaps expecting to see claws still, before he started to pat down his body.

“Making sure everything is still there?” Kevin cracked.

“They shot me,” Jacyn stammered as he continued to poke at his shoulder and side.

Even though he knew the wounds had healed and Jacyn felt no more pain, Logan still wanted to roar in outrage. He yearned to go over and kick the bodies of the Ravens even though they were dead and couldn’t feel his punishment. “Why didn’t you obey me?” Logan demanded, trying hard to keep his voice even.

“I was just trying to help,” Jacyn protested softly.

“When I tell you to do something, you do it,” Logan snapped, worry for what could have happened finally making him lose his thin hold on his temper.

“Who made you my boss?” Jacyn shot back, his own anger evident in the way his cheeks flushed. “Last time I heard, Mitchell was still our leader.”

“Who also told you to stay in the car.”

Jacyn cursed under his breath and ducked his head. “You heard that, huh?”

“Yeah, our hearing is very sensitive, but you probably already figured that out. How many conversations have you overheard in the past? Secret discussions you weren’t supposed to know about? You’ve had heightened senses all your life, you’ve just never realized it.”

Jacyn paused for a second, before he tilted his head back with a frustrated groan. “I’m so sick of this. For the past couple of days, I’ve lost complete control of my entire life. *Stay in the car, Jacyn. Have fun chained to our wall, Jacyn. You’re a kitty cat now, Jacyn. You can’t go back home because the police will arrest you for shooting up a store and stealing a rig, Jacyn. That is if a group of stinky bird men don’t capture you and make you into their own personal boy toy.*”

A snort off to Logan’s right told him Kevin was trying to hold in his laughter.

“And he’s lost it.”

“Shut up! Why don’t you and Jared go back to the house and check out what happened to the family?” Logan barked, never taking his gaze off Jacyn.

“Sure thing,” Jared replied, as usual, playing the peacemaker. “We’ll call the canine pack nearby and see if they can help with the cleanup, too.”

Right as the duo were leaving, Kevin paused and looked over his shoulder. His dark hair was hanging in his eyes and for once, the cocky smile was gone from his face. Taking a deep breath, he said, “Thanks for what you did for me back there, Jacyn. You got a massive set of balls on you. Mitchell is going to be real proud of you.”

Words of compliment coming from Kevin of all felines? Logan couldn’t have been more surprised if Satan himself had come up from hell and started ladling soup at a homeless shelter.

Jared gave his mate a light punch on the shoulder. “Come on, let’s go do what Logan asked. We’ve only got so much sunlight left and I don’t want to be out here playing while it’s still dark.”

“I’m sorry,” Jacyn whispered once they were alone again.

Logan couldn’t help it. He wrapped his arms around Jacyn’s shoulders and brought him in for a rib-crushing hug. They were still sitting on the ground and rocks were digging into his backside, but all that he cared about was the sensation of having Jacyn safe and sound, in his embrace.

“Don’t ever do that to me again,” he demanded in a harsh voice. “I thought I had lost you.” Logan pulled back so he could gaze at Jacyn’s face. A bit of Raven’s blood marred his cheek, so Logan tried to wipe it away. He only succeeded in smearing it more. “Are you in any pain?” Logan asked as he lightly brushed his lips against Jacyn’s mouth. It was completely against protocol, but he needed all the contact he could get. Maybe then the fear that still had his gut in an iron vise, would let up.

“It didn’t hurt as much this time. I just feel achy, like I had a really hard work out in the gym. I would give my hind legs for a hot bath though. I could soak for days.”

The thought of Jacyn sitting in a tub, his skin pink from the steam and droplets of water clinging to the hard muscles of his stomach, had Logan’s cock springing to life. Suddenly Logan had a new naughty fantasy and he damn well was going to make it come true. “Come on, let’s go back to the house and help the others so we can get the hell out of here.” Logan stood and held his hand out to help Jacyn up.

One more night. Logan had one more night with Jacyn. Then they would be back at the headquarters. A stab of regret hit Logan hard. He had no doubt that once they got home, he would lose Jacyn forever. So he was going to make this a night that neither one of them ever forgot.

## Chapter Nine

“Wow, does Mitchell know you’re charging this to his account?” Jared asked as he and Logan stood in the opulent lobby of the hotel.

Logan followed his gaze, taking in the highly polished marble floor, the huge potted plant, the large screen plasma TVs in the bar. Several of the guests, all dressed in high-end clothes gave the two men looks of disdain. Jared curled his lip at one scrawny guy and the human quickly scampered the other way.

“Mitchell owes us for what we’ve been through. We’ve spent all day cleaning up that mess at the Rogues’ house and we deserve some R and R,” Logan replied.

“It’s still pisses me off to no end what the Ravens did to that family.” Jared kept his voice down so they weren’t overheard.

Logan agreed with him. The Ravens hadn’t just killed the family, they had ripped them apart. Two parents and their adult children, murdered in cold blood and for what? To set up an ambush. It seemed all so senseless. But then, most of the things in this damn war seemed that way. Logan handed a keycard over to the panther and then slid another in his pocket.

“You got just two rooms?” Jared asked, cocking a brow.

“Leave it,” Logan growled as he started to make his way across the lobby and to the parking lot where they had left the others.

“Sure thing, if anyone asks me about it, I’ll just tell them you did it so you could stand guard so the Ravens didn’t snag him again.”

Jared probably would, too. The panther was one of the few true friends Logan had. More than once, they’d saved each other’s hide. The only fault Logan could find in the guy is he’d picked a tool for a mate.

Jacyn and Kevin were sitting on the hood of the Rover. They jumped down as Jared and Logan approached.

Logan almost stumbled when he noticed they had been laughing about something. Until then, he didn’t think Kevin could smile, let alone find his sense of humor.

“You actually managed to get us rooms here?” Kevin asked, glancing at the keycard in Jared’s hand. “I thought for sure they would take one look at you two and throw your asses out.”

“Logan worked his charm on them.” Jared grinned at his mate as they exchanged a tender look.

“Shoot, now I know you’re lying,” Kevin snorted. “Logan doesn’t have an ounce of charm in him.”

“Come on.” Jared threw an arm around Kevin’s shoulders. “I’m tired and hungry.”

Kevin stood on tiptoe so he could whisper something in Jared’s ear.

The panther chuckled, “Yeah, I’m that, too. You going to help alleviate it?”

Kevin rubbed his cheek against Jared’s chest, marking him with his scent. “I love you so much.”

They left, Kevin pausing long enough to call back, “See you tomorrow, Jacyn. Make sure you’re not too rough on Logan. We don’t want to find him in the same condition you left those Ravens.”

Logan shook his head as they rounded the corner. “I still don’t get what Jared sees in him.”

“You don’t always get to chose who you fall in love with,” Jacyn replied.

Logan turned to look at him, hoping to see if there was some underlying message to those words, but Jacyn’s face was a blank slate. For the first time since they’d met, Logan couldn’t read him. It both frustrated and scared the hell out of him. “Here.” He cleared his throat nervously as he pulled the key out of his pocket. “Why don’t you go up to the room and start getting situated?”

“Okay,” Jacyn replied slowly, warily reaching out to take it. “Aren’t you going to come, too?”

The slight bit of worry in his voice shouldn’t have made Logan happy, but it did. Just by hearing it, he knew Jacyn wanted him around. “I’ll be right there. I have a couple of calls to make. In the meantime, you go ahead and get started. I made sure the room had a hot tub.”

A wicked gleam of excitement went through Jacyn's eyes. "No way!"

"Why do you think I picked this hotel?" Logan grinned. It felt so good to know that he had been the one to make Jacyn so happy.

"You are so awesome."

"Well, you kept mentioning how you wanted a hot bath and I thought with all the crap you've been through, it was the least I could do for you."

Jacyn gave him one last grin before he raced to the room, nearly running in his excitement.

Logan was in such a good mood, he didn't even mind that he had to deal with Rat during one of the calls. After he gave a report to Rat, Logan called Mitchell to give him the details. He deliberately left out the part about Jacyn leaving the car, not wanting him to be in trouble before he even set foot into his new home.

"How's he taking all this?" Mitchell asked at the end of their conversation.

Logan didn't even have to ask who the *he* was. Just by the way Mitchell's voice had grown soft let him know it was Jacyn. The leader often sounded the same way when he talked about Cassie or Brent.

"Great, a lot better than most would," Logan replied, a great sense of pride going through him. Jacyn had more than handled it. He'd used it to his advantage to take out the Raven shifters.

"Promise me you'll keep a close eye on him until he's home," Mitchell ordered, thickly.

If Mitchell only knew how closely Logan planned to do that watching, the leader would probably have him thrown in the small jail at headquarters. That was if he didn't just out and out kill Logan first. "I'll protect him with my life," Logan vowed, meaning it to the marrow of his bones.

After he hung up, Logan grabbed their stuff from the Charger and went to the room. Once there, he set the bags down, took off his boots, and grabbed a bottle of champagne from the stocked mini-fridge. It was going to jack up the bill even more, but at this point, why worry.

Not bothering with glasses, he popped the cork and went to the bathroom. It had the same type of marble floors the lobby did and was almost as big as the rest of the room. Taking up a good portion of space was a large corner whirlpool tub.

The engine whirred, the sound mixing in with the gurgles from the bubbling water. Jacyn was already in there, naked and looking more relaxed than Logan had ever seen him. At least Logan hoped he was naked. With all the swirling water, he couldn't see to make sure.

Jacyn had his eyes closed and head back, resting against the tile wall.

At first, Logan didn't think he knew he had company. Then Jacyn slowly cracked his lids and gave him a lazy smile. Logan's cock snapped to attention, pushing painfully against the tight denim of his jeans.

"I think there's room if you want to come in and join me," Jacyn invited, his gaze heavy with desire.

"There's enough space in there to fit in the entire feline shifter population," Logan teased as he set the



champagne down on the ground by the tub. In order to do so, he had to bend over and his face was so close to Jacyn's tempting lips that Logan couldn't resist snagging a quick taste.

Once he pulled back, Jacyn said, "I don't want the entire shifter population in here with me, just you. Are you going to get naked and come in or do I have to get out and make you?"

The thought of Jacyn naked, aroused and wet, stalking him through the room, had Logan groaning. God, that would be a sight to see, but some other time. Right now, he knew that he would go crazy if he didn't get his hands on Jacyn soon. Straightening back up, Logan stripped off his clothes so fast it was a miracle he didn't shred them into pieces. Once he was naked, he froze, suddenly very aware of Jacyn's heated gaze.

"You're so hot," Jacyn proclaimed in a near snarl. His eyes flashed and for a brief second, the irises took on the shape of his jaguar before they returned to normal.

It let Logan know that his guy was on the edge, about to lose the battle for control with his lustful side. "And you're perfect," Logan replied, meaning it with every inch of his soul. Stepping into the tub, he hissed at the hot temperature, before he slowly sunk down and let his body adjust to the heat.

Jacyn leaned forward.

Logan put a hand on the man's chest and stopped him. "This time, I'm in control," he growled, passion making him sound harsher than he intended. When Jacyn opened his mouth to protest, Logan cut him off by putting his finger on the man's lips. "Last time I had all the pleasure and you got nothing. I want to make it up to you. I have to. Please."

The tip of Jacyn's tongue darted out to taste Logan's finger before the jaguar slowly nodded and settled back down.

"That's a good boy," Logan crooned as he reached over the edge of the tub and grabbed the champagne. "Now, open your mouth for me."

The fact that Jacyn immediately obeyed, so trusting, tugged on Logan's emotions in many ways. Logan tipped the bottle and carefully poured some of the drink into Jacyn's mouth. Before he could swallow, Logan captured his lips in a hard, demanding kiss.

He slid his tongue past Jacyn's lips, some of the bubbly liquid transferring to his mouth. Shifting so he was in between Jacyn's thighs, Logan was thrilled when he felt the jaguar's thick, hard erection brushing against his stomach. That answered the question about whether he was naked or not.

Logan used his free hand to squeeze that hard cock. Jacyn's body jerked, almost throwing him off. Logan pulled back and gave him a light warning nip on the chin. "Be still," he admonished.

"Sorry," Jacyn panted, his face flushed with passion. "But it feels so good."

"Try harder." Logan poured another swallow into Jacyn's mouth and then kissed him so they could share it again. Squeezing his cock even tighter, Logan started to pump his hand up and down. Jacyn whimpered against Logan's mouth, but followed orders and kept still. "How far do you want to take this?" Logan rumbled as he let his hand drift down until his fingers were poised at the entrance of Jacyn's tight ass.

“All the way,” Jacyn moaned as he tilted his head back. His eyelids fluttered shut, the wet spikes of his eyelashes dark against his cheeks. “Fuck me, Logan. Hard.”

Wanting to have both hands free to play, Logan gave Jacyn one last drink before he put the bottle down. As he swooped down for a wet kiss, Logan slid two fingers into Jacyn’s ass at the same time. While Logan was swallowing his share of the champagne, his mouth watered for something entirely different.

What he really wanted was to trail a path of kisses down Jacyn’s sculpted body. He wouldn’t stop until he had the jaguar’s hard cock in his mouth. Then he would have fun torturing Jacyn the way he’d tortured Logan before Kevin and Jared interrupted them.

Since they were both presently in the tub and Logan couldn’t hold his breath under water that long, he would have to wait until later for that. They had time to play before they had to leave. He only wished he had more of it. Like a lifetime’s worth of minutes and hours to make love to Jacyn, be with him, wake up in his arms.

That wasn’t to be though. All he would ever have was this one night and it made him want to howl in rage. Instead, Logan put all his pain and frustration into each kiss, caress and touch. Maybe someday Jacyn would look back to this moment and realize just how much Logan loved him.

Still plunging his fingers in and out of Jacyn with one hand, Logan used the other to caress his lover’s cheek, tweak his nipples, cup his balls and slowly stroke his cock. All the while, he continued to kiss and nuzzle Jacyn.

“This isn’t fair,” Jacyn declared breathless. “I’m getting all the pleasure. What about you?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll get my turn.” Logan rubbed his cheek, against Jacyn’s jaw line.

“When?” Jacyn sucked in a breath as Logan gave his cock one last squeeze.

“Now.” Logan spread Jacyn’s thighs out further so he could get at him even more. Grabbing his own cock, Logan guided it to the opening of the man’s ass. Slowly he entered Jacyn, each inch in more pleasurable than the last.

“More, please, I need all of you,” Jacyn begged. He tried to reach out, but almost slipped under the water. Bracing his elbows on the edge of the tub for support, he turned his imploring gaze to Logan.

