

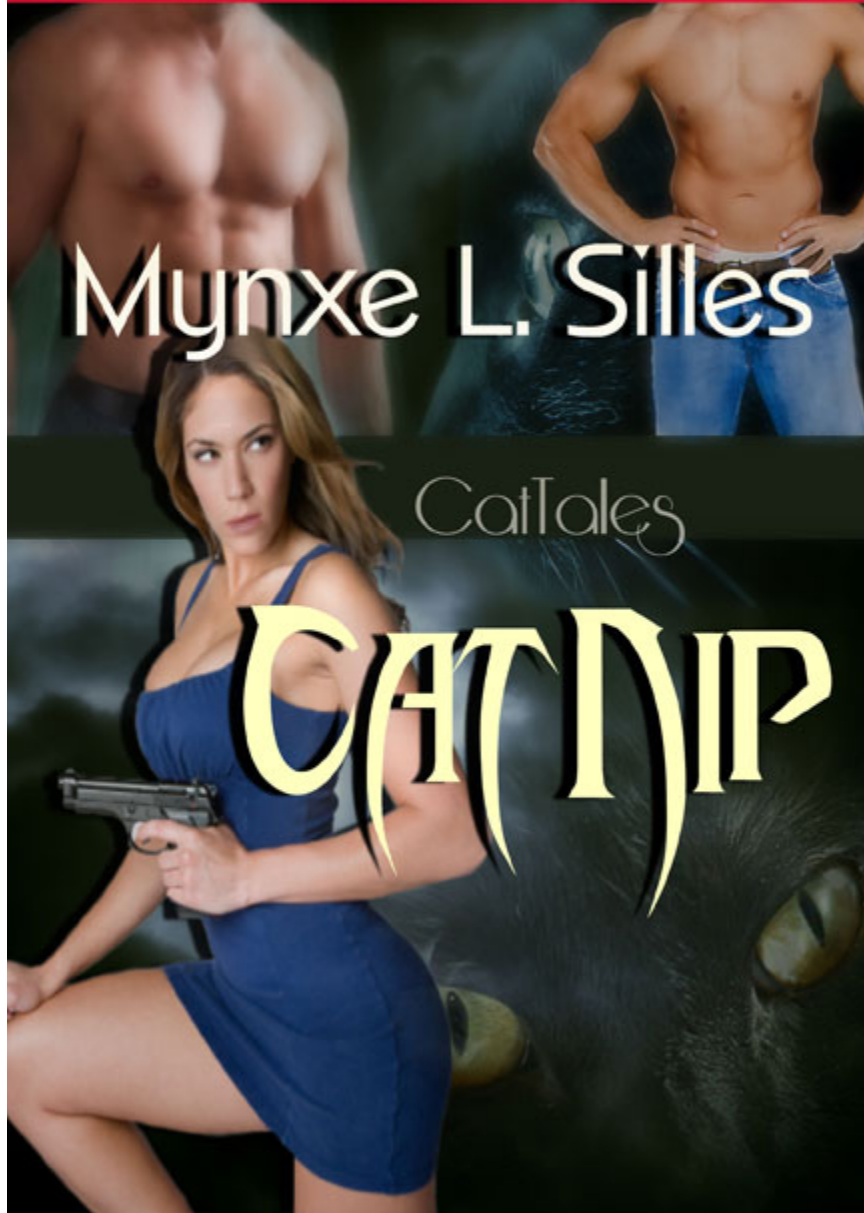
Siren Publishing

Ménage & More

Mynxe L. Silles

CatTales

CATnip



CatTales

CatNip

A dangerous drug dubbed CatNip is about to be released on the market. Adonis Cervantes, a new leader for the ominous drug cartel has risen from the ashes to reclaim a deadly throne. New horrors are about to be unleashed on the Imatu, an already dwindling race of shifters. Courageous action must be taken if these threats are to be neutralized.

Meanwhile, Craig and Lynx, childhood friends and government operatives for COBRA find themselves embroiled in a battle they never saw coming. Their plans will be changed again when the mysterious Leo Lascaux enters the picture. Leo could very well alter everything Lynx and Craig think they know about each other and about themselves.

Will the secret world of shifters survive? Will there be a king of the jungle left when the world stops shifting? Who'll come out on top?

Genre: Menage a Trois/Quatre, Paranormal, Shape-shifter

Length: 93,744 words

CATNIP

CatTales

Mynxe L. Silles

MENAGE AND MORE



Siren Publishing, Inc.
www.SirenPublishing.com

ABOUT THE E-BOOK YOU HAVE PURCHASED:

Your non-refundable purchase of this e-book allows you to only ONE LEGAL copy for your own personal reading on your own personal computer or device. **You do not have resell or distribution rights without the prior written permission of both the publisher and the copyright owner of this book.** This book cannot be copied in any format, sold, or otherwise transferred from your computer to another through upload to a file sharing peer to peer program, for free or for a fee, or as a prize in any contest. Such action is illegal and in violation of the U.S. Copyright Law. Distribution of this e-book, in whole or in part, online, offline, in print or in any way or any other method currently known or yet to be invented, is forbidden. If you do not want this book anymore, you must delete it from your computer.

WARNING: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000."

If you find a Siren-BookStrand e-book being sold or shared illegally, please let us know at **legal@sirenbookstrand.com**

A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

IMPRINT: Ménage and More

CATNIP

Copyright © 2010 by Mynxe L. Silles

E-book ISBN: 1-60601-917-1

First E-book Publication: November 2010

Cover design by Jinger Heaston

All cover art and logo copyright © 2010 by Siren Publishing, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED: This literary work may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, including electronic or photographic reproduction, in whole or in part, without express written permission.

All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is strictly coincidental.

PUBLISHER

Siren Publishing, Inc.

www.SirenPublishing.com

Letter to Readers

Dear Readers,

If you have purchased this copy of *CatNip* by Mynxe L. Silles from BookStrand.com or its official distributors, thank you. Also, thank you for not sharing your copy of this book.

On a personal note from Mynxe:
Cat-burglars will be captured and neutered or spayed.
Don't make me use my claws, hiss! You've been warned.

Regarding E-book Piracy

This book is copyrighted intellectual property. No other individual or group has resale rights, auction rights, membership rights, sharing rights, or any kind of rights to sell or to give away a copy of this book.

The author and the publisher work very hard to bring our paying readers high-quality reading entertainment.

This is Mynxe L. Silles' livelihood. It's fair and simple. Please respect Ms. Silles' right to earn a living from her work.

Amanda Hilton, Publisher
www.SirenPublishing.com
www.BookStrand.com

DEDICATION

I am eternally grateful for my editors: Dina, Devin, and Deanna. Thank you. I'd also like to thank Alison C. and Christina C.

Jinger Heaston, the incredible cover artist for *CatNip*, I bow to your brush, thank you.

A special thanks to everyone at Siren's for helping CatNip shape-shift into a reality. ;)

To my Hubba-Hubba, children, and loving family, thanks for your patience, support, and love. You inspire everything I do.

Moe Allen, closest friend and my favorite author – thank you. Some prayers are answered.

Linda, I love you, lady. Step-Dad, I love you 2.

Larissa, Niki, you both amaze me and are sisters of my heart.

Lisa, I'm very blessed to have you in my life. Do tell Susan and Liz not to read this one - at work. ;) Reuben and Andy - think Austin Powers. Just behave, fellows. ☺

Picard, my poetic friend, here's my Enterprise. Enjoy.

Samson, this book should take your mind off math for a while. ;)

To Mama Shawn and the lovely ladies from Polk Moms, you rock, thanks for sharing your kind hearts. Soon please - LNO!