“How can I deny you that?” Logan slammed the rest of the way home, burying his cock ball’s deep inside Jacyn.

Pleasure slithered its way around Logan’s body, making him rasp out a hoarse moan. Never had it been this intense, never had he felt so alive. Jacyn’s ass gripped his erection snugly, as if they had been made for each other.

While Logan wanted nothing more to pull back and pound into his lover hard and fast, he forced himself to set a slow, easy pace. He didn’t want to come too soon and end things. Not when this was going to be the only time he was going to enjoy this paradise.

Despite his efforts to prolong things, Logan could feel the pressure building up in his balls. Wanting Jacyn to find his pleasure first, he reached between them and took the man’s cock in his fist.

“Yes, just like that,” Jacyn groaned, the tendons on his neck standing out. “Hold it harder.”

Logan obeyed, tightening his grip on Jacyn’s cock and pumping his fist up and down. After a few more strokes, Jacyn let out a harsh cry as he came. Logan continued to milk him the entire time, until he’d wrenched all the pleasure from his lover’s body. Only when he was sure Jacyn was finished did Logan allow himself to join him in orgasm. Damn, it hadn’t been this good in for as long as he could remember. Logan bit his bottom lip to keep from yelling his pleasure too loudly and bringing hotel security to the door.

After it was over, he slid out of Jacyn and then settled back on his knees so he could gaze down at his guy. Jacyn slowly opened his eyes and gave Logan a satisfied grin. There was a low rumbling noise coming from his throat that had Logan smiling. “Now who’s purring,” he teased lightly, as he trailed his finger down Jacyn’s chest.

“I guess I am.” Jacyn yawned. “I didn’t even know I could do that.”

“You look tired,” Logan said with a tinge of disappointment. He didn’t want to lose a moment of the precious little bit of time he had left with Jacyn, even to sleep.

“I’ve still got plenty of energy left.” Jacyn sat up and gave Logan a scorching kiss. “Come to bed and let me prove it.”

## Chapter Ten

It was late into the next day before they finally got to Flint. Jacyn nervously clutched the dash of the car, heart hammering in his chest as he waited for the first glimpse of his new home.

“There it is,” Logan announced in a tight voice as a rundown factory came into view.

“Here?” Jacyn gave a slight shake of disbelief. Was this some kind of joke they play on the new guys. “It can’t be. It looks like a dump.”

“You should know by now that looks can be deceiving. When we first relocated here, we needed a big place. When the auto companies pulled out of Flint, they left behind many empty factories. The locals are so happy to see one of them being put to use for something other than drug houses that they didn’t ask

too many questions when we bought one and moved in.”

“Do you live there?” Jacyn felt a twinge of guilt that he’d never bothered to ask Logan that before.

“No, most of us have our own places. The different types of cats in us often don’t get along well enough to make cohabitation a good idea.”

Thinking about the way Kevin could grate on his nerves, Jacyn could totally relate to that one. Even though they were now friends, he didn’t think he could take more than small doses of the panther. “So where do you live?” Jacyn hoped he wasn’t coming off like some needy stalker.

“About five miles from here. I have a small apartment. Since it’s just me, I don’t need much. Plus, housekeeping is not my thing so the less I have to deal with the better.”

Jacyn nodded, thinking about his own crap-hole apartment he’d left behind in LA. How long before the landlord realized he wouldn’t be coming back and he threw all his stuff out? A bit of remorse went through him, making him frown. Like Logan, he didn’t have much, but it was his and he hated that it was going to end up in trash bags at the curb.

“Since he’s the leader and always on call, Mitchell does live here though,” Logan supplied, breaking into Jacyn’s internal pity party.

“How about Brent and Cassie?”

“They live here, too. From what I hear, they’ve already made up your room so don’t worry about not having a place to stay. If I know Cassie, she probably has the closet stocked and everything.” Logan slowed as they approached a large set of gates.

A chain link fence surrounded the entire building and though Jacyn wasn’t an expert on such things, he was pretty sure it was electrified. He barely noticed this, too disappointed that one... Logan was going to be five miles away and two... he hadn’t asked Jacyn to come stay with him.

What had he expected, that after one night of sex, Logan would want to become mates? Okay, it had been mind-blowing sex, but obviously that’s all it had been to Logan. Sex—because he had the good sense not to fall in love like Jacyn had with him.

Jacyn still wasn’t sure when he’d first fallen in love with the black jaguar, but somewhere along this trip from hell, there was no mistake that he’d fallen for Logan. *Hard*. To make matters worse, ever since they’d left the hotel, Logan had been cool and distant. Jacyn stilled, icy dread settling in his stomach. What if the sex had only been mind-blowing to him? Maybe he’d deluded himself into thinking Logan had enjoyed it as much as he had. Could it be possible that he sucked in bed? Or worse maybe he’d broken some shifter taboo and Logan was so disgusted with him that it was all he could do not to plant his boot firmly in Jacyn’s ass and kick him out the car—while it was still moving.

The worst part was, there was nobody that he could ask if he’d committed a kitty sex faux paux. It’s not as if he could go up to Mitchell, shake his hand and say, *why yes, I am your long lost brother. By the way, is it okay that I went down on one of your soldiers, days within meeting him? You don’t have some weird rules against that or anything, do you? If so, how do I make it up? With a fruit basket or something?*

Thankfully, a guard came out from the small white station house and approached the car, tearing him

away from his troubled thoughts. The tall man was wearing a green shirt and black fatigue pants. He wore his blond hair cut short to his skull and he had the darkest blue eyes Jacyn had ever seen. His gaze shifted from Logan to Jacyn. He cocked his brow, but otherwise showed no reaction to having a stranger in his midst.

Logan rolled down the window of the car. "How goes it, Thomas?"

"It's pretty damn shitty. One of our teams got ambushed while on a mission and we have a ton of wounded," Thomas replied in an almost bored voice. His gaze flicked over Jacyn. "Is this the one that has everyone's tails tied in knots?"

"Yes," Logan sighed, sounding put out. Almost as if Jacyn was a pest he couldn't wait to get rid of.

Jacyn got a bit annoyed. If he was so much trouble, then why had Logan spent the better part of last night making love to him?

"Cool." Thomas slowly broke out into a grin. Nodding to Jacyn, he addressed him for the first time. "I have a brother who went missing the same time you did. Finding you gives me real hope for him. You need anything at all, you don't hesitate to ask me."

"Thanks," Jacyn replied more than a bit relieved that all shifters weren't assholes like Kevin.

Logan gave one last wave before he pulled in the parking lot. Kevin and Jared were still following them, but as they passed through the gate, they went off in a different direction. Jacyn would have asked where they were going, but since Logan was still giving him the silent treatment, he decided to keep his questions to himself for once. Logan parked the car, turned it off, then turned to pin Jacyn with a hard stare.

"When we get in there, stick close by me until I can hand you off to Mitchell," he ordered.

"*Hand me off to Mitchell?*" Jacyn echoed, finally having had enough. What right did Logan have to treat him as if he was some fumbling idiot? Or worse, some fucking burden.

"Yes" Logan snapped, his tone as cold as his eyes. "My mission was to bring you home safe and make sure you got to Mitchell in one piece."

"Was it also part of your mission to fuck me?" Jacyn shot back, feeling equal parts enraged and hurt. Even though a small part of him knew that Logan was pushing him away in an effort to *protect* him, another part of him was enraged that the man didn't care enough to fight for what they could have had.

Not able to stand being so close to Logan anymore, he grabbed at the handle on the door. After a few frantic struggles, he was able to get it open. Not looking back, he got out and slammed the door hard. Since the car seemed to be the only thing that Logan gave a damn about, maybe that would hurt him back some. He started walking to the building, not pausing, even when he heard Logan get out.

"What do you want from me?" Logan called. "I warned you not to expect anything more."

Yeah he had, but that still hadn't prepared Jacyn for the sting of his rejection. Sure, he'd had lovers shove him away in the past, but not once had it even come close to hurting as much. Then again, Jacyn hadn't loved any of them as he did Logan. There was the sound of pounding footsteps and then Logan was behind him. He pulled on Jacyn's arm and made him stop.

“I never wanted to hurt you,” Logan said, his eyes bleak.

“I should have known better. You did try to warn me, but I had hoped that you...” Jacyn trailed off, realizing he’d almost said, *that you loved me as much as I do you*.

“Before long you’ll realize that I’m doing you a huge favor. If you’re associated with me, it’ll just drag you down. The last thing you need is me messing up your new life.”

“Did it ever occur to you that maybe I wanted a say in your decision to *save me*?” Jacyn gave a humorless laugh. “No, you just had to take that choice from me as well. I didn’t have any more say in that than I did about losing my career, my home, my friends and my own life.”

Jacyn knew it wasn’t right that he was taking all his stress out on Logan, but he couldn’t find it in him to pull back the words either. Everything that he’d felt the past couple of days had finally reached a boiling point. Jacyn wrenched his arm away from Logan and started walking away again. “Go home, I don’t need or want your help,” Jacyn spat.

“Yeah, the last time you thought that, you ended up chained to a wall,” Logan replied as he followed.

“Who knows, maybe this time it will be a cute guy doing the chaining and I’ll like it.”

Logan let out a low growl. “You’re not funny.”

“And you don’t intimidate me anymore, so making animal noises at me isn’t going to make me cooperate anymore.” Jacyn reached a door and tried to wrench it open, only to find it locked. There was a keypad by it, but he didn’t know the code to get in. Damn it, there went his little declaration of independence.

Thankfully Logan didn’t call him on it as he could have. Instead, he punched in the code and opened the door for him. As Jacyn stepped inside and saw his new home for the first time, he had to admit that it was nothing as he imagined it would be from just looking at the outside.

Long, with a ceiling at least three stories tall, it somehow managed not to come off cavernous, thanks to the updates the shifters had made. The floors were all hardwood instead of the usual industrial gray of factories. He didn’t want to think of the cost it had been to do that. The shifters had painted the walls a warm brown and there were plaques, pictures and weapons displayed on them. They’d erected several walls to make up offices and other types of rooms and there were dozens of tables set out in the open.

“This is the main area,” Logan waved at the area, “Here, we keep our offices, communications centers and war rooms. In the back is the cafeteria and training facilities.”

Several men and women were rushing around, but at one point or another they all paused a second to peek a glance at Jacyn. “It’s really big in here,” he commented as he returned some of the more open of glances. While he would have liked to duck his head and look away, the predator in him refused to back down from a challenge.

“Yeah, one of the benefits of being the government’s bitch is they make sure we have the technology we need,” Logan replied with a hint of bitterness.

“Well, look at what we have here. The lost kitty has finally found his way home,” a smug voice declared.

Jacyn looked up to see a tall, thin man approaching. With spiky died blue and black hair and eyeliner, he looked more like a Dracula wannabe than a shifter. He was even wearing black pants with chains in the loops, and boots with silver buckles.

“Jacyn meet Rat,” Logan sighed, a tick working in his jaw. “Head of communications and resident pain in the ass.”

Jacyn wrinkled his brow in confusion. “If his name is Rat does that mean—”

“Don’t even think of going there,” Rat cut in with a snarl. “I’m all cheetah and I’ll be more than happy to prove it to you right before I knock you on your ass. The reason for the name is my business and you don’t need to worry your pretty little boy-toy head over it.”

“I can see the residential pain in the ass thing now,” Jacyn muttered under his breath. Speaking louder, he glared up at Rat. “You’ll have to excuse me for not getting more worked up over your threats. In the past couple of days I’ve had a partner go postal on me, a friend murdered, been kidnapped by a bunch of giant Heckle and Jeckles, chained to a damn wall and found out I’m a fucking cat. So, too bad for you, I’ve suddenly decided to not give a shit.”

For a second, Rat just stood there, stone faced, then sniffed the air and wrinkled his nose. “You reek of Logan. What exactly have you two been up to?”

Jacyn made a big show of mimicking his sniff-the-air-and-make-a-face move. “And you reek of hand lotion and desperation. What exactly have you been up to when you’re all alone in that communications room?”

Logan muttered a curse under his breath and tried to move his body between the two of them. Jacyn stepped around him so he could stare down the cheetah. Curling his hands into tight fists, he braced himself, waiting for an attack. After what seemed like forever, a wide grin spread out over Rat’s face.

“Brent is going to love you. His very own mini-me. You’re not too bad, makes me wonder how you ever hooked up with Logan. I swear he was born with an iron bar jammed up his ass.”

“We’re not a couple,” Logan growled.

Jacyn bit back the burning hurt at Logan’s fast denial.

“If you two haven’t been playing, then how come your scents are all over each other?” Rat asked, a wicked gleam in his blue eyes.

“Probably because we’ve been in the same car for the past couple of days,” Logan snapped.

“Oh, I see,” Rat nodded slowly, looking anything but convinced. “So we’re going with the old we-were-in-the-same-car defense. I used that one when I lost my virginity to a very hot, but very Rogue cougar.”

“Just shut up and tell me where Mitchell is,” Logan glowered at Rat.

“Sorry, I can’t,” Surprisingly, Rat did sound sincere. “I was just coming to bring you a message from him.” He turned his attention to Jacyn. “You really might want to take a shower before you meet big bro. Not that it ever works though. Once someone stinks you, it sticks around a while. This one time I

hooked up with a panther and—”

Now it was Logan who cut in, “Focus just ten seconds for me, will ya? What was the message?”

“Oh, yeah, I guess I should give you that,” Rat replied slowly.

His dumbass act didn’t fool Jacyn for a second. He knew the cheetah was getting a kick out of annoying the big, bad black jaguar.

“We had an incident and there were some major casualties.”

“Yeah, we already know. Thomas said one of our teams was hit hard.” Logan ran his hands through his hair in frustration.

“As usual, Thomas was only partly right.” Again, he looked back over at Jacyn. “One thing you’ll learn real quickly is not to trust lions. They never get information right. I was shot in the ass during a mission one time because one of them told me that an area was secure. Ha! Stupid me believed him and found myself surrounded by a group of drug dealers. They took offense because we had blown up most of their supply and decided to try to kill me for it.”

“And it was my misfortune they failed,” Logan snarled. By the way his eyes were glowing with anger along with his tensed muscles, he looked about ready to attack and pound the answers out of the cheetah. “Will you just give me one straight answer? I haven’t had much sleep and I’m cranky.”

Jacyn felt a slight flush come to his cheeks since he knew exactly why Logan hadn’t been getting any rest. He waited for Rat to catch on and make a zinger, but luckily the cheetah let it go.

“Well, la-di, fucking da! It hasn’t exactly been a party here either. That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you.” Rat rolled his eyes, “No offense, but sometimes you jaguars really drive me crazy with your lack of communication skills.”