To all my wonderful friends - thanks!

And I dedicate CatNip to you, dear reader, whoever you are. I hope it brings you the pleasure I had writing it.

Oh, and to Leo, Lynx, and Craig ~ keep 'em coming!

Bisous balise,
Mynxe L. Silles

CATNIP

CatTales

MYNXE L. SILLES

Copyright © 2010

Prologue

“Bite my ass!” Lynx hissed.

“Better watch out, or I just might,” Leo growled.

Her indignant gasp turned to a purr as he made good on his threat.

Chapter 1

Damn! Lynx was going to kill him. Craig smoothly slid his body, rock-hard and ready, closer to the gyrating, unbelievably lithe form in front of him. But Lynx, of the lithe, sinuous body, wasn't having it. She was too hot and slippery. She danced out of his grasp, snaking away to the pulsing beat of Finger Eleven's "Paralyzer."

Sweat beaded his lips. His cock throbbed like it was being squeezed by an adrenaline fist. It pulsed hard and fast. His mind fought for restraint and reason, but desire fevered his blood.

Had he ever been this turned on, this needy, this overcome with lust at the mere sight of anyone? His arousal had spiked through the roof, the roof being his body. His self-control was past being tested at the moment.

Still, Lynx shimmied in front of him like fire itself, hot as flame. One could almost see the ashes and smoke as she incinerated everyone close enough to see her. Dirty dancing didn't come close to what she was doing on that dance floor, with her fuck-me eyes and wickedly wanton body. Her long, golden-brown hair fell in lush waves down her back, and like a living thing, it stroked her as she undulated.

Hell, that silky white halter top she wore barely concealed those hard, little nipples of hers. Craig couldn't help but lick his lips as he visualized covering them with his tongue instead. Not that Lynx's red leather mini-skirt contained her perfect ass either. No, because there was no containing an ass that moved like that. He could only imagine cupping those rounded orbs of flesh in his hands before he sank into the writhing little mynx.

Distracted, Craig's eyes followed Lynx. She swayed to a primal beat. Long, sensual hair bounced above the sweetest rear cheeks he'd ever seen. It was a wild, wild tango. Her sexy legs kept time to the heated rhythm, her head flung back in pure ecstasy as she moved on the hard floor. The other dancers swirled past, behind, as close to her as they dared.

He could come just watching her dance.

A guttural burst of gunfire sure wasn't the climax he dreamed of. The sound ripped through the club. Naturally, panic ensued.

Next thing he knew, visceral screams echoed through the room as dancers and lounging bar-hoppers began a mass exodus. Craig quickly scanned the area for the shooter, but there was no time to spare. Chaos had already erupted.

Moving with unnatural speed, Craig made a grab for Lynx. Hair tangled his grip of Lynx's arm, but he managed to pull her through the smoky club. He adeptly maneuvered them through the panicked throng towards the back exit.

They swung past the emergency exit door and headed for his black Mustang. "Get in!" he said tersely as they reached it.

"Well, then, would you please let go of my arm and hair, Mr. G.I. fucking Tarzan," Lynx said sweetly.

His Lynx, he was discovering, could cuss up a blue-streak that would make a sailor blush. Who knew?

"Sorry," he mumbled. He got in and hurriedly started the car.

Lynx just glared at him as she hopped in and slammed the door. Craig winced.

"What did you do that for you, you Neanderthal? What? Are you a fucking caveman? That was my hair you grabbed!" Lynx's eyes could've spit fire. They looked about as big as hazel saucers, and they blazed with green and gold highlights. He wanted to stare into them and...

Okay, so, he forgot the question.

Why bother to answer? “My, my, that’s some temper you’ve got, little minx.” He never could resist teasing her. “Now buckle up, it’s the law,” he ordered as he gunned the engine. Lynx muttered something that sounded suspiciously like more expletives under her breath. Craig ignored it.

Rubber burned as he spun out of the parking lot. All Craig’s systems were still on red-alert. He wasn’t wasting the time to explain anything to Lynx until she was well out of harm’s way. Luckily, the club was close to the highway.

What had Captain Slater been thinking? he wondered.

Why would the Captain allow Lynx to go there to cut her teeth on this job? Craig knew Lynx wasn’t necessarily untrained, but truly experienced she wasn’t, either. And he’d be damned if he would watch her die in front of him.

“Some bastard shooting things up and ruining my fun,” Lynx spat out as she seethed in the seat beside him. At least she couldn’t very well hop out of the car at the speed he was going. “I could’ve had him.” The look she sent him smoldered with defiance.

“Just a few more minutes and Crawley would’ve been putty in my hands.”

Her statement set off a trigger of lust and jealousy. It twisted through him like a vise of raw fury. Craig growled. It came from deep in his throat.

“Would he now?” he asked softly. “Or maybe you were just the next course on the slime ball’s buffet. Foolish and beautiful women mysteriously disappear around slime like him every day.”

The look Lynx shot him when she answered nearly had his cock exploding in the tight confines of his Levi’s.

“Oh, so I’m foolish and beautiful? You’re just a cocky, over-protective, brainless fool, Craig Marozi!” Lynx fumed and rolled her expressive, slanted cat-eyes at him. “So that’s why you couldn’t keep your eyes in your head or off my ass to save your fool life. Right?” Lynx turned her face away. Now, she was ignoring him.

Craig grinned. Lynx might not be Irish like her adoptive parents had been, but she could sure get pissed off quickly. Her temper was still Irish. Still, the thought of Lynx's beloved but deceased parents sobered him. He shook his head and concentrated on driving. It was far better to think about getting back to base safely.

About twenty miles down the road, relieved they weren't being followed, Craig turned into the next 7-Eleven. He was low on gas. He needed to get back to base. It was where they'd wait for word of what they needed to do next, since the bar set-up had been shot all to hell. Craig rubbed a hand through his hair, frustration knifing through his mid-section like a dull blade as he pumped. Back on the road again, his thoughts turned to the fuck-up the evening had turned into.

Damn it, this wasn't how he'd imagined the evening going. He hadn't realized the captain had already turned Lynx loose. If she was meant as bait for the team's next mark, he should've been told. He'd been woefully unprepared for Lynx tonight. Her seductive, sensual moves on the dance floor had certainly baited him. He wasn't at all sure he liked Lynx having any part of the undercover sting on Crawley.

Hell, he had practically grown up with Lynx. She was one of his best friends. Plus, she was his friend Daniel's younger sister.

He had only recently returned home, and what a shock that'd been. The gangly sixteen-year-old Craig remembered Lynx to be had grown up. And out, he could see that. He had missed her transformation, too, thanks to some dangerous assignments and a few harrowing years.

Now Lynx was full of a woman's vitality. She had the irresistible female curves to match, too. But apparently, Lynx had also developed a fiery tongue. Images of where Lynx could best put her fiery little tongue to use danced through his head.

Lynx interrupted his reverie with something mightily akin to an indignant hiss. Evidently, the little minx still wasn't too tickled with his heroic rescue of her earlier.

As he drove, Craig's thoughts dialed back to the day he'd returned to base after a long, difficult mission. Later that day, Captain Slater had introduced Lynx as the newest member of their team.

COBRA was an elite team that consisted of highly trained government operatives. COBRA's operatives were adept at covert warfare and government investigations of a secretive nature. At the news Lynx had joined COBRA, Craig had been so surprised he'd nearly choked. Daniel's little sister working with them! Wasn't that just like her? Lynx had been his and Daniel's shadow as a kid.