“Don’t kill the cheetah,” Logan muttered under his breath, appearing to be giving himself a pep talk. “If you rip the bastard apart, Mitchell will be pissed.”

The whole situation was so amusing that Jacyn had to bite the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing.

“Okay,” Rat sighed, acting very put out that Logan was being such a spoilsport. “There was a huge mission that involved the terrorist group who are in cahoots with the Ravens.”

“So what went wrong?” Logan asked, quickly as if he were afraid of Rat getting off topic again.

Not an empty fear as far as Jacyn could tell.

“They somehow knew we were coming and set up an ambush. Before we even knew it, we had lost most of three teams.” Rat’s eyes went flat with rage as his jaw clenched tightly together.

“Are they dead?” Jacyn asked stupidly.

“A few, some of the others are injured badly.”

“Are they at the hospital?” While Jacyn worried that question may be another stupid one, somehow he



didn't quite see how they could explain away a whole bunch of shot up guys who kept turning into cats popping up in a human ER.

"Are you kidding?" Rat snorted. "While we may be good enough to fight the human governments battles, we're not good enough for them to help us when we get hurt doing so."

"We have an infirmary of our own here," Logan explained.

"Mitchell had to go meet with the locals to help clean up the mess," Rat added as he gave Jacyn a sympathetic look. "He wanted me to make sure to let you know that he'll be back as soon as he can. Brent and Cassie had to go with him so lucky you got me as your welcoming committee."

Jacyn felt conflicted. While he was disappointed about not being able to meet his siblings, he was also relieved. With the emotion he was feeling over Logan right now, the last thing he needed was more drama. "Where's the infirmary?"

"In the back, why?" Rat cocked his head to the side in confusion.

"You probably already know this, but I'm a paramedic. I may as well go back and see if I can help out with the wounded while I wait for Mitchell to get back."

Rat looked over at Logan for silent permission, before he gave a nod and led the way.

## Chapter Eleven

Jacyn quickly learned that shifter medicine was a whole world different from just plain human healing. For one thing, for the shifters even needing medical help, meant the injuries were severe, so bad that if they had been human they would have died already. Then when the fact that some of them were in their cat forms, it added a whole new difficulty to the mix.

The shifter in charge, Doctor Featherstone, was a towering mass of muscles who looked like he belonged behind a weapon, not healing the affects of one. Yet, when Jacyn looked closely into his deep brown eyes, he saw compassion. With long dark hair and high arched cheeks that came as a result of his

Native American heritage, he had a strange calming quality about him, too.

The doctor and the rest of his staff were dressed in green scrubs and they moved with a well-oiled efficiency that told Jacyn they had worked many trauma situations together. He had worked in medicine long enough to see that, despite lacking the better equipment of a big hospital, this group knew what they were doing.

They still gladly took up Jacyn on his offer to help and soon he found himself elbow deep in injured shifters. The first lesson he learned was to pull his hand back quick if a cat decided to take a snap at him. Since they were in so much pain, they were operating mostly on their animal instincts. Not that Jacyn could blame them. Looking at some of the gaping wounds they sported, he would be grumpy, too, if he were them.

He was currently wrapping up the paw of a huge puma. Thankfully the animal seemed pretty out of it since they had just finished doing an emergency operation on him to remove several bullets. Still Jacyn continued to murmur soft words of comfort to the animal.

The entire time Jacyn had been working in the infirmary, Logan had stood there like some tall, menacing bodyguard. While he'd never got in the way, he'd still made it clear that if anyone made one wrong move toward Jacyn, they'd be pulling back a stump.

While it would have comforted some, Jacyn knew better than to read too much into it. Every part of him wished that Logan protected him because he actually gave a damn, but Jacyn knew better. If the words Logan had spoken in the car did not get the message across, then the way he'd reacted when Rat had mentioned them being together had. His vehement denials had cut Jacyn as deep as a blade.

Still working on the bandage, Jacyn swallowed hard against the painful lump in his throat. While that night of passion had meant so much to Jacyn, it was obviously just another tussle as far as Logan was concerned.

It's not as if he hadn't had one-night stands before, nor was this the first time someone had used him just for a good time. It had just never hurt this much before. Jacyn, fool that he was, had let himself believe that someone could actually care about him. He had opened his heart to the shifter, and in turn, Logan had taken that gift and stomped on it.

The puma cracked its lids, staring at Jacyn with its bleary green eyes. The cat's chest rumbled with a weak growl.

"It's okay," Jacyn crooned as he stroked the velvet-like fur on the puma's nose. The cat gave a satisfied purr until Jacyn pulled his hand away.

The animal let out a low growl in protest.

"All right, I'll pet you a bit longer if that's what you need."

"Samuel," Logan stepped closer so he could glare down at the cat. "Stop playing games or your injuries will be the least of your worries."

"Stop it," Jacyn chided, shocked at Logan's cold attitude. "He's hurt and just needs some comfort."

"Samuel is a man as well as a cat and his male side is enjoying your touch more than he should. He's

using your naivety to cop a feel.”

“Quit being so hard. I’m just doing my job and helping with the wounded. If you don’t like it, you know where the door is.”

Logan leaned down so his lips were just inches from Jacyn’s ear and whispered, “Your whole life is different now. Remember what I told you, looks can be deceiving.”

Logan’s hot breath skated across Jacyn’s skin, making him shiver with need. Despite the fact he was still pissed at him, Jacyn felt his cock come to life, pressing painfully against his jeans. God, he must be losing it. Here he was, getting a boner in the middle of the infirmary and all over a guy who made it clear he wanted nothing to do with him.

\* \* \* \*

Mitchell stood at the entrance of the infirmary, watching Jacyn move around. His brother. Found. After all these years of thinking he had been dead, finally Jacyn was safe and home where he belonged. Mitchell only regretted that their parents hadn’t lived long enough to see this.

Rat had reported how Jacyn had rushed instantly to the infirmary, not even taking time to settle in. A thrill of pride went through Mitchell, even though he was still new to all this, Jacyn had put helping his own kind first. Because of his haste, Jacyn wasn’t even dressed in the scrubs like the rest of the medical staff. Instead, he was dressed in a pair of black jeans and shirt.

“Is it really him?” Brent asked in a strangled voice as he came up next to Mitchell.

“Yes,” Mitchell replied, past the boulder of emotion clogging his throat. Just one look at Jacyn answered that. With the same speckled brown hair and brown eyes, he was a match to Mitchell, Brent and Cassie. It was obvious to anyone who looked close enough that they all came from the same genetic mold.

While Mitchell wanted nothing more than to run over and embrace Jacyn, he couldn’t move. Here he was the leader of the feline shifters. A warrior known worldwide for his bravery and he was terrified of how his brother would react to him.

Pathetic. The only comfort he had was that Brent seemed affected by the same chicken-shit syndrome. His littermate just stood there, rooted in place, a deep longing in his eyes as he gazed at Jacyn.

The sound of footsteps reached Mitchell and he didn’t even have to turn to know it was Cassie. By the time she reached them, she was panting for breath, her cheeks flushed from exertion.

“Where is he?” she demanded in a trembling voice. Cassie never showed fear or anxiety, yet here she was close to tears. Unable to speak, Mitchell just tilted his head in Jacyn’s direction.

Unlike him and Brent, Cassie had no problem moving. She let out a gasp of joy as she ran into the room, her long hair swirling around her small frame. Jacyn must have sensed her presence because he looked over at her, his eyes narrowing as he studied her face. Mitchell knew the instant he realized who she was. He sucked in a huge breath as his mouth hung open in shock.

Cassie reached Jacyn and stopped just inches from him. They faced each other, neither moving as they gazed into each other's faces. Mitchell found himself unable to breathe, the scene so touching, it made everyone in the room stop and stare.

"I knew it," Cassie sobbed. She reached up to touch Jacyn's face, but pulled her hand back as if afraid of his reaction. "Even though they said you were dead, I knew you were just lost. I never gave up on you."

"Cassie?" Jacyn choked out.

"Yes, it's me." Cassie hadn't cried since she was a little girl, yet now she had huge tears spilling down her cheeks. With a loud hiccup, she launched herself at Jacyn and wrapped her arms around his waist.

Jacyn stiffened as if he weren't used to affection. That made Mitchell want to break down and ball like a baby, too. What had happened to his brother during all those years he was missing? Finally, Jacyn slowly raised his arms and returned Cassie's embrace.

"Now that's strange," Brent whispered. Instead of looking at his reuniting siblings, he had his gaze directed elsewhere. Mitchell followed it and saw that Logan was standing nearby, watching Jacyn intently. Usually stoic, there was a strange mixture of emotions playing on the black jaguar's face. Hope, sadness and even a bit of wistfulness were present. If Mitchell hadn't of known better, he could have sworn they were all directed at Jacyn, too.

The fact that Brent noticed this despite the emotional situation going on between Jacyn and Cassie, didn't surprise Mitchell. Always alert, nothing ever got by him. It was the reason he was one of Mitchell's best fighters.

There was something going on with Logan, of that Mitchell was sure. He would get to the bottom of it, later. Right now all that mattered was Jacyn. Finally finding the courage, Mitchell crossed the room and put his arms around Jacyn. Cassie was still there, so it made for a group hug, but that just made it even better.

Then he got a good sniff of Jacyn, and the whole reason why Logan was acting the way he was slammed home. Mitchell just barely held back the snarl threatening to rip from his lips. He was going to kill Logan for this. Not wanting Jacyn's welcome home to be marred, Mitchell fought back his rage for now.

"Uh...hi," Jacyn stammered with a lopsided smile. "I'm guessing you're either Brent or Mitchell."

"He's Mitchell, I'm the other brother," Brent announced as he came over and hugged Jacyn.

He must have caught the same scent Mitchell had because a look of rage passed over his face. Mitchell gave a slight shake of his head, a silent command for Brent to hold back for now. Later they would both take turns tearing Logan apart.

\* \* \* \*

Jacyn had wondered time and again how this moment would play out, but he had never imagined it would be this good. Not only were Mitchell, Cassie and Brent happy to see him, they looked as worked up about this as he was. Hell, Cassie was even crying. Over him. Nobody had ever done that.

He darted a look over at Logan, desperate to see how he was reacting to this, but saw that the man was starting to edge his way out of the room, without even bothering to say goodbye. He wasn't the only one who noticed him leaving. Mitchell spun around and fixed Logan with a hard glare.

"Make sure you come to my office first thing in the morning," he ordered the black jaguar in cool, clipped tones.

"Yes, sir," Logan bowed his head respectfully.

Jacyn was confused, wondering what Logan had done to piss off Mitchell so much. If anything, he should be thankful to the guy for all the trouble he went through to bring them back together. As he watched Logan walking away, Jacyn felt like a piece of him was going, too. With each step the man took, a deeper sense of longing hit Jacyn.

"Logan, thank you," he called, desperate to do anything to put off the parting, even for a second longer. Logan stopped and looked back at him. As their gazes locked, Jacyn felt his heart breaking. The once caring expression on Logan's face was gone. In its place was a cold emotionless mask. It was as if everything that had happened between them meant nothing to him.

"No problem," Logan replied, flatly. "I was just doing my job."

Then just like that, he walked away. Jacyn waited and waited, but not once did Logan look back.

"Come on, I'll show you our living quarters," Cassie urged, grabbing Jacyn by the arm. She seemed completely oblivious to what had just gone on.

Not wanting to be a damper on her happiness, Jacyn allowed himself to be led away. The entire time they walked through the massive building, she kept up a steady stream of conversation. She talked so fast, he only caught half of it, but he kept nodding anyway.

"Wait until you see your room. I have it all ready for you," she announced as she bounced up a set of stairs. Even though she was small, the weapons she had strapped all over her body said she was far from a weakling. She had a strong athletic body that showed she put time in at the gym, too. Logan had told him that Cassie fought right alongside the rest of the guys and that she held her own.

While he on the other hand, told to always stay in the car and keep his head down, was aware of how weak and ineffective he was in this new, hard world of predators. Not raised in this society, he'd watched National Geographic enough to know what happened to the meekest of the coalition.

No wonder Logan had dropped him as soon as they got back—he probably embarrassed him. Just as Cassie started to lead him through the door, Jacyn pulled on her hand to make her stop.

"Will you teach me how to fight?" he asked. It should have made him feel even lower to have to be asking a girl, but it seemed so natural to come to her for help. Maybe it was because they had some littermate bond thing going on.

"Of course I will." Her brown eyes grew moist with emotion again. "I'll teach you everything."

Jacyn smiled at her and let her drag him through the door. The living quarters were more like a loft with separate bedrooms set off to the side. Decorated in the same brown tones as the rest of the building, the hardwood floors had deep-toned throw rugs over them to add some comfort and hominess to the area. He grinned in delight when he saw the huge plasma screen TV in front of the large leather sectional. "I could get used to this place," he nearly purred in delight. They even had a Wii.

"I want to show you something." Letting go of his hand, Cassie crossed the room to the fireplace and pulled a framed picture off the mantle. With shaking hands, she handed it to Jacyn.

When he gazed down at it, he had to blink away his own tears. It was a man and woman. The male had the same color hair they did and he reminded Jacyn a lot of Mitchell. Both of them having the same strong jaw line and sloping nose. The female had long, raven hair and the brightest blue eyes Jacyn had ever seen. She was gazing up at the male, a seductive smile playing on her rosy lips. "Who are they?" he asked, although deep down he already knew the answer.

"They're our parents." Cassie took in a shuddering breath. "They died trying to protect us. We were only three at the time."

Jacyn lovingly caressed the glass. So many thoughts and feelings were mixing inside him he didn't know whether to smile, laugh or cry. "I don't remember them," he confessed with a choked sob. "I don't remember any of you. I'm so sorry."

Cassie wrapped one arm around his waist and rested her head on his shoulder. "That's okay, Jacyn, because we never forgot you."

## Chapter Twelve

"What exactly in the hell were you thinking?" Mitchell asked angrily as he strode into his office and took a seat behind his desk.

Logan, summoned first thing in the morning, shifted uncomfortably in his seat as he thought best how to answer it. While he knew better than to lie to his leader and friend, he still wanted to keep his head. He didn't want to say something that would end up hurting Jacyn anymore than he already had.

All night, Logan had twisted and turned in bed, a burning self-hatred keeping him awake. When he did close his eyes, all he saw was the pained look of betrayal on Jacyn's face. It was as if a piece of Logan had died when he had walked away from him. All the while, he wanted nothing more than to turn back, run to Jacyn and gather him in his arms.

"Are you going to answer me, or are you starting to make it a hobby to piss me off?" Mitchell pounded a fist on the desk.