He would never forget the mischievous look in Lynx's eyes that day, either. Lynx, he knew, had gotten a real thrill out of shocking everyone. Even her big brother Daniel hadn't known she'd been planning to sign on. Craig would never have thought Lynx the type to join COBRA. She was like a little sister, his shadow. She was the tomboy he'd loved to tease. Hell, he could remember pulling her pig-tails.

Boy, those were the days. What he wouldn't give to pull her hair now.

But now, Lynx was in COBRA. COBRA was code for Covert Operations Black Regiment A. There were several different teams with COBRA training. However, theirs was the only one classified A, an exclusive class. They were the best of the best in the field, and they were always the ones who went deepest undercover.

"*Marozi.*" Lynx's voice, not much more than a seductive whisper, curled around his frontal lobes, delicately lingered in his ear, and was gone.

Was his mind playing tricks on him? He could've sworn he'd heard it. Craig looked over at Lynx, who had since curled up as much as possible and fallen fast asleep. It was a long drive back to the base. Kneading his temple with weary fingers, Craig resolved to get a good night's sleep, too, when they returned.

If he was hearing voices now, this whole situation with Lynx was really getting to him. He really needed a good night's sleep and nice

long chat with his partner, Daniel, her big brother. Maybe then he could make some sense of everything, maybe even forge an acceptable game plan.

Yes, that's it, Craig told himself as he turned into the gates to their crew's compound on base. That was just what he needed. Tomorrow, he'd worry about taming Lynx, the little wildcat lightly snoring beside him.

~ *CatDreams* ~

As the early morning's light shafted in through the windows, Lynx felt herself slowly coming awake. She stretched and yawned lazily, although her first impulse was to curl back up into a cat-like roll. She could sleep through the morning.

A small groan to the right of her pricked her ears. Lynx processed quickly. She wasn't in her bed at home. Alert now, she sat up. Lynx tried to place which direction the groan had come from. Another light sound occurred, the sound of someone twisting and turning restlessly in sleep, and Lynx became aware someone was on the cot there. The cot was to the far right of her.

She began to recall the events of the night before. So, Craig had brought them back to base versus taking her home. Well, it was closer and perhaps safer. Another light groan came from Craig's direction. Lynx lightly padded over to the cot Craig occupied. Perhaps he had been hurt? Maybe in her temper last night she had not realized it? Guiltily, Lynx quietly moved to the small chair near the window by his bedside, hoping to ascertain what, if anything, was wrong with him.

He slept uneasily. Craig rolled again from his stomach to side to back. He never opened his eyes, obviously in the throes of some dream or another. As he turned fully over, the sheets twisted and then visibly tented over Craig's abdomen.

Lynx tried unsuccessfully to suppress her body's answering jolt of awareness. Oh, but she was wide awake now. The mere sight of Craig, somnolent and suffering from an arousing dream, had her hand burning to reach out. She just wanted to touch what lay spiked beneath the tangle of sheets.

She could see Craig's maleness was not in question. Even with the cover afforded by the sheets, Lynx couldn't exactly miss his straining erection. That particular part of this man's anatomy was impressively large. Apparently, Craig did have a thing or two to be cocky about. Knowing she should move away but unable to turn her eyes away, she watched, mesmerized.

But Lynx couldn't tear her eyes away when Craig's rock-hard length pulsed, and she heard his breathing shift. Craig's wet dream had sucked her in. Her eyes roved up and down his muscled shoulders and biceps. He had an exceptional face. Even half shrouded in the shades of early morning light and darkness, the sensuality of Craig's features amazed Lynx.

Craig had those high cheekbones and to-die-for lips. The beginnings of stubble delineated his unshaven face. He had a strong chin and a high, graceful forehead above. His grey-blue eyes were sinfully sexy, though they were now closed in sleep. Yeah, he had a face any woman would want, and many men would envy.

He had a midnight curtain of dark hair that normally fell over his shoulders and down his back. It made for a killer combo. When Craig's jet-black rain of hair was kissed by the sunlight, russet highlights would spark. The intriguing effect was that of a Norse god come straight to life.

Then there was the issue of that cock of his tenting the sheets, the sight of which almost undid her natural restraint.

Lynx unconsciously licked her lips.

Craig continued to dream. He was washboard hard. His every movement had the sheet twisting about his swollen cock-head. Lynx itched to touch it. Was he straining for her?

Lynx imagined kneeling in front of him. Her small, slim hands were graceful but seductive as she guided him to her lips like a prayer. On her knees before him, she would let her tongue explore him. She would glide it over the tip. What would he taste like? She could see the barest outline of the flared head.

Craig's cock looked too heavy, too large. Would she be able to take him?

She imagined that she could. The fantasy unfurled in her mind.

She'd lick Craig's cock and slowly stretch her lips over him like a glove. His thick, hard shaft would slide down her throat on a velvet whoosh. Her happy tongue would dance and swirl. He would burn for her. She would watch him burn. Unable to control himself any longer, Craig would pump until he flooded her mouth with his...

Fantasy interrupted, Craig's face contorted and Lynx could see his cock jerk heavily against the sheets. Unable to take her eyes off his sleeping face or form, Lynx was still somewhat startled by his next movement as he fisted his bulging cock in his hand.

What if he woke up? Lynx quietly padded back across the room to her cot. She took care not to make any sound as she slid under the sheets and turned onto her side. She could watch him from the relative safety of her bed.

Craig groaned, and the sheets slid away. Lynx was spellbound.

His cock slid thickly through his fist. He started pumping, slowly at first. But then the head grew fuller and his strokes heavier. He moved faster as his breathing became harsher. Another groan eased past his lips.

Did he dream of being deep in her throat? Would his hands fist in her hair as he came?

"Too fucking good," Craig mumbled out loud, still pumping. His motions grew even faster and slicker. His body arched with each stroke. Another loud groan and sweat beaded his forehead. Lynx longed to lick it away. She longed to lick him.

Shakily, her hands slipped beneath the damp silk of her panties. Her fingers slid and stroked down inside her fevered sex. Need and arousal sparked hot. Her fingers went wild. Her eyes remained arrested on Craig's straining figure. He was going to come any minute now. She could tell.

Her fingers flowed in and out with the timing of his strokes. Just a minute more, that was all she needed. Lynx felt a storm of unbearable tension building. Her muscles clenched. Her sex was dripping wet, she ached. Her swollen clit was a small bundle of tension, yearning for release.

Craig grunted, and pumped harder. The rhythmic movement nearly lifted his buttocks off the bed. His cock was jerking, thick and plum-colored in his hand. Tiny pearls of pre-cum escaped the flaring head of his long shaft. His hand slid its way down again.

Lynx, watching, shuddered and climaxed in a gush of hot juices. Her fingers were soaked, tangled in wet curls. Her strangled gasp mingled with the sound of Craig's deep and sexy groan. Her hand instinctively went to her mouth to choke back the sound. She struggled to restrain a moan.

How would Craig taste different?

With some effort, she withdrew the hand from her mouth. Sharp little contractions still punctuated her breathing. Her heart was pounding. Her whole body quivered. Lynx heard Craig groan again.

Craig came awake. Literally.

Craig jerked up. A geyser of seed sluiced over his fisted hands. They were sticky with it, and the sheets...Goddess! The sheets were a hopeless mess.

Craig fell back on the bed, gasping. His cock still pulsed.

By all appearances, Craig had experienced a wet dream to end all wet dreams.

Lynx peeked through barely slanted eyes she hoped didn't give her away. She tried to slow her erratic breathing.

Eventually, Craig slid noiselessly out of the cot and gathered up the bedraggled sheets. He left the room. A few minutes later, he slipped back in.