Startled, Logan realized he had let his mind wander. "I'm sorry," he replied, gruffly.

"What exactly are you sorry for? Not listening or for playing games with my brother?" Mitchell leaned forward and glared, his eyes flaring with fury.

Logan wasn't afraid of getting a physical beat down, but he was terrified of disappointing the leader. Not when Mitchell had placed so much trust in him and accepted him so willingly. "It's not what you think," Logan tried to reason.

"Really?" Mitchell cocked his head to the side, the anger far from being gone from his face. "So correct me if I'm wrong. My lost little brother didn't come home reeking like one of my top soldiers? One who was in charge of protecting him and making sure he got back unscathed? Damn it, Logan, you were the last one who I thought would pull a stunt like this."

"I didn't mean for it to happen." Logan scrubbed his face with his hand.

"What, you accidentally had sex with Jacyn?" Mitchell made a scoffing noise in the back of his throat. "Do you honestly expect me to fall for that excuse? It's lame and beneath you."

"I didn't mean it that way." Logan sighed, hesitated. He was already in deep, he might as well dive all the way into Shit's Creek. "I didn't mean to end up caring for him so much."

There was a long stretch of silence, the tension so heavy in the air it was a wonder either one of them could breathe. Finally, Mitchell muttered a low curse as he settled back in his chair. "This is the last thing he needs now," he said, all the earlier anger gone from his voice.

Somehow that didn't comfort Logan any. Nothing short of having Jacyn back could do that. "I know it is." He did, too. It was going to be hard enough for Jacyn to fit in without having to be associated with an outcast like him.

"It's not because of what you're thinking either," Mitchell cut in, seeming to read Logan's thoughts. "He's got so much coming at him right now, that he's confused enough as it is. What if things don't work out with you two and he ends up getting hurt?"

"I would sooner die than cause Jacyn any pain," Logan vowed passionately.

"That's a chance I can't take. What if something happened between you two and he decided to leave because of it? I couldn't stand losing him again," Mitchell admitted in a hoarse voice.

Logan felt the last little bit of hope he'd been holding onto crumble like dust. How could he even think about putting his own needs and wants first? Mitchell was the brother he never had. Cassie the sister. It would destroy him to know they were hurt because he had been too selfish to pull back. It was going to hurt though. Hell, it was going to be like a knife in the gut every time he saw Jacyn. To know that even

though he was close enough to touch, Logan could never have him. “When does that team go to the Middle East?” Logan asked, his voice so tight he hardly recognized it.

“Tomorrow morning, why?” Mitchell picked up an ink pen and started to tap it nervously on the edge of his desk.

“Permission to join in.” As soon as he made the request, Logan wanted it back, but he knew this was the right thing to do.

“Are you sure? This mission could go on for weeks?”

Which was precisely the reason Logan wanted it. If he were gone, then maybe Jacyn would forget about him and find someone else. Maybe then, at least, one of them could be happy. It hurt like hell to think of Jacyn being with anyone else, but Logan would manage somehow. He would be alone. Just like always.

\* \* \* \*

Sweet goddess of mercy, they had Lucky Charms. Jacyn barely held back the whoop of joy as he pulled the colorful box from the cupboard. Now all he had to do was figure out where they kept the bowls and he would be set.

Yawning, he scratched his stomach as he went bowl hunting. He had just found them and was pulling one down when Brent came into the kitchen. Jacyn noticed the shifter was dressed in black fatigues and a t-shirt. He suddenly worried that maybe he should have pulled on something besides the tee and flannel pajama bottoms Cassie had bought him. “I hope you don’t mind.” Jacyn waved the box. “I was just hungry and didn’t want to bother you guys.”

“This is your home, too, so you can take whatever you want.” Brent smiled. “Just so you know though, you try to jack my Fruit Loops and we’re going to have issues.”

“Got it.” Jacyn laughed, some of his shyness passing. “I’ll make sure to leave them alone.”

“Man, I still can’t believe you’re here,” Brent declared as he went to the fridge and pulled out a gallon of milk. He set it down on the counter next to Jacyn. “Now all we have to do is find Keegan, Andy and Joel and we’ll finally be a complete family again.”

So those were the names of his missing brothers. Jacyn felt a tad guilty for not inquiring about them before. “How old are they?” he asked as he sat down at the table.

“A couple years younger than you and Cassie. They’re from Mom’s last litter.”

“How do you guys know they’re still alive?”

“Same way we did with you.” Brent pulled out a chair and joined him. “Rat is great at hacking into the humans’ computer systems. He looks for kids put into orphanages or foster homes at the time of the attack and he goes from there. It’s not much of a lead, but it’s all we got. At first we didn’t think we were ever going to find you.”



“How did we end up with the humans in the first place?” Jacyn stirred his cereal with the spoon. “I mean, why not just kill us when they did our parents?”

“That’s a mystery that not even Scooby can solve. Maybe some of the Ravens actually have a heart and couldn’t stand to murder kids. Hell, maybe they just did it to fuck with our heads. All we do know is that you guys are out there and we have to find you.”

“Because you don’t want unaccounted shifters running on the loose,” Jacyn recalled from his earlier conversation with Logan.

“Well, yeah I guess that, but mostly because you belong with your family.” Brent threw down his spoon, his cheeks flush with anger. “I heard how you had to go through your first change, not even knowing who you were. That killed me having to know how scared you must have been. If you had been home where you belonged, you would have been taught how to manage it so it didn’t hurt so much. Mitchell would have been with you the first time and eased you through it. Instead, you had to endure the agony while being beat up by those Raven bastards at the same time.”

“I managed,” Jacyn shrugged, even after everything he still wasn’t comfortable having others worry about him. “Logan taught me how not to fight it so it didn’t hurt so much the second time.”

“Yeah, I’m sure that’s not all he taught you,” Brent huffed.

Before Jacyn could ask what he meant with the comment, Cassie came shuffling into the kitchen. Like Jacyn, she was still in sleeping pants and a t-shirt that had Rob Zombie on it. Her hair was such a mass of cowlicks and tangles, it seemed to make up most of her body mass.

“Morning, cupcake,” Brent sang out as he gave her an overly bright smile.

“Bite me,” she grumbled back.

“Cassie isn’t a morning person,” Brent confided to Jacyn in a loud stage whisper.

“That still doesn’t mean I’m not alert enough to kick your ass.” She stuck her tongue out at him. Frowning, she looked down at their bowls. “Please tell me you did not welcome home our brother with this. Gosh, Brent, you are such a pig.”

“I love you, too,” Brent replied with an even bigger grin. It was obvious he loved to rile his sister.

Jacyn couldn’t help but smile at their banter.

“Jacyn, put down that spoon and give me a second,” Cassie ordered with an ease that told him she was used to bossing others around. “I’ll cook you a real breakfast.”

“Oh, hell no!” Brent protested, putting his palms up in a pleading gesture. “Not even you would be so cruel as to poison Jacyn on his first morning home.”

“My cooking isn’t that bad,” Cassie protested, hand on hip.

“Yes it is. The government should declare it a WMD. If we sent some of your food to the Ravens, those damn birds would probably surrender within the first day.”

“How can you say that to me?” She acted angry, but Jacyn detected a hint of a smile playing at the corners of her lips.

“Last time you made something for me, I was sick for days.” Brent rubbed his stomach as if he were reliving a particularly painful memory.

“That was so not my fault,” Cassie giggled, her laughter light and bubbly.

It tugged on Jacyn’s heart, as it seemed to reawaken some lost memories. He tried to push further, in hope of recalling what exactly they were, but came up blank.

“Not your fault?” Brent echoed. “They put expiration dates on food for a reason.”

“That cheese smelled perfectly fine when I used it,” Cassie continued to argue even as she went over and poured herself a bowl of cereal.

Jacyn noticed she went for the Lucky Charms, too.

She joined them at the table and they all ate in comfortable silence for a while before Brent finally broke it, “Doc Featherstone from the infirmary called. He was wondering if you would be interested in working there permanently. It seems he was impressed with your skills yesterday.”

“Really?” Jacyn exclaimed, unable to hide his excitement. The only loss that had truly upset him from his former life was that he wouldn’t be able to be a paramedic anymore. To know that he would be able to do it here more than made up for it.

“Yeah, he said you could start as soon as you get settled in.” Brent seemed pleased with Jacyn’s reaction.

“I’m going to be training Jacyn so he’s battle-ready, too,” Cassie added around a big mouthful of cereal.

“That would be great.” Brent nodded. “I know Mitchell wants more medics battle-ready so they can go out on missions with the teams.”

That made sense to Jacyn. The sooner they got medical attention to the injured, the lower the casualty rate would be. It was what the human military did so why not the shifters, too? Jacyn took a deep breath and finally asked the one question that had been hammering his conscious since he’d woke up. “I know Mitchell could sense that Logan and I...” he trailed off, shooting an embarrassed glance at Cassie.

She didn’t seem to mind, however. “Oh yeah, Mitchell and Brent both smelled Logan’s stank all over you. The males of our kind can do that, you know.” She took a bite, acting as if she had conversations like this all time. “So they knew right away that Logan and you were banging.”

Brent moaned and he hid his face in his hand.

Jacyn stared at her in slack-jawed shock.

“Why can’t I have a normal girly sister?” Brent asked.

“Because normal is boring,” she shot back with the cutest of grins.

“Is Logan going to be in trouble?” Jacyn asked, recovering from his shock. “I could tell Mitchell was pissed at him.”

“I wouldn’t worry about Logan.” Brent directed his gaze down at his bowl, suddenly very interested in the cereal. “When I talked to Mitchell this morning, he said that Logan volunteered to go on an extended mission.”

“Oh,” Jacyn stammered, feeling his body go numb from the inside out. “How long is he supposed to be gone?”

“We don’t know for sure since the military isn’t too big on sharing info with us, but it’s probably going to last several weeks.”

Jacyn let those words slowly sink in. Logan hadn’t been kidding when he said he didn’t want to have anything to do with him. So much so that he asked Mitchell to send him as far away from Jacyn as possible. Just when he thought he couldn’t have been hurt more, this last insult had to be thrown his way.

“That jackass,” Cassie hissed as she clutched her spoon tight in her hand as though she was thinking of using it as a weapon. “I’m going to cut out that black heart of his and make him eat it.”

“It’s no biggie,” Jacyn lied, swallowing hard against the lump in his throat. “It’s not like we ever made any promises to each other. Heck, we only knew each other a couple of days.” By looking at the sympathetic looks tossed his way, he knew he wasn’t fooling his brother or sister for a second.

Cassie threw down her spoon and sprang to her feet.

Before Jacyn could react, she had her arms around him, hugging him so tight that he couldn’t breathe properly. At the moment though, he didn’t give a damn. Even though he still wasn’t used to affection, somehow with her it seemed natural. Closing his eyes, he hugged her back, taking comfort in the fact that, while his heart was breaking, at least he didn’t have to go through it alone.

## Chapter Thirteen

Three months. That was how long that damn mission to the Middle East had lasted. Months that seemed to go on forever, because by his second day there, Logan realized he'd made the biggest mistake in his life.

As Logan sat in the rear of the dark van rushing the team back to headquarters, all he could think about was Jacyn. That wasn't new though because the jaguar consumed Logan's thoughts day and night. With no way to go back or even make a call because the mission was on complete blackout, all Logan could do was count the seconds until he would see his lover again.

Would Jacyn ever forgive him for abandoning him? If so, did he even love Logan? What if he'd already moved on and had someone else? He shifted impatiently in his seat as those doubts and questions pounded inside his head. Even as the familiar skyline of Flint came into view, showing he was close to being home, he didn't feel relief. The only thing that would do that would be to have Jacyn back where he belonged, in Logan's arms and bed.

It was late, so the parking lot to the headquarters was relatively empty as they pulled through the gates. The team grumbled as they disembarked and headed inside for a debriefing meeting. Most of them wanted to head straight home and catch up on some much needed sleep. The last thing any of them desired was to have to go inside the building. Logan on the other hand, couldn't wait to get in. He just might get lucky enough to catch a glimpse of Jacyn.

It turned out he didn't have to look too hard. As the team was heading back to one of the larger meeting rooms, Logan spotted Jacyn running to the back of the building. Dressed in a pair of baggy, green scrubs and with a stethoscope looped over his neck, it was pretty clear he was heading for the infirmary.

As Jacyn passed by Rat, the cheetah said something that made him laugh. Logan felt like the air was Hoovered from his lungs. He'd almost forgotten how sexy his smile was. Sensual, with just a touch of sweetness to it.

Even though the rest of the team continued to walk, Logan stood still, as if someone had nailed his boots to the ground. The urge to run over and take Jacyn was so strong that Logan had to clamp his hands into tight fists to stop from reaching out.

"Jacyn, wait up!" Cassie yelled as she came bounding through the building.

"What do you want, pest? I'm already late for work."

Since Jacyn was yelling, Logan could hear that husky voice clearly now. It reminded him of hot butterscotch on a cold sundae. Logan shook his head in self-disgust. Now he was thinking like a love-sick poet. Yeah, he really must be gone.

The rest of his team was long gone and the meeting had probably already started, yet he still couldn't leave. Now that he finally had Jacyn back in his sights, Logan didn't think he'd ever be able to walk away again.

Cassie must have sensed him staring because as she reached Jacyn's side, she turned her head in Logan's direction. Instead of the warm greeting he'd always got from Cassie, he got a murderous glare. Lips pressed in a tight line, her normally warm brown eyes were sharp with hatred. She wrapped her hand around the crook of Jacyn's arm, all possessive as she said something to Jacyn that Logan couldn't hear.

Jacyn tilted his head to the side to listen to her, before a brief look of emotion danced across his face. Logan couldn't be for sure, but it looked like the same type of anger Cassie was tossing around.

Jacyn looked over at him and their gazes locked. Logan's mouth went dry as his heart boomed in his chest. Then just as quick, Jacyn turned away, dismissing Logan completely. Shocked and hurt, Logan continued to stand there like a damn idiot even after Jacyn and Cassie walked away.

Logan wanted to pound the wall in frustration, preferably with his head even though he had no right to feel slighted. What did he expect? That Jacyn would be at the door waiting with wide-open arms?

Maybe not, but he could have at least waved for old times' sake. Stupid for him to think he would get even that. Not after the way he had left Jacyn without even bothering to say goodbye. At the time, Logan had told himself he was doing it for the jaguar's own good. Now he knew he'd done it because he was a chicken and deathly afraid of the feelings he had for Jacyn. Because he was too much of a pussy to face those fears, he may have lost Jacyn forever.

"You better get in there before Mitchell has your balls nailed to his wall," Rat said as he passed by.

Before he had time to stop himself, Logan had his arm out, hand around the cheetah's throat. "What exactly is going on between you and Jacyn?" he demanded in a low voice.

"What do you care?" Rat challenged, that cocky grin of his taunting. "You were the one stupid enough to leave. You honestly don't think someone as good looking as Jacyn is going to go unattached for long, do you?"

"Don't play this game with me, Rat, or so help me..." Logan left the rest of the threat deliberately hanging so the cheetah could wonder what terrible punishments could be in store for him. Then Logan saw the wicked glint in Rat's eyes and he let his hand drop. Logan heard rumors that Rat was into pain so the sick bastard would probably grin through the entire beat down.

Rat confirmed his suspicion when he gave an exaggerated sigh of disappointment. "You're no fun. Besides, I'm not the only one who wants to get close to Jacyn."

"Who else has been sniffing around?"

"Well, let's see," Rat began ticking off on his fingers, "there's Thomas, Mike, Aden..."

Logan walked away, but Rat followed him, still firing off names. He didn't even stop when they entered the meeting hall. Logan tried ignoring the ass, but that didn't stop him from dropping a few more names. Much to Logan's dismay, he took the chair next to him.

Brent and Mitchell were already up front, ready to get the meeting started. While Mitchell gave him a small nod of hello, Brent shot off a glare that was nearly identical to the one Cassie had given. Yeah, Logan was really feeling the love today. "What are you even doing here?" Logan asked, cutting Rat off from finishing his list of Jacyn lovers.

"Mitchell asked me," Rat replied simply, as if that settled the matter as far as he was concerned.

"But you weren't on the mission, so why would you have to be here for the debriefing?" Logan had counted his blessing that he got three Rat free months, too.

“Maybe Mitchell didn’t want to deny you all my great wisdom?” Rat cocked his brow.

Logan noticed he’d had pierced it lately. “I find that doubtful.”

“Then could it be because of my good looks?”

“Even more doubtful,” Logan grunted.

“My charm?”

“Not a fucking chance.”

“You wound me, Logan,” Rat sighed as he shook his head. “You really do. Now what shred of self-confidence I might have had is gone and you have only yourself to blame.”

“However will I live with the guilt?” Logan deadpanned.

“I don’t know, you will have to find a way to carry on.

“If you could all focus, I would like to get this meeting started,” Mitchell called, loudly to get everyone’s attention. “I know the team that just got back is real eager to debrief and get home so I promise to make it short. As many of you already know, we had another mission compromised last week. I lost five good men and we had fifteen serious injuries. We think there may be a leak on the human side of the operation.”

Logan felt a jolt of shock. *Yet another team brought down.* No wonder Mitchell was calling a meeting. Something was seriously fucked up.

“Why do you think it’s someone on the outside who’s talking?” a soldier asked.

Logan recognized him as one of the newer recruits who had just come of age.

“If it were on our side, it wouldn’t just be the missions involving humans that were going fubar. We would be having issues with the Ravens, too,” Brent replied in an are-you-really-that-stupid voice.

“I never trusted the humans anyway.” Rat’s upper lip curled into a sneer. “I haven’t met one who wouldn’t hesitate to stab you as soon as your is back is turned.”

“Don’t hold back, tell us how you really feel,” Logan muttered under his breath so only the cheetah heard. Although given Rat’s past, he didn’t blame the guy for having issues.

“The problem is, if we want to survive, we have to play ball with them,” Mitchell cut in, his voice tight.

“So what do you want us to do, sir?” Logan asked.

“We watch each other’s backs, trust nobody that’s not feline and be on guard at all times,” Mitchell answered. “Rat, can you hack into their computer system and sneak around to see what you can find.”

“Of course. I could do it in my sleep.”

“Just make sure you don’t get caught. While the human government may have no problem with using us to do their dirty work, we all know they wouldn’t hesitate to throw us under the bus and then piss on our remains.”

Logan nodded in agreement. Many humans in power thought the shifters were an abomination and would just love to have an excuse to wipe them out. It was the main reason they all fought so hard to keep their existence mostly a secret. Even the Ravens used caution in that area.

Mitchell gazed over the assembled shifters, his gaze somber. “I can’t stress to you all how important it is that we find the human responsible and figure out a quiet way to eliminate them. We’re already losing too many men to the Ravens and I’ll be damned if I’m going to have any more die because somebody got greedy and sold us out.”

\* \* \* \*

Jacyn sat at the desk near the back of the infirmary, trying his damndest to get all the charting done. It was useless though, because despite his best efforts, his mind kept drifting back to Logan.

Jacyn shoved a file away and ran his hands through his hair, frustration beating him down. Three months. Three months Logan had been away and Jacyn’s feelings toward the man had only grown stronger. How pathetic did that make him?

He was angry with Logan, sure. The fact that it had been so easy for him to walk away had cut Jacyn deep. That still didn’t mean that he was able to forget the man. As soon as Jacyn had seen him standing there, all he could think about was the time they had made love. How good it had felt to have Logan’s hard body cover him right before he had plunged inside Jacyn’s body.

All the pent up sexual frustration had hit Jacyn so hard he was tempted to duck into the bathroom so he could relieve some of the pressure by taking care of it himself. Not that it would help that much. He’d learned that the hard way over the past months. The only thing that could scratch his itch was Logan.

“Wow, it’s so quiet in here,” Rat said as he strolled in.

Jacyn smiled at the cheetah. Despite his smartass attitude and a mean streak, Jacyn had come to really like the guy. Oddly enough, Rat, the one who didn’t have any friends, had taken him under his wing and was teaching him a lot about the shifter life. “I thought you were at that meeting Mitchell called.” Jacyn kicked out a chair for Rat to sit down in.

“I got booted out,” Rat replied in a completely unrepentant voice.

“What did you do now?” Jacyn grinned even though he knew he would be encouraging the behavior.

“I told Brent to suck it.”

“Ouch, you must have a death wish.”

“Ah, I would love for Brent to have a go at me.” Rat scrunched up his face, the first real emotion he’d

shown. “It’s the only time that I get to see some action. Sometimes I get tired of always spending my time at the computer while everyone else gets to go out to kick ass and have fun.”

“Why don’t you just ask Mitchell to put you into rotation?” Jacyn grabbed another file, but didn’t open it yet. With Rat around, he wasn’t going to be getting much work done. Not with the way the cheetah loved to gab.

Rat narrowed his eyes. “You mean nobody has told you yet?”

Jacyn shook his head.

Bright patches of color appeared on the cheetah’s cheeks as he admitted, “I can’t hold my shift.”

Shocked, Jacyn didn’t know how to react. He’d heard of that happening to shifters. Since working in the medical wing, he’d taken a crash course on shifter anatomy, what can go wrong in a shift, illnesses that are unique to their own kind, plus many other things. This was the first time he’d ever met someone affected with this particular affliction though. Probably because they considered it a taboo disease since it made one weak. “How did you get it?” Jacyn asked.

“I don’t know, I was born with it.” Rat shrugged, acting like it was no big deal.

Jacyn wasn’t fooled for a second.

“It’s how I got the nickname Rat. My dad started calling me it when he found out I was defective.”

“Because rats are considered the lowest form of animals,” Jacyn concluded, feeling a deep-seated hatred. How could a father be so cruel to his son?

“Even when I moved here to Michigan, the name still stuck, so I just stopped fighting it and got used to answering to it,” Rat replied.

This time Jacyn detected the bitterness coming from the cheetah. Rat’s eyes were haunted, bleak as if he was feeling the fresh sting of rejection. “Why don’t you go to Mitchell and ask him to make them stop?” Jacyn demanded softly. Inside he was a rolling mass of rage. He wanted to find everyone who had ever insulted his friend and make them hurt.

“He offered to, but I told him not to bother. Every time I hear it now it makes me want to become something more so I can prove my father wrong. Only when I think I’ve done that will I stop using that name.” Rat traced a pattern on the desk, refusing to meet Jacyn’s eyes.

“What’s your real name?”

“Carson,” Rat confessed in a near whisper. It was so unlike him to talk low in shame, and not meet someone’s gaze.

Jacyn couldn’t stand it any longer. He reached over, put two fingers under Rat’s chin and made him look up. Gazing intently into the cheetah’s eyes, so he knew he wasn’t lying, Jacyn said, “I like that name. Believe it or not, it fits you much better than Rat.”

Rat stared back at him.



Jacyn was shocked to see a spark of desire in the man's eyes. The air suddenly became heavy with a sexual tension that had never existed between the two of them before. While Jacyn should have reveled in it, he felt guilty. As if he were betraying Logan.

"Logan has no idea how lucky he was." Rat licked his lips and leaned closer.

Jacyn started to pull back, then the memory of Logan walking away came back. What the hell did Jacyn have to lose? Maybe if he found comfort in someone else, he would be able to finally get Logan out of his heart. He closed his eyes and waited.

Rat's lips pressed softly against his mouth. His touch was warm, tender and carried the slightest scent of patchouli.

Jacyn parted his lips in acceptance and Rat slid his tongue inside, stroking and teasing. Jacyn thrust his tongue forward to meet his and Rat groaned in approval. It was nice, it was tender and it did absolutely nothing for Jacyn. A fact Rat discovered for himself as soon as he leaned in to touch Jacyn's cock and found it soft.

"Fuck," Rat cursed as he pulled back, a deep heat coming to his face.

"I'm sorry, it's nothing you did or didn't do, I promise." Jacyn wanted to kick his own ass or maybe just beat his head against the wall—anything to knock some sense into his thick skull and drive away thoughts of Logan.

"Just tell me it's him and not because of what I am," Rat begged in a broken voice.

"It's him, I swear it." Jacyn closed his eyes and let out a curse of his own. "How lame does that make me? Here I can't get past Logan and he could care less about me."

"I wouldn't be so sure of that." Rat gave a weak smile. "I've seen the way he looks at you."

"I don't buy it." Jacyn shook his head. "If he felt anything for me, he would have stayed and fought for us. Instead, he hopped the first plane out of here so he could get as far away from me as possible."

Rat gazed longingly at Jacyn. "Logan was a fool. If I were so fortunate to get you, nothing short of death would make me let go."

## Chapter Fourteen

Logan knew that he should leave. He was tired, hungry and craving a hot shower. Yet once the meeting was over, he found his feet beating a path to the medical wing instead. Even though he knew he would be in for a world of kickass if Mitchell found out, he just had to see Jacyn.

Just what are you going to do when you find him? His inner doubt chided. *Admit that you were a big coward for bailing on him? Do you honestly think he will give a damn and forgive you? You heard Rat, Jacyn could have anyone he wants so why would he pick a loser like you?*

He put a clamp on that nasty voice in his head and continued to make his way to the infirmary. When he got there, he was relieved to find all the beds tightly made up and empty. There wasn't even any staff there with the exception of Jacyn.

He was sitting behind a desk, hunched over some paperwork, completely oblivious to his surroundings. Logan smiled when he noticed that Jacyn was nibbling on his bottom lip. Some habits never died. Taking a deep breath to bolster his courage, Logan approached the desk. "I see you got a job," he called loudly to get his attention. Jacyn didn't even look up in surprise, showing that he knew he had company and maybe he wasn't as oblivious as Logan had thought.

"Hey, Logan. Yeah, I work part-time here and the rest of the time with the teams," he replied in a bored voice as he continued to write notes in the files.

Logan tried not to let Jacyn's blasé attitude hurt him. After all, it was the least he deserved. "You go out on missions now?" A rush of protective worry hit Logan and he fought it, knowing he had no right to feel that way.

"Yeah, when I heard that Mitchell likes to have at least two battle-trained medics on each mission, I couldn't wait to sign up." Jacyn still hadn't looked up and it was beginning to piss Logan off.

"You shouldn't be out in the field. You don't have the skills," Logan growled, anger making him sound harsher than he wanted.

"I didn't," Jacyn replied in clipped tones. "But while you were off doing your thing, I was working my ass off to learn how to survive. Cassie and Brent are great teachers."

"*Off doing my thing?*" Logan took a few steps forward so he could plant the palms of his hands on the desk. "I'll have you know I was on a mission."

"Yeah, one that you specifically asked Mitchell to send you on." Jacyn finally looked up.

The raw hurt in his eyes hit Logan like a punch in the chest. "He told you about that?" Of course Mitchell did, what better way to drive a wedge between them. The leader had made it more than clear he didn't want Logan to be with Jacyn.

"Yeah, he did." Jacyn stood and slammed a file on the desk. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have some work to do." Jacyn stormed away to a supply room, but not before he tossed Logan one more angry glare.

After looking around one last time to make sure nobody else was around, Logan followed him. It was a drug room, tall cabinets lining three of the walls, the fourth held the door, which Logan shut and locked. Jacyn's back had been to him, but as soon as he heard the lock click, he turned around. His cheeks were flushed with outrage and full lips parted in shock.

"What in the hell do you think you're doing?" he demanded.

"We need to talk and this seems to be the only way to get you to listen." Logan moved forward, stalking Jacyn like a predator would its prey. A thrill of pride and excitement went through him when the man didn't take a step back. No, instead, his once timid jaguar actually lifted the corner of his top lip in a warning snarl.

"You're not allowed in here. Employees only, or didn't you read the note on the door?" Jacyn gave a snide smile.

"You've become a regular smartass. It must be from hanging out with Rat too much," Logan replied as he took another couple steps forward. The room was so small it was almost a closet so now he was standing just inches from Jacyn. Leaning forward, he inhaled deep, needing to smell the familiar and sensual scent that was his guy. Instead, what he got was the faint, yet unmistakable smell of someone else. Bending down so his lips were just inches from Jacyn's ear, Logan asked, "Just how close have you and the cheetah been getting?"

"What business is it of yours?" Jacyn challenged. His body posture was stiff and unyielding, but he didn't push Logan away either.

"I could kill him for touching you." He turned his face slightly so his breath brushed against Jacyn's cheek. Logan had to bite back a smile when he saw Jacyn shiver in response.

"Leave him alone. He's just a friend, nothing more." Jacyn closed his eyes and took in a ragged breath.

Despite the anger churning in his gut over Rat, Logan still wanted to do a happy dance. Jacyn may be denying that he still had feelings for him, but his body was saying a whole different story. Logan buried his nose in the crook of Jacyn's neck and breathed in deep. "If you're just friends, then how come I can smell his scent all over you?"

"Because we were in the same car together," Jacyn quipped, throwing Logan's own lame excuse back in his face.

Logan laughed. God, how he had missed Jacyn's quick wit. Hell, he'd missed everything about the guy. "I never meant to hurt you," he confessed raggedly as he nuzzled the side of Jacyn's face. Now when a male shifter came near him, they would smell him and not Rat.