Craig glanced over her way. He must've been convinced she was still asleep because he reached for his jeans and slowly pulled them up. Lynx bit the inside of her mouth as Craig's muscular legs, a perfectly chiseled ass, and one large, mouth-watering cock disappeared behind the denim.

He was quick and quiet as he remade the bed. Once done, Craig sat down at the edge of the bed, head in his hands.

Lynx watched Craig surreptitiously.

What was he thinking? she wondered.

He'd said her name before. He'd groaned it, actually. Could that mean he had dreamt of her? Maybe he just worried that his childhood playmate had witnessed his wet dream?

She didn't know what had spurred his nocturnal foray, but if Craig was half as creamy as her reaction had been, the man could surely make her naughty dreams cum true.

Chapter 2

Less than an hour later, Craig and Lynx were summoned to the compound's debriefing room with Captain Slater, who looked semi-pissed. Lynx sensed Craig's anxiety. They both needed to find out what the stats were on the situation.

Also attending was the rugged group of COBRA agents, which consisted of some of Homeland Security and the DEA's most elite agents. Slater looked ready to read the riot act. Being new, she couldn't help being a little nervous. Lynx glanced around and was comforted to note that she didn't seem to be the only one sweating it.

The team's command center was located at Camp McDill's Air Force Base. The compound at McDill afforded the men and women from COBRA all the high tech intelligence they needed, and yet provided them the relative security of the base from which to centrally operate.

COBRA had already made invaluable headway into the war on drugs. But there were many other disturbing, often connected, crimes. Sex crimes were all too common, as were acts of home-grown terrorism. Wherever drugs could be found, it seemed that all such illegal activities could, and often did, abound.

McDill's location was the epicenter for the team's counter-attacks in the constant war of good versus evil. Centrally located there, COBRA had navigated many successful missions against some of the country's premier criminal organizations. Florida, despite its scenic landscapes and beaches, was considered prime real estate for drug runners and the like due to its coastal outlines. The unassuming coastline offered drug traffickers an irresistible temptation. It was a

temptation the corrupt and criminally-minded couldn't seem to deny as the drug trade flourished with easy access to coastal waters.

Miami remained a premier location for the growing drug trade. The city was a continual hot-bed of drug-related, illicit activities. The business of importing and exporting drugs was a highly profitable lure for greedy men devoid of ethics. COBRA stayed busy combating the deadly tide from Miami-based drug-runners and their suppliers alone.

But the sad fact remained. Florida was also believed to be home to at least one infamous branch of the Ombres drug cartel. Still, the killing fields were littered with casualties of the drug wars. The blood-soaked ground just continued to expand.

There were so many contaminates, it sometimes felt like COBRA was plugging one small hole, among many, in a dam the size of the Hoover Dam. Every drug runner and supplier, big or small, was just another leak. Every drug was just another toxic emission. There seemed to be an endless supply of poison that still seeped through.

COBRA's mission was deceptively simple. Stop the poison from getting through. Sometimes though, things didn't go exactly as planned.

Lynx listened as Captain Slater reamed Craig. Apparently, the previous night's debauched mission had Slater all fired up. He let it fly, first at Craig, and then her.

Slater grated out. "Why weren't you in place before the bullets started flying at the club, Marozi?" But Slater continued to vent, "Lynx, what the hell were you doing there? I thought your orders were clear, too. You weren't supposed to go near the mark or that place before we'd covered your butt better. You weren't wired. Hell, you weren't even on our list to be there last night! This whole operation, not to mention lives, could've been jeopardized if not for Craig up-and-leaving his position to cover your back. That's just not acceptable, Lynx. Damn it!"

Slater took a deep breath before ranting again, with a warning growl. "This unit will survive or self-destruct on teamwork. This just

can't continue. Craig, from here on out, Lynx reports to you. Not only that, but she'd better not make a move without going through you first. You are to keep me fully apprised every step of the way." Slater sent a hard look at Lynx, as if daring her to argue his edict, and then continued barking instructions.

Lynx bit her lip in frustration, but held her tongue.

Slater had more to say. Lynx tuned back in, forgetting to argue.

"Marozi, Shaunessy, next time don't let flying bullets take you by surprise. You were way off your game last night. The only excuse you've got, Marozi, was Shaunessy's unexpected arrival. Where was your game? A shooter should've never gotten that close. No more screw-ups or surprises, guys. We can't afford 'em."

Slater turned to Ethan Havers, another of the team's lean, steely-eyed agents and said, "Well, what was recovered from our clean-up at the club last night?"

Ethan leaned back in his chair casually, his hard, nearly black eyes glittering. His drawl was lazy. Lynx knew from previous observation of Ethan in action that his drawl was misleading. "Not what we expected, Captain. Crawley was DOA. He's not exactly talking." Lynx saw Javier stifle a laugh. Slater gave Javier a hard look.

Ethan ignored them both. "We did find some traces of something in Crawley's blood. What this something is exactly, we're not sure yet. The substance isn't your usual drug, though. So far, the lab's not sure what to make of it. Of course, they've got a lot more testing to do, but whatever it is, it's stranger than usual. It doesn't have the expected components, and it doesn't look to be your run-of-the-mill compound. It's just not your average drug, that's for certain. "

Lynx slowly let things sink in. So, Crawley was dead. She hadn't been sure. The bullets had been flying, and Craig had rushed her out of there so fast. There was no time to know much for certain beyond the fact that she was pissed when he had pulled her away from her chance at Crawley. She had been sure she could get some real info out of Crawley. Yes, she'd had Crawley's attention all right. He'd been

trying to seduce her on the dance floor all night until, that is, Craig had deftly maneuvered her away from him.

She was appreciative for that now, though, not that she'd admit it to him. Craig had moved her out of the line of gunfire, and she hadn't exactly seen the bullets coming. Nothing in the Intel on Crawley had indicated any immediate threat to his life. Lynx knew she should've been more alert, but up until then, the night had been proceeding pretty much like any other night at a club like Smoky's Joint. Then, pandemonium had erupted.

Lynx furtively glanced over at Craig. He was listening intently to Ethan's description of the scene they'd left behind last night. She drank in Craig's aquiline jaw line with its sexy stubble. Her gaze dropped to his full, sensual lower lip pursed in thought, and then moved back up to his hooded, shadowy, grey-blue eyes. That wickedly sensual, long black hair of his fell so carelessly over his muscular shoulders. It was difficult to concentrate. She'd gone wet again just watching him. She couldn't forget what she'd seen of Craig earlier, either.

Craig's gaze came to rest on her a second later, intense, searching. Lynx's felt the blood rush to her cheeks. She hadn't realized she'd been staring. Just one look from Craig had sent the rest of her blood straight to her pussy. Lynx squirmed in her seat and quickly turned her attention back to Slater.

"Daniel and Javier will be back in forty-eight hours," Captain Slater said. Lynx tried to concentrate on something other than the electric tingles in her abdomen. Craig's next piercing look sent more shivers dancing up her spine.

Slater's voice intruded. "Craig, I want you to see that they get briefed on the next rendezvous this Friday, the one we have planned with our informant."

Slater continued. "Ethan, you keep me apprised of any news from the lab. And Lynx, I need you to be ready and wired this time out. Absolutely no funny business. Not this time, guys. We got lucky this

once, but it might not happen again. We don't believe the operation is blown yet, so don't go shooting it out of the water and spoiling what we've worked for months to get in place."