"Bullshit," Jacyn replied, savagely, but still didn't pull back. "If you didn't want to hurt me, you would have never just dumped here and taken off."

"It was a mistake for me to do that and I knew that the first two days into that damn mission, but by then I was stuck and couldn't get back. I couldn't even call you and beg for forgiveness because they wouldn't let us." Logan rubbed his face against the warm flesh of Jacyn's jaw, wanting to make sure his scent was completely covering Rat's.

"I trusted you and you just threw that away," Jacyn said as he tilted his head to the side so Logan could

have better access.

Unable to resist the flesh that the jaguar was offering, Logan darted his tongue out for a taste. "I'm so sorry," Logan whispered before he placed the softest of kisses on his lover's cheek.

"Fuck, I can't think straight when you're doing that," Jacyn moaned.

"Then don't think." Logan reached down and cupped the man's cock through the thin material of his scrubs. "Just feel." This time Jacyn let Logan pin him up against one of the cabinets. Growling in pleasure, he pressed as much of his body as possible against the jaguar. Swooping down, he caught those sweet lips in a passionate kiss, all the while rubbing against Jacyn's tight body. There was no way Mitchell wasn't going to know what they had been up to as soon as he got within ten feet of his brother, but Logan didn't give a damn. Those three months of loneliness had taught him a hard lesson. Nothing, nobody was ever going to stand between him and his lover again.

Jacyn kissed him back with the same fervor Logan was feeling. Tongues collided as hands roamed. Despite the locked door, anyone could catch them at any time, but Logan didn't give a damn. All that mattered right now, was Jacyn. Never taking his mouth away, Logan let his hand drift up to the drawstring at the waist of Jacyn's pants. It took some fumbling, but he somehow managed to get the ties open so he could reach in and wrap his fingers around the man's thick cock. "If you only knew how many nights I dreamed of this—of you," Logan moaned as he stroked the head of the jaguar's erection.

"I was never with anyone else," Jacyn swore as he thrust his hips forward. "I couldn't stand the thought of being with anyone but you."

Purring in satisfaction, Logan pressed one last kiss to his lips before he dropped to his knees. "I've wanted to taste you for so long," he declared before he pulled the scrubs down further so he could free Jacyn's cock all the way. Flicking his tongue out to lick the head, Logan closed his eyes in pleasure. "So good, just like I thought it would be."

"Damn it. Please," Jacyn groaned as he threw his head back so hard against the cabinet that he probably cracked the plastic.

"Please what?" Logan prodded as he made another lazy pass with his tongue. He savored the salty taste, his mouth watering for more.

"You would have to make me beg, wouldn't you?" A soft grin spread out over his kiss-swollen lips as Jacyn rolled his hips forward.

"Yes, I want to hear you ask for it."

Jacyn looked down at him with desire-infused eyes, his teeth were clenched together like he was holding back his inner predator and his chest heaved as he sucked in deep breaths. Never had he looked so dangerous or sexy and it made Logan almost come right then and there, before the action had really started.

"Suck me, Logan," Jacyn snarled in a guttural voice. "Do it so hard that I can't even remember my name."

Technically, he was ordering, not begging, but Logan wasn't going to quibble at this point. Not when he was finally going to get a taste of that cock. Grabbing Jacyn by the hips, Logan wrapped his lips around

his lover's erection.

Logan usually enjoyed getting blowjobs more than giving them, but with Jacyn, it was different. Each gasp, moan or groan he elicited from the jaguar ratcheted up his own passion. His own cock pressed so hard against the fly of his jeans, it was probably leaving a mark, but he didn't care. All he cared about was Jacyn and his pleasure.

Jacyn threaded his fingers through Logan's hair, his touch so gentle and caring it almost brought him to tears. Wouldn't that be something? The big, badass black jaguar reduced to tears, just because of a simple caress. Instead, Logan sucked in so hard, that Jacyn's cock jerked in response.

"Oh, God that's so good. I'm not going to last long, babe," Jacyn panted.

If Logan could have, he would have smiled over the man's endearment. Still working his cock, Logan reached down and squeezed Jacyn's balls. The jaguar let out a yelp of pleasure as he banged his head against the cabinet again. Yup, there was definitely going to be a crack in the thing.

Jacyn let out one last moan before his body grew tight.

Logan loosened his throat just as his guy came. Hot jets of semen shot into Logan's mouth and he savored every drop. Giving him one last lingering pass of his tongue, he stood up and tried to kiss Jacyn.

"Ah, not happening," Jacyn, declared, stiff-arming him.

Slack jawed, Logan couldn't hide his surprise. "What do you mean?"

"It means we're done here." Jacyn pulled his pants back up and tied the drawstring back together.

"Are you playing some kind of sick game?" He gave a slight shake of his head. All of a sudden he felt like he was in some weird dream where he was two steps behind all the events.

"No, this is me showing you how it feels to have someone use you for a good fuck and then walk out and leave you hanging," Jacyn replied, his voice dripping with bitterness.

His once warm, caring eyes, were now dull and flat. It was as if he was old beyond his years, the exuberant, innocence Logan had grown to love, destroyed. "I apologized for that."

"Yeah, well sorry just doesn't cut it. Not when you just rip someone's trust like that. All my life people abandoned me, starting when I was a kid. You bitch and moan about your parents, but at least you had them. I had to learn to live with nobody caring for me. Then I finally thought that I had found someone who gave a damn and you just had to prove me wrong."

The anger, betrayal and despair rolling off Jacyn was so strong that Logan actually took a step back. Jacyn was so bitter and jaded now. He had been pushed passed his breaking point and Logan hated himself for delivering the final blow that had done that. "Don't do this," he begged even though he knew it was useless. In desperation, Logan uttered the words he'd never said to anyone, "I love you."

Jacyn stopped dead in his tracks. Shaking his head, he let out a humorless chuckle as he ran his tongue over his teeth. "Don't try to feed me any more lies. If you loved me, then you would have stayed and fought for me. Instead, you ran away."

“Please—” Logan started.

Jacyn cut him off. “There’s nothing more to talk about,” he said, his tone as cold as his eyes. “We’re done, finished, over. I never want to speak to you again.” Jacyn let out a bitter laugh as he shook his head. “Who am I kidding? We never had anything to begin with. I was just some plaything for you to pass the time with. Well you can go find someone else to fill that role. I’m done being everyone’s bitch.”

Before Logan could argue his point, Jacyn opened the door and left. The silence that followed was ominous as he realized that was how his life was going to be without Jacyn—a vast space of emptiness.

Numb, Logan finally managed to make his feet work. When he went back out to the infirmary, Jacyn was nowhere in sight and Logan knew that even if he could find the jaguar, there would be no changing his mind.

Instead, he found the nearest exit door and took refuge in the cool, dark night. Taking several deep gulps of the not so clean Flint air, he lifted his head to the sky and yelled, “Fuck!”

“Interesting vocab you have there,” Cassie remarked as she pushed open the door and joined him.

They were on a loading dock ramp and she leaned against the railing, her gaze directed on the traffic rushing past on the nearby I-75 freeway. Logan tensed, waiting for her to start laying into him, but she remained silent. “Did you come out here to kick my ass?” he asked. Of all the female shifters, she would be the one most likely to succeed in that area. Not only was she a dirty fighter, but she was damn scrappy.

“No.” She shook her head and finally turned to look at him.

He tried to read her expression, but she was a blank slate. “So why are you here?” Logan remained wary. “I caught the looks you were giving me earlier and they weren’t exactly friendly.”

“You hurt him, bad,” she replied tightly.

“I know I did and I would give anything to take it back. I fucked up big time.” Logan grabbed onto the railing so tight, his knuckles popped.

“Do you care for him?”

“More than that. I love him,” Logan confessed. Might as well lay it all out in the open. What did he have left to lose?

“I thought so.” Cassie gave a wistful smile. “I could tell the minute I saw the way you looked at him today.”

“Does that upset you?” Even though Cassie had never made an issue out of who his parents were, Logan still half-expected her to throw that in his face. It had happened so many times in his past.

“It does upset me, but not for the reasons you think.” She wrapped her arms around her stomach. “I’m just so afraid of losing him again. I just got him back.”

“Mitchell said the same thing,” Logan confided. “That’s why I left. I thought it would make it easier on you guys.”

“I thought as much, which is why I’m going to help you now, despite my fears.”

“Help me how?” Logan asked as a slight glimmer of hope rose in his chest.

“I’m going to get you and Jacyn together once and for all. I can see now that you two were made for each other and it’s about damn time you both got the happiness you deserve.”

## Chapter Fifteen

Even after all these years, Mitchell still didn’t feel comfortable sitting at the head of the family dinner table. Nevertheless, he did it because ever since their parents had been slaughtered, it was his duty to watch over and protect his siblings. He’d done a piss poor job of it in his opinion.

Still keeping his head down on the pretext of eating, he raised his eyes just enough to take a peek at the others. Jacyn was morose, not talking, as he toyed with his spaghetti. Mitchell didn’t have to guess what was bothering him. Ever since Logan had left, his brother had sunk into a deep depression. It got so bad that Mitchell had almost caved on several occasions and called Logan to beg him to come back.

Cassie was staring at Jacyn, too, but she had a mischievous, almost smug expression on her face. Mitchell knew that look well. The little brat was up to something and that something involved her littermate.

A glance over at Brent confirmed Mitchell’s suspicions. He had a harried, worried face on. The one he always wore when he’d let Cassie talk him into participating in one of her schemes.

Mitchell was concerned, too, but it had a lot more to do than wondering what Cassie was up to. It was all about Jacyn. For weeks now, he had been becoming more and more withdrawn. While they had all been excited about him coming home, all they got was an empty shell of a guy who wandered around in a sullen silence. The only time he came to life was when he was training with Cassie or Brent and then Jacyn pushed himself so hard it was a wonder he didn’t break.

Despite the confrontation he’d had with Logan before he left, Mitchell had found himself hoping that

once he got home, Jacyn would snap out of it. Instead, it had just gotten worse. Which was damn confusing because of the way Jacyn reeked of Logan, it was obvious the two had shared some alone time.

There was also something else he had to bring up with his brother, something he dreaded doing, but couldn't be put off any longer. Deciding there was no time like the present, Mitchell nervously cleared his throat and said, "Jacyn, I don't suppose you remember anything about the night Mom and Dad were murdered, do you?"

It was as if Mitchell dropped a bomb in the middle of the table. Cassie gasped as her fork dropped to her plate, the sound of silver hitting china loud. Brent let out a low curse as he rubbed his temples with his fingers. Jacyn was the only one not affected. He barely glanced up as he gave a shrug.

"I don't remember much at all about my childhood, let alone what happened to me when I was three."

"Are you sure? Nothing at all?" Mitchell prompted. "Not even some vague recollections?"

"No. I've tried and all I ever got is a blank wall." He shoved his full plate away.

"I need you to try again. This is real important."

"What's the big deal?" Cassie demanded hotly.

"Because if Jacyn can tell us how he managed to escape and ended up living with humans, then we may be able to figure out where the other missing shifters are," Brent supplied as he shot an apologetic look at Jacyn.

"Right now we're just spinning our wheels. Rat is good at what he does, but we're just finding a small fraction of the lost felines," Mitchell added.

As one, they all glanced at the three empty chairs at the table. One for each of the still missing brothers. No matter where they lived, Mitchell always made sure he had a spot for all of his family. He wouldn't rest either, until that table was full as it should be.

"Maybe I can't remember anything because I was too young at the time," Jacyn suggested as he continued to stare at the empty seats.

"That's not it." Mitchell shook his head. "Cassie recalls it like it was yesterday."

"He's right," Cassie agreed, a haunted look marring her usual bright features. "I still see it almost every night in my dreams."

"How did you get out?" Jacyn asked as he reached out and grabbed her hand.

Mitchell almost smiled at the protective gesture. Even though they had only been reunited for three months, the bond between Cassie and Jacyn was strong.

"I woke up because Mom was screaming. I was scared, so much so that I just hid under my covers and cried, unable to get up the courage to run. There were yells, gunfire and then I heard a loud explosion. Even though I could smell the house burning, I was still too afraid to move. Then Brent came running in. He kept the blanket over my eyes so I wouldn't see Mom and Dad's bodies as he carried me out of the



house.”

“Where was Mitchell during all this?” Jacyn asked Cassie.

Even though there wasn’t one iota of accusation in his voice, that question hit Mitchell hard. “I got hurt during the ambush,” he admitted, guilt making his stomach burn. “Even though Dad yelled for me to go get you and the triplets out, I thought I could help him fight instead.” Mitchell scrubbed his face with his hands and was shocked to find his cheeks wet with tears. Taking a deep breath, he continued, “I was just a young, inexperienced fool, and I got cut down quickly. Brent tried to go back in after he brought Cassie out, but there was another explosion and then everything was just blown to bits.”

“We thought you guys were incinerated in the blast,” Brent interjected, his eyes watering up, too. “If we had known that you were still alive, nothing would have stopped us from looking for you.”

“How did you figure out that some of us survived?” Jacyn asked.

“Actually it was kind of funny—” Brent started.

Mitchell cut him off, “No it wasn’t. We had a guy turn into a puma in the middle of a college campus. It caused a bit of a scene and was one hell of a mess to explain away.”

“Please,” Brent snorted. “You know my street performance magician act, was a perfect cover.”

Mitchell continued as if he hadn’t heard. “Anyhow, once that happened, we suspected that maybe he wasn’t the only one. So we started digging around.”

“And you discovered me,” Jacyn finished with a sigh.

“Yes, I found you. It may have been over twenty years too late, but I finally brought you home.”

“But if I remembered what happened before the explosion you might be able to bring all of us home,” Jacyn concluded, his gaze going back to the three empty chairs.

“Yes, and I think I may know of a way to help you recall that night. It’s risky though,” Mitchell ventured, even though he wasn’t convinced on the idea himself.

“I’ll do anything, just name it,” Jacyn replied without hesitation.

“Doctor Featherstone has some shaman ceremonies he can perform. You’ll drink some concoction he makes up specifically for our kind and it will make you go into a *dream walk*. ” Mitchell made air quotes with his fingers. “He thinks that will help unlock the memories of what happened to you during and after the attack.”

“No.” Cassie shook her head violently as she clutched Jacyn’s hand tighter. “I’ve heard what that stuff can do. How it can turn the user’s mind into mush. Or how they can’t come back and are caught forever in the hallucinations. We can’t risk that.”

“I don’t see how we have a choice,” Jacyn told her gently. “I would never be able to forgive myself for just sitting back and not helping our brothers.”