Slater paused, and then said, "We've only gone in ankle deep on this ring thus far. There are much bigger guns to lock on than Crawley in this game. Hell, we don't even know what we could be dealing with here yet. But somebody wants to get this stuff on the illegal market pretty bad. For all we know, this drug could be a bio-weapon they're selectively testing. It could also just be some new and revised date rape cocktail."

Slater looked pointedly at each COBRA member. "We don't know yet. Whatever this stuff is, it's got the attention of dangerous men in lofty positions. Men who could set the drug market on fire in a short amount of time. We do know the drug's already a hot seller, but so far, no agent's been able to get a real sample. So, we have no way of knowing how destructive this new drug can be."

Ethan frowned slightly and set his drink down slowly on the conference table. "Well, let's see. We've got two dead bodies, but they're not talking much. The female victim did appear to have been raped."

Ethan sighed, "But even forensics has not explained the victims' deaths, yet. We've got some scared shitless snitches who are being even less cooperative than usual. Plus, there are rumors of abductions, mostly female, but none confirmed. Our one snitch was adamant that slavery was involved. But this snitch is a rather questionable source. He's a known schizophrenic. However, I can't help but believe we have to take his information into consideration. Whatever's going down does appear to be big."

Slater agreed, "Yes, we do have good information from another reliable long-term snitch of ours that this new drug may have multiple purposes, too. It may increase awareness and stimulation exponentially. However, we're at a loss here. We need a sample of this chemical substance in evidence for testing. If this drug is

responsible for the deaths we've been seeing, we haven't found enough proof of it yet. In other words, the deaths involved weren't noticeably drug related, at least not physically. But our few sources indicate a connection."

Ethan's frown only deepened. "Okay then, something else is worrying me. The usual greedy snitches aren't even talking much. They're warier than usual. However, there's a mystery man we keep hearing about. Nobody knows much about him, except that he's powerfully connected everywhere we turn. He must be widely feared and respected by some of the biggest names we have on our list. When even money stops talking, and bribes aren't working, you'd better believe they're running scared. We haven't even been able to get a decently vague description, much less a detailed one."

Craig spoke up. "So, we have no real idea who this ominous person of interest is or what his particular role in all this...But whoever he is, he's obviously involved in a very big way. Add an unknown drug to the mix, and I don't like how this case is *not* shaping up. I don't think we can be too careful on this case. My gut's screaming it's all going to be bad news too. But what we need most is more intel, and soon."

"With that I can agree," Slater acknowledged before giving a final admonishment. "Well, keep your heads up, everybody. Don't forget to check in regularly."

Lynx scooted her chair out and walked over to pour herself some coffee. She took a sip. Ugh. It was pretty obvious if she wanted good coffee at headquarters, she'd have to start making it.

Slater and Ethan left the room, still deep in conversation. Craig ambled over to where she stood and hooked his arm through hers. Wicked man, he gave her his most charming, boyish grin. "Wanna go get some breakfast, little minx?"

Lynx hadn't heard that endearment since she'd been a knobby-kneed stripling, a tomboy to boot. Her brother Daniel had always laughed when Craig called her that, insisting she was his baby sister,

not a pet. Craig had persisted in using the nickname throughout her teens, though. It was only when he'd went away to the army and eventually into the Army Rangers that she'd kind of forgotten about his pet nickname for her. She decided she'd missed hearing it.

But as much as she liked hearing Craig's pet name for her, she hoped he could see she was all grown up now. Lynx smiled. "Sure thing, Marozi." Lynx cocked her head to look up at his six-two frame, which was ramrod straight. "I could really use some of Mimi's coffee and a hot breakfast right about now."

~ When *Cats* Prey ~

The pleasing camaraderie over breakfast didn't last long, thought Craig as he pulled up in his driveway. No more than halfway through breakfast, Lynx had gotten ticked at him over his instructions for her to go home and start packing. Damn if she hadn't been ready to light out of there like hell on wheels, and some very hot wheels at that. Lynx was sure bent on insisting she could take care of herself.

He was smart enough to know that Slater's orders would be the only reason Lynx would listen now. But, man, was she ever pissed about it, still.

His Lynx had grown up to be a spitfire and a half. Craig chuckled to himself. The little minx was going to take some taming before she accepted anyone's orders.

That thought was enough to send the blood rushing to his groin again. *Taming Lynx shouldn't excite me.* Oh, but the look he'd caught Lynx giving him when she thought he was engaged in conversation elsewhere...damn, that was just hot. Her eyes had betrayed her thoughts. He knew what she'd like to do with him. What he'd like to do right now to her.

He could tell Lynx had liked what she'd seen. The way she'd had blushed and fidgeted had sent blood rushing straight to his dick.

Craig reached down to straighten himself. His cock had a life of its own more than usual these days. Here he was, rock hard again. Just a few short hours ago he'd dreamed of her and soaked the sheets. Craig grimaced. Tame Lynx? Hades! He was going to have to tame another part of himself first!

Three hours later, Craig looked at his watch again. He had changed and showered already. He'd taken care of some bills and correspondence. He'd even gotten some research done via his computer link with COBRA. It was half past four, and still, there was no sign of her. What was taking the little minx so long? Sighing, Craig grabbed his keys from his coffee table and headed back out the door. If he had to guess, Lynx wasn't going to do anything the easy way.

Maybe he should spank her ass.

Craig pulled out of his curving drive with the ease of a man who had navigated it for years, the steering wheel of his Mustang firmly in hand. By 4:45 p.m., Craig was pulling into the spot beside where Lynx's cute little tricked-out truck was parked.

Boy, was she ever gonna get it. He could see no sign of anything loaded up as yet. Apparently, Lynx wasn't in any kind of rush to obey him. Craig chuckled to himself. He was definitely going to spank her ass. He hopped out of his car and strode to her door.

Craig tried the doorbell twice. No answer. *Maybe she's just in the shower.* On impulse he tried the doorknob and was surprised when it turned. He stiffened in shock. Now, this warranted much more than just one spanking. No self-respecting, trained COBRA agent would leave their door unlocked like this.

The thought left his head the minute he stepped into Lynx's small hallway and then into the living room. The sight of strewn belongings and books littered the floor. *What the hell?*

"Lynx, are you here?"

Nobody answered. Craig headed for the bedroom to the left of the kitchen. The silence was deafening as he began systematically

searching her small apartment from front to back. No, there was nothing. No sign of Lynx herself. Quickly, he scanned the area looking for any clues as to what had happened. Then he saw it. There, spilling onto the couch was Lynx's small purse.

Real fear began to churn in Craig's gut. He leaned over and sized up the contents. Her truck keys were still here, as was a tube of red lipstick, some coins, and her thin wallet. Then there was a small vial of some exotic smelling perfume, her sunglasses, and some business cards and credit cards. From the looks of it, nothing had been stolen.

Craig ominously noted the bills in her wallet. Then, something in the seam of the sofa caught his eye. Gingerly, he pulled it out. It was another business card-Crawley's, the dead guy from the club.

Craig made a tense phone call to Captain Slater, outlining what he suspected. Within the hour, COBRA agents were swarming the apartment and dusting for prints. The prognosis for immediate answers looked grim. But Craig paced back and forth, restless. He knew time was wasting, but he still needed those lab reports on the various prints found.

Craig listened gravely as agents Ed Jorgenson and Ethan Havers did their usual bickering, sifting through their conversation for anything of relevance.

Ethan made his way over to where Craig was and put a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry, Craig. Jorgenson is nothing if not thorough. Lynx is tougher than she looks, too.

Craig nodded thoughtfully. "Yeah, thanks, Ethan. I know you're right." As Ethan picked his way back through the crime scene that had been Lynx's living room, Craig bit back the fear and concentrated instead on the anger. If Lynx was hurt in any way, someone was going to have hell to pay. Hell, yes, they were. He was going to make damn sure of it.

Chapter 3

Lynx coughed and gasped. Groggily, she twisted her head to the side only to realize that was a very bad idea. Her head throbbed at the movement. Lynx cautiously ran her tongue against the inside of her teeth. Okay, she wasn't gagged or bound, but her head hurt like the dickens. She could barely move, and she didn't know where she was. How long had she been unconscious?

Struggling to look around was difficult, but Lynx, careful of her head now, tried to anyway. At least the bed she was lying on felt comfortable. How had she gotten here? She remembered struggling with someone at her apartment. Who? She couldn't quite remember. Her head was still spinning. The darkness seemed to swirl around her. She just barely heard the faint sound of a doorknob turning before she succumbed, unconsciousness again.

Cat A Tonic

Leo stepped into the darkened room. Two companions followed in his footsteps. Roberto looked studious, serious. Beside him, Felice, his wife, was raven-haired and petite and smiled much more frequently. But Leo knew Felice was equally studious.

Felice carried her small doctor's type satchel in. She set it down on the nightstand beside the sleeping Lynx. Felice looked up at him and asked, "Should I begin?"

"Please do," Leo affirmed. He moved aside to afford Felice and Roberto better access to Lynx's inert body. The pair quickly examined her limp form. They quickly found the small lump on the

back of her head. Then they checked her lightly bruised body for any other injuries.

“Nothing serious to worry about that I can see,” Felice relayed. “She looks as healthy as anybody would be after her ordeal.”

Leo nodded. “She’s lucky we scared her attackers off.” He scanned Felice’s face. “Are you sure this is Lynx? The same one we’ve been searching for?”

Felice answered with a firm nod of her head. “No doubt about it, Leo. It’s a damn good thing we got there before those rogues hurt her too badly, or worse, abducted her like they have others. Evidently, Lynx is also being sought by some very dangerous company, company she’d be better off not meeting.”

“I know you’re right about that.” Leo muttered.

“Leo, the labs have thus far confirmed numerous markers,” Felice offered.

Leo’s gaze rested on the recumbent Lynx. No, there couldn’t be two women who fit her description. Her heart-shaped face had the flawless features of an angel, from her rosebud mouth to her moth-shaped eyebrows that clearly framed her wide-set eyes. He wondered what color they would be. Would they match her tawny, perfect skin? Or would they be startling, intense enough to drown a man in their vividness? Leo’s eyes wandered down her long, tapered legs and back to her slim waist. His eyes took in the rise and fall of her breasts under her faded tank top.

She was uncommonly beautiful, but the scent of her made him go weak in the knees. She had to be. No purely human female had ever smelled so sweet to him.

Leo’s mouth watered.

His reason for bringing her here was clear. Lynx might not know it yet, but she was his ideal mate in every way. It was his purpose in life to protect her.

Lynx was like him. She was a direct descendent of the Imatu. The legends and lore referred to them as “the cat people.” Hopefully, soon she would acclimate to the world she was born to inhabit, his.

Satisfied that Lynx’s condition wasn’t critical, Leo, Roberto, and Felice left the room. Leo locked the door as they left. In the hall, he gravely turned to face his two friends. He trusted their judgment. They were scientists and knew a great deal more than he did on the subject of Imatu reactions.

“How much longer before we can safely inoculate her?” he asked.

Roberto cleared his throat. He turned to Felice and said softly, “We have enough serum already, right, Felice?”

“Yes,” Felice stated simply.

“Good,” Leo growled. “I’ll collect some from you and inoculate her shortly. I expect Lynx to be made as comfortable as possible in the interim. Make sure she’s given some water and fed when she wakes again. I don’t want her hungry or uncomfortable in any way.” Leo strode off down the hall with purposeful steps, pulling out his phone as he went. He hurried through the mundane calls he couldn’t put off. He wanted to be there when Lynx woke up.

But try as he might, Leo discovered he couldn’t stay away from Lynx for long. Unlocking the door, he stepped back in. If someone was going to take care of her, it should be him.

He held the serum in his hands and fingered the tube-like casing surrounding the syringe between his fingers carefully. Slowly, he eased the fabric up over Lynx’s taut buttocks. Lynx had fallen asleep. Her breathing was normal. She slept prostrate, face down and impervious. She looked so fucking vulnerable on his big bed.

It had been determined that Lynx wasn’t suffering a concussion as they’d first feared. The Imatu were known for their ability to heal quicker than the average human. The Imatu also normally had a high resistance to drugs of any sort. She hadn’t needed a sedative. Her body was healing itself. Sleep was her body’s instinctive response to injury.

Leo could see that the bump to Lynx's head had already nearly disappeared. In a few short hours, it would.

Leo lightly caressed her firm, slightly rounded curves. Mesmerized, he traced along the cheeks of her ass. He was unable to stop himself. But if he was honest, he didn't really want to try. Reverently, he followed her body's outline, grazing over the dimpled hills, coming to rest on the valley that separated them. He gently stroked between the small mounds, dipping lightly, then deeper into the cleft.

What a beautiful sight.

Remembering his purpose, Leo reluctantly turned back to his objective. Lynx's delicate left rear cheek made a tempting target. He gently swabbed a small area with disinfectant and then carefully placed the syringe there, pushing the plunger to release its contents fully. He withdrew it. Only a small, almost unnoticeable moan had escaped her lips when the needle sank in. He sat down on the edge of the bed, trembling, not in fear but relief. Good, the deed was done.

Within hours, the serum would take effect. She would survive her coming shift, adapt easier. The oft traumatic psychological side effects would be lessened for her. Leo knew that if Lynx's shift came upon her otherwise, before she understood how to deal with it, the results would be unpredictable.

He could not leave Lynx unprepared or alone to face it. Female shifters often went into a raging heat cycle. Usually this happened within a fairly short period of time around the time of their first shift. The serum would help make the transition easier.

Leo knew Lynx would never be the same after her first full shift. At least this way Lynx would be safer. She would be afforded some protection. And she wouldn't be alone. His pride would share their knowledge of all things Imatu with her. She would need to accept her inherent gifts as a shifter. It was her lineage, after all. Now, she would have experienced teachers from the pride to ease the transitions she would need to make. The transition from an ordinary human to a

uniquely gifted shifter was not always a smooth one. Without Roberto and Felicia's help, Leo hesitated to think what trouble he might have faced alone.

Facing the change alone and without safeguards, Lynx would be easy prey for the less scrupulous rogue Imatus out there. Poachers sought the bounty that shifters brought. There were always those men determined to capture and control their kind. Leo knew there were some very skilled hunters employed by the worst animals of them all: humans.

At the thought, a barely restrained snarl curled his lips.

Leo found he was anxious for Lynx's transformation to begin. Here, she could safely explore her Imatu nature. She was sheltered on his ranch, protected as it was. Once the change truly began, there was no doubt that Lynx would be one wild cat. Oh, she would still be insatiable, despite the serum. But after all, it was an appetite only one of her kind could completely understand and satisfy.

Leo understood those needs all too well right now. His erection was beyond strained, his cock rigid against the tight confines of his jeans. His need to mate with Lynx was primal, instinctual, and so intense his balls ached.

He was impatient for Lynx to awaken to her needs and their shared destiny. His desire to take her now, as she lay sleeping, was barely restrained. He didn't want to betray the vulnerable, sleeping Lynx. But watching her, he doubted he could avoid temptation for too long. Slowly, he cupped Lynx's unmarked right cheek and very lightly traced the deep rivulet betwixt the two.