“But it won’t be worth it if we lose you in the process,” she protested.

“Hey, now I’m sure Doc Featherstone won’t let that happen. He would be short staffed if I was out of it,” Jacyn teased.

“Don’t even make jokes about something like that,” Cassie snapped as she jerked her hand away.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make light of your feelings.” Jacyn leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. “I’ll tell you what, you can come with me when I do it and if I don’t snap out of it, you can kick me in the ass until I come to.”

“I’ll come, but only so I can watch every step of the process. If I see one thing I don’t like, I’m stopping the whole thing,” Cassie vowed, savagely.

“I’ll be there, too,” Brent added. “I can’t let you guys have all the fun.”

“Thanks, you have no idea how much all your support means to me.” Jacyn smiled, but his eyes remained dead.

Mitchell felt that guilt burning his gut again. His little brother was hurting and he was hugely responsible for that. Steeling himself, he confessed, “It was my fault Logan left.” Once more the table grew quiet as they stared at him in horror.

“I knew it! What did you do?” Cassie narrowed her eyes dangerously.

“I ordered him to stay away from Jacyn.”

“Why?” Jacyn slowly shook his head.

The betrayal in his expression was so raw Mitchell had to look away. “Because I was afraid that if things didn’t work out between you two that you would leave. I was a coward and you paid the price for it.” Mitchell didn’t add how terrified he was right now that he was going to end up losing Jacyn after all. What if his brother could never forgive him?

“So you were the one who sent him on the mission overseas?” Jacyn asked carefully, his tone or expression revealing nothing.

“No, he asked after I told him leave you alone.”

Jacyn frowned. “So it wasn’t your fault then. Logan made the choice to leave. If he gave a damn, then he would have stayed and fought for me.”

“Did you fight for him?” Cassie asked in her typical blunt fashion.

Now she got the look from Jacyn. “I never got a choice in that. Logan took it from me when he left.”

“That’s not true and you know it.” Cassie didn’t yell, but her tone let everyone know she wasn’t going to take any bullshit either. “You could have gone to Mitchell and demanded to get into contact with Logan, or made him take you to there. Instead, you curled up into a little pity ball and gave up.”

“I didn’t give up,” he protested.

“Yes, you did, but it’s not too late,” Cassie said, her expression tender now. “Go to Logan. Let him know how you feel.”

“I don’t know. I said some bad things to him today. I think I hurt him pretty badly.”

“He’ll forgive you for it,” Cassie soothed. “I’m sure of it.”

There was a long pause where Mitchell held his breath, hoping that his brother would make the right decision.

Finally, Jacyn nodded. “Okay, I’ll talk to him.”

“Great!” Cassie sprang to her feet. “Let’s go. I’ll drive you since I know where he lives.”

“What?” Jacyn chuckled. “You mean right now?”

“Yes. I can’t stand seeing you miserable for one second longer.” She grabbed his arm and hauled him to his feet.

Jacyn looked over at Mitchell, clearly looking for permission.

Mitchell was humbled and relieved that there was no anger or resentment in his brother’s gaze. “Go—make things right.”

They started to leave.

Mitchell whistled to get their attention again. “Jacyn, I’m sorry I butted in like that. I tend to be…” he trailed off, looking for the right words.

Unfortunately, Brent was happy to fill in the blank, “Bossy, overbearing, a know-it-all?”

“Yeah, all that,” Mitchell drawled. They all laughed, the tense mood broken.

“Of course, I forgive you.” Jacyn gave a crooked grin. “Isn’t that what family is all about?”

“Tell Logan, I’m sorry, too,” Mitchell said gruffly. God, he was so damn emotional today he may as well give it up and start watching chick flicks while he painted his nails.

“I will. And Mitchell,” Jacyn paused as he took in a deep breath, “thank you for finding me. I’m proud to be your brother.”

Mitchell was saved from having to make some slobbery, emotional response as Cassie and Jacyn left. Once it was just he and Brent again there was a brief silence.

“Oh man!” Brent groused, good-naturedly. “They left before they did the dishes. Now, I’m going to be stuck doing them and I cooked tonight, too.”

\* \* \* \*

“How much longer until we get there?” Jacyn asked as he peered through the windshield. Not that he could see much of anything. It was dark, plus a thunderstorm had rolled in, bringing with it a heavy rain.

“Impatient much?” Cassie laughed as she took a hard right. She drove like she fought, hard and aggressive. Usually Jacyn would have told her to slow down, but tonight, he was thankful for her love of speed. “More like worried. What if he’s pissed at me for what I said to him earlier?”

“Because I care so much, I’m going to have mercy on you and let you in on a little secret.” She smiled, somehow managing to look smug and adorable at the same time. “I talked to Logan after your fight and he is so in love with you he can’t even think straight.” She pulled in front of an apartment complex and pointed to a door. “This it is. Go get him.”

Jacyn paused, the sound of rain smacking the windows the only noise. “Maybe you should wait here for a second? You know, to make sure he doesn’t slam the door in my face or something?”

“Fine.” She sighed before rolling her eyes. “I’ll wait, even though I know he’s going to let you in.”

“Thanks, sis.” Jacyn, hesitated, his fingers wrapped around the latch to the car door. “You know I love you, right?”

“Of course I do.” She beamed. “But I still like hearing you say it. I love you, too. Oh, and by the way, I got another chair for the table. That way Logan will have a place, too.”

Jacyn kissed her on the cheek before he opened the door and stepped out into the storm. The cold rain pelted him so hard it stung his skin. Even though he ran all the way, he was still soaked by the time he got to the door of the apartment. There was no shelter to duck under so he got even wetter as he knocked.

A light turned on inside and Jacyn’s heart hammered. He could hear the faint shuffling of someone moving inside and his stomach did a nervous flip. The lock clicked as it was undone and his breath caught in his throat.

Finally, the door opened and he found himself looking into Logan’s face. His hair slightly mussed, he was dressed only in a pair of ratty gray sweatpants. Never had Jacyn seen anyone more beautiful.

They just both stood there—Logan wearing a confused, yet hopeful look on his face and Jacyn shivering in the cold rain. A loud boom of thunder snapped Jacyn out of his stupor.

“I love you, too,” Jacyn said, gripping the doorjamb for support. “I’m so sorry, Logan. Mitchell told me why you left and I realized that I should have had more faith in you. I know I don’t deserve it, but can you ever give me another chance?” For a brief horrifying moment, Jacyn thought that Logan was going to turn him away.

Then he smiled, “Of course I forgive you, babe. Now come inside before you freeze to death.”

Before Jacyn could move, Logan reached out and grabbed him by the front of his shirt. Dragging him to his hard chest, Logan captured him in a passionate kiss. Jacyn returned it with an urgency as pure happiness soared through him. He was back where he should be—in Logan’s arms.

Still not believing that this was really happening Jacyn slid his tongue inside the man’s mouth and ran his

shaking hands over the warm body of his lover. Jacyn shivered.

“You’re freezing,” Logan observed with a chuckle.

“Are you offering to warm me up?” Jacyn smiled.

Logan’s response was to reach around him so he could shut the door. Putting his arms around Jacyn, he whispered, “I’ll always be here to warm you up from now on.”

## Chapter Sixteen

Even though Jacyn was sopping wet and cold to the touch, Logan held him tight, savoring the feeling of him. All that mattered was that he was here and he had said he loved him. Logan couldn’t remember a moment where he had felt happier—more complete. “I love you so much, Jacyn,” he declared before he slanted his mouth over his lips and gave him another heated kiss.

“No walking away from each other anymore,” Jacyn vowed.

“Are you kidding? I’m not ever going to leave your side. Now that I have you, I’m not letting go.” He turned off the light, plunging the room into darkness. Due to his feline senses, he could almost see perfectly as he started tugging on Jacyn’s clothes. Since everything was wet, it was hard, but between the two of them, they managed. The storm had picked up even more, lightning illuminating the room for brief moments of time.

Jacyn was nude now, except for his briefs and Logan kissed and caressed every inch of exposed flesh. Sliding his fingers past the elastic waistband of Jacyn’s underwear, he stroked his lover’s hard cock. “Let’s go to bed,” Logan suggested in a husky whisper.

“Okay,” Jacyn moaned as he rubbed the side of his face against Logan’s chest, covering him with his scent. “Mine”

“Yes,” Logan agreed, still caressing the jaguar’s erection. “And you’re mine. I promise I’ll never leave you again.” Logan didn’t have much furniture in his sparse apartment, but thank the gods he did have a

large bed. Leading Jacyn to it, he paused at the foot to give him another passionate kiss. They fell onto the mattress, taking off the remainder of each other's clothing, all the while stroking, licking and nipping at various body parts.

With each passing second, Logan's tenuous grip on his control slipped a bit more. Then Jacyn bit him on the base of his neck. Logan jerked, not out of pain, but out of blind passion. He snapped, the wild need to fully possess his lover—a thing he could no longer deny. "Get up on your knees and grab the headboard," Logan ordered with a feral growl.

Jacyn's eyes flared with need before he scrambled to obey, his long fingers wrapping around the slats of the wooden headboard.

The move put him in the perfect position. Logan got behind him and parted the cheeks of his ass so he could get to the tight opening. Bending down, he rimmed the hole with his tongue repeatedly, getting him primed and ready for taking.

Jacyn hissed with pleasure, his fingers clutching the wood so tight his knuckles turned white.

"After tonight there's going to be no doubt that your mine," he promised, between strokes as he slid a finger inside the man's ass. "Do you want to know why?"

"Why?" Jacyn moaned as he thrust his hips back.

Logan took the hint and slid another finger in, slowly pumping them in and out. "Because I'm going to do more than just fuck you. I'm going to conquer you."

"Oh, God," Jacyn panted.

A flash of lighting lit up the room, showing Logan a glimpse of his lover's passion-infused face. His cheeks were pink, his lips plump and a fine sheen of sweat dotted his brow. Logan growled in pleasure as he moved his fingers from Jacyn, replacing them with the tip of his cock. Unlike last time where he took things slow and gentle, this time it was all about possession and his animal side was ruling. Letting out a snarl, Logan pushed inside Jacyn in one hard thrust.

"Yes," the jaguar cried, as he let out a snarl that was more animal than man. "More, I need all of it."

Knowing that Jacyn given into his wild side, too, Logan felt no guilt when he started to slam into the man hard and fast. Reaching around, he grabbed Jacyn's cock and stroked him in time with the thrusts. All the while, Logan delighted in the sight of his own erection sliding in and out of the tight, rosy opening of his lover's ass. "Who do you belong to?" he demanded.

"You. I'm Logan's," Jacyn chanted as he thrust his hips back so Logan could go even deeper inside him.

"And I belong to you," he vowed back as an orgasm hit him so hard he felt it in every inch of his body. As he shot off inside the man's ass, Logan could feel hot jets of semen pumping into his hand as Jacyn came, too.

After they had both caught their breath, Logan slid out of Jacyn and sat back on his heels. Bringing his wet fingers to his mouth, he licked them clean. "You taste so damn good," he observed in a husky voice. Jacyn twisted around, his eyes flashing with passion. Licking his lips, he pounced on Logan's chest,

pinning him to the bed.

“You’re pretty tasty yourself,” Jacyn crooned as he lowered his head.

\* \* \* \*

The next day as Jacyn was in his bedroom, putting on his Kevlar vest and suiting up for the mission, he still couldn’t stop smiling. He was sore all over from last night, but it was a pleasant sort of pain. Even though he should be tired since he’d stayed up all night playing, he had never felt more alive and awake.

“You look like the cat that ate the canary,” Logan teased as he came in.

“More like the cream,” Jacyn returned with a wicked grin.

“Ouch,” Logan laughed. “That pun was so bad it hurt.”

“Sorry. You have Brent to blame for that. He’s the king of bad jokes.” Jacyn pulled out his twin set of short swords and put them in the scabbards strapped to his back. They formed an X on his back, the hilts pointing out at his shoulders so he could grab them easily. The rest of his clothes were all black, from the fatigue pants to the short-sleeved t-shirt.

Logan was dressed the same way except on his back he had his long sword. They both had various other weapons strapped to their bodies. In addition, Jacyn had few emergency medical supplies. The bulk of his first aid supplies were in a bag that he would leave in the van.

“Are you sure you’re ready to go out on a mission?” Logan asked.

Jacyn didn’t take offense to the question, knowing he only asked it because he was concerned. Logan was in no way doubting his skill. “This isn’t my first one,” Jacyn reminded him. “Plus, Mitchell cleared me and thought I was more than prepared to play with the big boys. I wouldn’t worry. With Cassie training me, I could take on a whole slew of Ravens.” He grimaced as he recalled the brutal practice sessions that his sister had put him through. There were times when she had left him so bruised and banged up, he had been forced to shift so he could heal enough just to walk.

“Just promise you’ll stick close to me,” Logan pleaded as he fussed over the straps on Jacyn’s Kevlar vest. “I couldn’t stand for anything to happen to you.”

“The feeling is mutual so you be careful, too.

“You guys ready?” Brent asked from the doorway. “I want to get this done and over with. Project Runway is on tonight.”

“Please tell me you’re kidding and you really don’t watch that,” Logan drawled.

“I can’t help it, I love that show and now that you live here, you’re going to have to learn to appreciate it,” Brent said with a wicked grin.

“I’m living here?” Logan looked at Jacyn questioningly.

Jacyn just gave him a sheepish shrug. It’s what he really wanted, since he could still be with Logan and get close to his family at the same time, but he hadn’t wanted to push things too hard.

“Of course he’s living here,” Cassie yelled from the hallway. “I already have a chair for him at the table.”

Jacyn cringed, wondering if having a family was a good thing after all.

“Ah, I see,” Brent said slowly as he nodded. “That settles it then. Once you have a chair, there’s no getting out.”

“How do you know Mitchell would even let me stay?” Logan smiled.

Jacyn breathed a sigh of relief, knowing they weren’t upsetting him.

“Who do you think bought the chair?” Cassie asked in a *duh* voice.

“I guess I don’t have a choice then. It would be a crime to go against the *chair rule*. ” Logan gazed down at Jacyn, with utmost tender of expressions.

“Ah, man if you two keep making those goofy faces at each other, *I’m* going to request a mission to the Middle East,” Brent grouched, but the grin on his face showed he was kidding.

“Don’t tempt me,” Mitchell said as he joined the ever-growing crowd in the hall. “It’s time, so I hope you’re all ready.”

“Sure, Logan was just helping Jacyn put his vest on,” Brent chimed in a sarcastic tone. It earned him a slap on the back of the head via Mitchell’s hand. Brent scowled as he rubbed it.

“Be quiet before I mount you on a stake, put you in the middle of a field and use you as bait to draw in the Ravens,” Mitchell drawled.

“I thought that sort of thing scared them away.” Brent scratched his head.

“That’s crows, you idiot,” Logan said.

That piqued Jacyn’s curiosity. “Are there such a thing as crow shifters?”

“Yes, but if we run into any of them, we just throw some ears of corn at them. It makes them lose focus and they forget to fight,” Brent informed with that smartass grin of his.

Jacyn flipped him off and added a few more rude hand gestures he learned as a kid growing up in the foster care system. “Don’t send him to the Middle East, pick somewhere much worse, like Siberia or the North Pole,” Jacyn begged Mitchell. He was just teasing though. While they may ride him and sometimes drive him crazy, he wouldn’t trade them away for anything.

Laughing, Jacyn followed Mitchell and Brent out of their living quarters and to the war room. Logan was by his side, Cassie on the other. Never had Jacyn felt more complete. Yet, on the way out, he couldn’t help but look at those three empty spots at the table. Cassie caught him and she gave a slight shake of her head.



“You still can’t be thinking about going through with that plan Doc Featherstone and Mitchell cooked up are you?” she demanded, her eyes flashing with worry and anger.

“I have to, Cassie,” Jacyn replied, once more looking at the table. The empty spaces nagging him.

“Do what?” Logan asked, his eyes narrowing with suspicion.

Since Jacyn didn’t respond, Cassie was very happy to fill Logan in on all the details. She was just wrapping it up as they got to the war room. Logan pressed his lips together in a tight line, a tick working his jaw. If Jacyn were a betting man, he’d place odds on his lover not being on board for the plan.

“I don’t suppose there is any way I can talk you out of this?” Logan’s voice sounded as tight as a bow string.

“No. If I didn’t do all I can to help out all those lost shifters, I’d never forgive myself,” Jacyn replied with firm conviction. “It’s just not our family who’s suffering. There are dozens of others. I’m the first real firm lead Mitchell’s had in a while.” Jacyn steeled himself, waiting for Logan to protest. He was going to stand his ground no matter what. The days of him being the weak link that hid out in the car were over so he was shocked to the toes of his combat boots when Logan nodded.

“Will you at least let me be there with you when you do it?” Logan requested in a not-too-happy voice.

“Of course, but it’s going to be crowded in there. Cassie, Brent and Mitchell all demanded the same thing,” Jacyn chuckled.

“I just hope the risk is worth it,” Logan replied as he exchanged anxious glances with Cassie.

## Chapter Seventeen

Two days later, Jacyn found himself sitting on his bed, surrounded by his family, Logan and Doc Featherstone. The room was dim, a CD of light rhythmic drums was playing and the air was rich with the scent of burnt sage. While it should have been relaxing, he was more jacked up than ever before.

It didn’t help that the mood had been tense before they had even started. For the past couple of days,

everyone had been in a mood because of how their last mission had turned out.

What was supposed to have been a raid on a warehouse full of weapons had been a massive failure. When the felines arrived there, all they had found was an empty building. There was nothing, not even a shred of paper to indicate that the terrorists or the Ravens had been there.

Mitchell suspected someone from the human government had tipped them off and Jacyn was inclined to agree with him. The question was who was selling out not only the shifters, but their own nation? First the mystery about the lost shifters and now this. More questions. More dead-ends when it came to answers. Jacyn could see the strain of all this weighing heavily on Mitchell. This was why it was so important for Jacyn to go through with this.

“You need to relax or this may never work,” the doctor admonished as he knelt by the bed.

“I am,” Jacyn argued even though he had his hands clutched into tight fists.

“Are you afraid of remembering?” the doctor asked, his gaze searching Jacyn’s face.

“He saw his parents murdered,” Logan snapped. “Call me crazy, but I don’t think anyone would want to relive that.”

“It’s okay, I can do this,” Jacyn said, although he wasn’t certain if he was giving the pep talk to himself or Logan.

“Of course you can,” Logan soothed, all his anger gone. He got into the bed, too, positioning them until Jacyn’s back was to his chest. “Here, lie back against me and I’ll hold you through the entire thing. That way you won’t feel like you’re in there alone.”

“Thanks.” Jacyn felt some of the tension leave as Logan’s strong arms wrapped around him.

The doctor held a large coffee cup under Jacyn’s nose and ordered, “Drink!”

Jacyn inhaled the content’s scent and nearly gagged at the rancid smell. “Jesus!”

“No...Featherstone.” The doctor didn’t even crack a smile as he pointed to his name badge.

Jacyn started to explain, but decided it wasn’t worth the breath. Instead, he took the mug and brought it to his lips. Sipping it, he gagged at the taste. He brought the cup back down, but the doctor grabbed his wrist and made him bring it back up. Forcing the mug to his lips, Featherstone tilted it so Jacyn had no choice but to drink or he would have choked.

It was so foul tasting, like a mixture of fermented mushrooms, tree bark and rotten cheese. Jacyn bucked as his stomach heaved, but the bastard who dared to call himself a caring physician still kept tilting that damn cup. It wasn’t until every drop was gone that he took it away.

“Bastard,” Jacyn gasped out as he gagged. His stomach turned and twisted, demanding he throw up, but he gritted his teeth together and refused. He had no doubt that if he upchucked the concoction, Doc would just make him drink another one.

“Does it really taste that bad?” Brent asked, eyeing up the empty mug as if it was a snake.

“Tastes like—” Jacyn gagged again. “Like shit.”

“No, it’s a mixture of herbs, mushrooms and some other stuff. There’s no excrement in it.” Doc set down the mug and studied Jacyn.

“How long before we know if it worked or not?” Mitchell asked. His voice was slow and blurry sounding.

“It already is,” Doc responded, sounding like he was in a long tunnel

“Nonsense!” Jacyn slurred that word and, for some insane reason, it made him giggle. “I shouldn’t feel anything yet. It’s too soon.”

The room started to do slow rotations and the music became louder, the drums lulling him into a daze. A slow tingle spread out to every inch of his body and he felt himself relax as he just gave into it. He felt as if he was on the ledge of a cliff and his foot was on the edge. The urge to step off was so strong. In the distance, he could hear voices calling to him—that of his mother and father. Somehow he knew if he took that step, he would be able to get closer to them. Did he dare? He hesitated, just for one second before he moved forward and let himself fall into the abyss.

\* \* \* \*

Logan knew the instant Jacyn had gone into the trance. The man sucked in a deep breath and then his body went limp. Logan put a hand on his chest, alarmed to find his heart had slowed to a near stop and his respirations were shallow and far apart. “What’s going on with him?” he nearly yelled at Doc.

“It’s okay.” Featherstone didn’t appear concerned at all. “He’s just entering the dream walk.”

“Are you sure?” Mitchell stepped closer, his face lined with worry. “He doesn’t look so good.”

“He better be sure,” Logan growled as he held Jacyn tighter. Fear slammed into him when he felt how cold and clammy the man’s skin was.

Jacyn let out a heaving breath and his lids fluttered open. His eyes rolled back, showing only the whites.

Cassie let out a sob as she put her hand to her mouth.

“Jacyn, I need you to think about that night,” Doc ordered in a slow, hypnotic voice. “Go back there and tell me what you see.”

For a while, Logan didn’t think Jacyn had heard the question. Then the jaguar let out a low moan and whispered, “Already there.”

“What’s happening?”

“I’m in Mom’s bedroom.” He smiled faintly. “I had a nightmare and she let me come in with her and Dad.”

“Where’s your father?”

Jacyn’s brow crinkled at that question and Logan could feel his heart thump harder.

“He’s out in the living room with Mitchell. But they should be running because they’re coming.” Jacyn hitched in another breath.

“Who’s coming?” Doc relented.

“The black birds. It’s too late, they’re already there and they’ve attacked Dad. I can hear him yelling for us to run.”

“Where did you run to?”

“I didn’t. I was too scared. I just wanted to be with Mom,” Jacyn sobbed.

Logan hugged him harder and placed a kiss on his sweaty temple.

“But you weren’t safe there, were you?”

“No.” Jacyn violently shook his head. “They came in...oh God, they had swords that were covered with blood. Mitchell and Dad’s blood. I could hear Cassie and the others screaming. Mom tried to fight them off, but there were so many. They...they...killed her.”

“But you got out. How?”

“There were other birds there, different ones. They were supposed to kill me, but instead they took me away.” Jacyn’s entire body jerked as his head snapped to the side.

“What type of birds?” Doc’s face grew concerned as he grabbed Jacyn’s wrist to check his pulse.

“Don’t know.” Jacyn jerked again. “Big. Pretty.”

His body arched up as a guttural yell burst from his lips. Taking in one last deep breath, he uttered, “Hawks.” Then he went still. Logan cried out in alarm as he felt Jacyn’s heart flutter, then stop all together.

“What’s happening?” Cassie screamed.

“He’s being sucked into the spirit realm,” the doctor said as he sprang to his feet and started to slap Jacyn on the cheeks. “Come on. Don’t do this.”

“Do something,” Mitchell yelled as he stepped forward.

Even though he directed the order at Doc, Logan decided to spring into action. Kissing Jacyn’s temple again, he cooed in his ear, “Come back to me, babe. You know how much I need you. Don’t leave me alone.”

Jacyn remained limp and unresponsive—Cassie’s sobs the only sound in the room. Not ready to give up yet, Logan tried again. “Wake up for me. Let me see those beautiful eyes of yours.” When Jacyn still

didn't move, Logan felt a rage of despair come over him. Instead of the soft voice, he yelled, "Damn it! We promised that we wouldn't leave each other again! Don't let me down!"

Still nothing. Logan lowered his head as a deep sense of hopelessness went through him. Then he felt it. A soft thump in Jacyn's chest that let him know the man's heart was beating again. Then there was a gentle rise of his chest as he started breathing. Logan jerked back up, a thrill of hope making him let out a short bark of laughter. "That's it, babe. Fight your way back to me." Smoothing back Jacyn's sweaty hair, he placed another kiss on his brow. "You're doing great."

Brent, Cassie and Mitchell pressed closer. "Is he going to be okay?" Mitchell asked in a shaky voice.

"Yes," Doc informed with a deep sigh.

Jacyn opened his eyes, his gaze locking on to Logan. "Did I do good?" he whispered.

"You did great." Logan held him tight, relieved so much, tears threatened to spill from his eyes. "Just promise me you'll never do something like that again."

\* \* \* \*

Jacyn woke up to the pleasant sensation of being in Logan's arms. Unfortunately, that was the only pleasant thing. His head felt like it had been used as a punching bag. His stomach was rolling with nausea and there was a god-awful taste in his mouth. He sat up, groaning when his head protested the sudden movement.

Logan came instantly awake. "How are you feeling?" he asked in a sleepy voice.

Since he knew it was useless to try to get away with lying, he said, "I feel like hell."

"Do you think you can walk?" Logan rubbed Jacyn's back.

"If I have to." He closed his eyes, enjoying the impromptu massage.

"I'm afraid you do. Mitchell and Rat have some pictures of known Hawk shifters that they want you to look at."

Jacyn groaned. "Okay, just give me a second to brush my teeth. My mouth tastes like I was gnawing on garbage."

Logan nodded.

Jacyn got up, wobbling because his legs felt like they were made from springs. Walking carefully, he managed to get to the bathroom. Once he was done, he went back out to where Logan was waiting. "Okay, let's get this over with."

Since he was tired and weak, it seemed to him that it took forever to get to the communications room. A couple of times he stumbled, but Logan was there every time to help steady him. By the time they got

there, Jacyn was shaking from fatigue and he just wanted to lie down in bed again.

“It will only take a few moments then you can go back to sleep,” Logan promised, as if he sensed what Jacyn was feeling.

Mitchell came running over and directed Jacyn to a chair. He sat in it, trying hard to ignore the looks of concern Brent, Rat and Cassie were shooting him. Mitchell gave him a squeeze on the shoulder.

“Thanks to you we think we may have our first real solid lead,” the leader said, with more than a hint of pride. Pointing to one of the monitors, he asked, “Does this guy look familiar to you?”

Jacyn glanced over and felt a sharp jolt of recognition. The man’s dark hair was shorter than he remembered, but his black piercing eyes were the same. “That’s the one who took me away from the house.” The words started to tumble from Jacyn’s lips as he began to recall everything perfectly. It was as if someone turned the key to a door and opened the portal to his past. “He had some other hawk shifters with him and they were under orders from the Ravens to kill all the survivors. But the Hawks couldn’t stomach killing kids so they snuck us away and blew up the houses to hide what they did.”

“Do you know where they took all the other children?” Mitchell asked, hopeful.

“No,” Jacyn admitted as he felt defeat. “They separated us right away. I think they were afraid a big group of us clustered together would attract too much attention. I was with a female for a while before she cleaned my memory and put me with humans.”

“What do you mean *cleaned your memory*?” Brent shook his head in confusion. “How did she do that?”

“I’ve heard of shifters being able to do that,” Rat interjected. “I just thought it was a myth though.”

“It makes sense though,” Mitchell mused. “It would explain why some of the older shifters haven’t voluntarily come back to us.”

“So what’s our next move?” Logan asked as he came up behind Jacyn and put his hands on his shoulders.

“We need to find him,” Mitchell pointed to the monitor.

“Good luck,” Rat snorted. “This guy has gone way underground. Nobody has heard from him in years.”

“What’s his name?” Brent queried in a soft voice as he stared at the monitor, intently.

“He was known as Daniel Morris, but who knows what he goes by now,” Rat shrugged.

“I’ll find him,” Brent announced.

“I don’t know,” Mitchell hedged. “Maybe I should go on this one.”

“No,” Brent shook his head, his gaze still locked on the picture. “You have enough to worry about with the human side of this operation leaking like a sieve. Let me worry about tracking down the hawk.”

For a second, it looked like Mitchell was going to keep arguing, but he finally nodded in agreement.

“Just make sure you’re careful. While they did rescue some of our kids, the Hawks have always been on the other side of this war. So he could attack you if he knows you’re on to him.”

“Understood.” Brent stared at the monitor, the funniest look on his face.

Jacyn couldn’t be sure, but he would have almost sworn it was interest and attraction. He leaned back in the chair so he was closer to Logan’s body. Even as he took comfort in his mate’s presence, a small nagging part of him knew that they were in for hard times.

Before the felines won this war, there would be more deaths. Jacyn only hoped it wasn’t those he loved. Closing his eyes, he did something he’d never done before. He prayed.

### About the Author

Stephani Hecht is a happily married mother of two. You can usually find her snuggled up to her laptop, creating her next book.