~ CatCalls ~

In her sleep, Lynx mewled softly and dreamed forbidden dreams.

The jungle was a backdrop to hosts of sounds. The sounds of monkeys and birds filled the air with a plethora of lush, animalistic calls. Then, the roar of a lion shattered the air in a rough caress of

guttural bursts. She could see and feel as one with the smaller female avoiding the noonday sun under a small copse of trees. By her side, a large and predatory lion prowled, intent on his mate. The ritualistic roars rumbled in cadence as the female cat finally bowed to the determined lion at her flank: her pride's leader. The female's belly was rubbing the ground in anticipation as the lion licked and nipped her neck repeatedly. He was behind her, heavy on her hunches, as he seized her by the fur on her neck, dominating, demanding that she accept his heavy weight and his engorged member. The lion only released her after he had left traces of his imperial line deep inside the female lioness.

The dream darkened, shifted. Lynx's breathing grew ragged. She whimpered.

This time she was the primitive cat, padding through the jungle silently, stealthily, the jungle's carpeted flooring bruised but accepting of her passage. She was moving swiftly over terrain she recognized. Every path, every step she remembered somehow. A growl rose from her throat, instinctive, natural. The clearing ahead was familiar, but no more so than the sleek form that came loping out of the shadows to meet her. The cougar's tongue was lapping behind her ears gently, yet savage with need. His teeth scraped over the back of her hunches. Then with a rasp of tongue and teeth at her neck, he rode her flanks, at first easy, then rougher. The rhythm became harder and faster. She arched to meet his demanding cry, an instinctive response to his animalistic seduction. At the feel of his haunches bearing down on her, she at first buckled under his weight. But then she then rose like a mesmerized cobra, meeting her cougar's demanding thrusts. At each assault of fierce desire, her feline hunches bowed in submission.

~ Here Kitty, Kitty ~

Lynx mewed softly, but not from pain or distress. The sound was feline, both exotic and sensual. She was having a good dream then? Leo tensed. His hand was still resting against the soft swell of her curving hips, and the images from Lynx's dream rushed over him when he opened his mind. The images were soft and hazy, but enough. He knew now what she dreamt.

Leo gave thanks again for his unique abilities as an Imatu.

He could not resist. Lower, lower his fingers trailed to the softer swell of her hips and then to the curls resting below. Lightly, Leo brushed them with his fingers and, before thinking, dipped in the rosy folds of Lynx's pussy. She was wet, dewy, and the scent was enticing him past the point of reason...

His cock was like an iron rod stabbing against his jeans now. This was torture. She was hotter, slicker, more enticing than he could've imagined. White-hot, the flame had been lit. Things were about to get even hotter. Lynx was the one. Leo knew it. There was no letting her go.

The tests had confirmed she was Imatu, a shifter like him, but the tests had also verified several unique blood bonds, very intimate links for their kind. Lynx was a perfect match and mate for him.

One taste of her creamy honey might help tide me over, until...

Leo lifted a roughly textured finger to his mouth. The taste only left him groaning. His hand returned to the scene of its carnal crime. He hadn't really intended to breach the slickened entrance before him. But now that he had, he craved more of her, so much more. One taste of Lynx would never be enough.

Chapter 4

Back at the McDill base compound, Craig slowly fingered the small business card he discovered wedged in Lynx's sofa. Crawley was dead, that much was true, but perhaps there was some connection to wherever Lynx had been taken. It had the address of the packing firm where Crawley was listed part owner. Parker Packing Company, Bowling Green Way, was on the outskirts of Sarasota and not that far of a drive.

Before leaving to check out one of COBRA's few leads so far, Craig met with Captain Slater. Agents Ethan Havers and Javier Banderas were there.

"There were no telling prints found," Slater informed them. "However, given Crawley's company card was found at the scene of the crime, we will continue to investigate that angle. Craig, I expect you will want to check out Parker Packing for yourself. Ethan, work with Jorgenson researching any and all intelligence we have on Crawley."

Ethan snorted. "Just another day at the funny farm with Jorgenson, huh?" Noticing the sharp look Craig shot him, Ethan added seriously, "You know I'll do whatever it takes to help find Lynx, Craig."

Javier chimed in, sounding serious for once. "Yeah, that goes for me too, Craig. What do you have in mind for me, Captain?"

"Glad you asked, Banderas," Slater replied. "I want you to be checking with Lynx's neighbors again to see if they remembered anything since our last interview. Also, check with the hospitals in surrounding areas, just in case."

“Sure thing, boss. I’m outta here. Is that all, then?” Javier asked questioningly.

“That’ll do it, Banderas,” Slater replied. “Craig,” Slater said, pulling him aside after Ethan and Javier left, “you just go find our Lynx.”

Craig nodded. “I will do my best. You can count on it, Captain. I don’t want to delay the search any longer. Every second could count right now.”

“Get to it, then, and keep me posted.”

The knot twisting Craig’s stomach had only grown larger and more insidious as the day progressed. There was no telling where Lynx was now. With every hour that passed she could be farther away, or worse, perhaps not there at all. He had to find her. Not just for himself, but for Daniel, too.

The call he’d made to Daniel had not been an easy one. Daniel was on his way back to the base after completing his rendezvous with one of his connections in their outfit. Daniel would be returning to McDill within the hour, and that made Craig feel slightly better.

Daniel had never sounded so tense, which he could understand. Daniel’s only family, his sister, was missing. Seven years earlier, Daniel and Lynx had lost both their loving, adoptive parents in a freak, tragic accident, and now Lynx was missing. Craig knew that if anything happened to her, Daniel would never forgive himself. Hell, how would he ever forgive himself?

His throat tightened at the thought of losing Lynx and what that would do to his buddy, her brother. It would devastate them both, if truth were told. There could be no mistakes on this mission. They would find and rescue her, and Goddess help anyone who tried to stand in their way.

~ *Catch Up* ~

Daniel pulled up in the parking lot at the base compound and parked. Craig waved and strode out to meet him. Craig wasted no time filling him in on what the team had gleaned from the scant forensic evidence taken from Lynx's apartment.

"They haven't identified any 'suspect' fingerprints, Daniel. But, the lab is still sorting through the other prints that we lifted. So far, every print has belonged to someone known to have been in Lynx's apartment."

Craig paused. "There was evidence of a small amount of blood in the kitchen. It was determined to be Lynx's blood, but," Craig added hastily, "it was an insignificant amount, Daniel. It could've easily been from just a scratch."

This was not the kind of news Daniel had hoped to hear. Relaying it was just as difficult for Craig, judging by his face.

It didn't help much. Daniel's emotions see-sawed, and fear for Lynx's safety vied with absolute rage at thought of anyone hurting her. He clenched his fists.

"We will find the bastard who did this," Craig said reassuringly. Daniel could see the same determined look in Craig's eyes. He knew he wasn't alone. Craig would do whatever it took to see Lynx was found.

Daniel agreed. "Let's get to it, then. Let's head to Sarasota and that packing company listed on Crawley's business card. So, who's driving? Me or you, pal?"

Craig laughed at him, outright. "Daniel, I recall a certain unforgettable car chase over a certain bridge. Sure, it was an exhilarating ride, buddy. But things could've turned out much differently. For instance, it wouldn't have been so funny if I had to wind up detailing my 'Stang just to have the fish removed."

Daniel remembered vividly and fondly. The memory still made him smile. "Hey, bro, watch it. You're starting to sound like my sister when she's pissed off."

Craig chuckled. “You’re probably right. Let’s drive your Camaro this time, okay? On second thought, let me drive it. You nearly had me choking on saltwater and gagging on sardines last time around.”

“All right, just this once,” Daniel said, laughing again. He quickly turned serious. “Hop in.” Daniel tossed the keys to Craig then he settled his long, lanky form in the passenger seat. “We got some serious miles to eat, and the sooner we get going, the sooner we can find Lynx.”

The Camaro’s ignition roared back to life, and a familiar country tune poured from the radio. As Joe Nichols crooned “The Impossible,” Craig made for the highway. Daniel hoped, for his sake and Craig’s, finding Lynx wouldn’t turn out to be impossible. If anything happened to his baby sister, Daniel wasn’t so sure he’d survive it.

Chapter 5

Lynx stirred. She felt really groggy. How long had she slept? She did remember drifting in and out of some disturbingly erotic dreams. Yet, her head felt as if it weighed a ton. Her eyelids even felt heavy. She moved her tongue. It felt thick, as if it were full of glue. Lynx slowly forced her eyes open and tried to focus.

A large, very muscular man sat by her bed, watching her. “Water, could I have some water, please?” she croaked out.

He rose up, muscles rippling in one long smooth and limber stretch. He moved so gracefully, so fluidly. He looked exotic for a man, sun-burnished and golden. She could have ripped him straight out of Greek myth. Yes, this man was definitely dangerous-one way or another.

Lynx eyed the man speculatively as he went to retrieve the bedside carafe. He silently poured her a tall glass of refreshing water. He returned to her side at the bed, sat down again, and carefully lifted her head with one hand, easing her lips to the glass.

Lynx drank it in gulps until she finally drained the glass’s contents.

“Where am I?” she asked, looking about questioningly. “Who are you?” she asked more pointedly.

He slowly set the empty glass on the side table again and peered at her thoughtfully, as if to unsure what to tell her. “You’re at my ranch, the Lascaux Ranch,” he finally said softly. “My name is Leo Lascaux. We’ve been looking for you for a very long time, Lynx. Recently, we discovered your whereabouts. But it coincided with a most unhappy accident.”

“What incident was that?”

Leo seemed to think for a moment before he answered her question. “Well, it was the night a man named Raymond Crawley was killed that we found you. It was lucky for you that we did.”

Puzzled, Lynx looked at Leo. She faintly remembered Leo now. The attackers she’d struggled with, they had run out the back way when Leo and another man had come in. But why had Leo been there to begin with? The question formed in her head before her mouth could utter it.

“Who am I to you, then?”

Her question was answered before the words left her lips. Leo’s telepathic transmission sounded clear as a bell in her head. Shocked, Lynx listened, struggling to understand the implications.

“You are of an ancient bloodline, Lynx. You are descended from the Imatu, the cat people of Indian lore and legend. We, as well as others of your kind, had little hope of finding you. We were not even sure if you’d survived your first year. We didn’t know where your adoptive parents had taken you after we found out you’d been orphaned.”

“Telepathy is a natural talent for the Imatu, Lynx,” Leo explained, out loud this time.

“But not everyone transmits as capably as you just did. Many shifters learn how to control their telepathic gifts over time. Some experience it soon after their first shift. Others, like you, just do it naturally when the situation is right. I am pleased that your gift is so strong,” Leo added.

The compliment strangely warmed her.

She stared back at Leo and took careful note of his features. He had amber-colored eyes with long, sooty eyelashes. His thick golden mane of hair hung loosely down his back.

He made her mouth water. Lynx licked her lips. Leo’s shoulders were broad, but they seemed to fit perfectly atop his narrow, but rock-solid torso. His legs were long and lean, and yet, muscular. From his

golden hair down to his perfect ass, this man was gorgeous. He could also read her thoughts. Slightly intimidated, she swallowed the knot that rose in her throat.

He observed her as well. The look in his eyes was both knowing and provocative.

Leo moved, looking suddenly uncomfortable. From her vantage point, Lynx didn't need to read Leo's mind to intuit the reason for his change of position. The surge of hardening flesh between his thighs was a clue, a really big one.

Embarrassed, her eyes flew to his. She was probably crimson right now. Still, there was no censure in Leo's gaze, only raw hunger.

The need flashed in his look and was gone.

Leo didn't give her time to ponder it. "Lynx, I know you have more questions. I'll answer them soon. Right now, I do need to go take care of some ranch business. Just know this. You are safe here, Lynx. You will not be harmed here or under my care."

He went on. "Still, if I were you, I wouldn't try to leave just yet. It just isn't safe yet for you to do so."

Leo drew in a breath, and then explained, "First, my ranch is well guarded, but the men who tried to abduct you could try again. You're not back to full strength yet, Lynx. You have been targeted by dangerous people, the kind of people who only wish to destroy you. You would not be safe were these men to succeed in abducting you. The consequences-if they find you again-could be dire. Just rest now. You're safe," Leo finished.

Oddly enough, she believed him. Feeling slightly woozy and definitely sleepy again, Lynx chose to accept Leo's explanation, for the time being. She acquiesced as he urged her to lie back down. She sank back onto the pillows with a sigh.

Leo arranged the silken covers around her shoulders. He smoothed her hair out of her face and bent over her. Slowly, he brushed her forehead with a feather-light kiss. The tender touch

seared her like a brand. He tucked the edge of the coverlet around her more firmly and padded out of the room.

Lynx curled up and drifted back to sleep.

~ *CatTests* ~

It was time to find out the rest of the test results. Leo headed for the lab, where he knew he'd likely find Roberto and Felice.

As he walked, he wondered. Would the results verify Lynx was the mate for him? Was Lynx a descendent of the prominent Imatu shifters Sing Young and Enid Persia?

Until Roberto and Felice had found him, Leo hadn't known any other Imatus, at least to his knowledge. Roberto and Felice had introduced him to Demar and the twins, Colby and Drake.

Their ongoing search for other Imatu was often hampered by many things. The intense desire of most shifters to maintain their secrecy was a big reason. There was also the unknown element of the scattered feline shifters. Shifters who had not yet discovered their own lineage or abilities were difficult to locate, too.

Other factors impeded the hunt for those of their kind. Unless a shifter had parents who were both of the ancient bloodline, their true nature was somewhat diluted genetically. This could make identification a challenge.

There were stories of shifters that discovered their hidden animal nature with erratic results. Suicide or madness could result. Control was imperative for the Imatu. Shifters with extraordinary capabilities on the loose and out of control were a tremendous risk for their kind. The Imatu could not afford that kind of exposure. Humans were already capable of extreme prejudices. The Imatu were vulnerable enough without stories leaking of rogue shape-shifters on the loose.

Roberto looked up as he entered the lab. Roberto's face was impassive, set with the concentrated stamp of a man who perpetually sorted and tested confusing data. Leo was unperturbed by Roberto's

habitually serious demeanor. He understood it. “So, Roberto, what have we got so far with her blood work? Anything new?”

Roberto shot Leo a sidewise look as he carefully placed the small vial he’d been holding back into the circular slot of the carrier. Then he moved over by the refrigerated unit and placed the contents safely inside. Only then did Roberto clear his throat softly.

“The battery of tests confirms her physiology is completely compatible to yours, Leo. We do know that she’s healthy so far and should be able to bear children. Felice has been doing more research into Lynx’s background, too.

“As you know, Leo, it wasn’t an easy search. She was adopted so early in life. Finding out that her real parents were both of the ancient bloodline took some complicated research. Still, the answers have confirmed what we originally expected. Lynx is the biological daughter of Enid Persia and Sing Young. As you know, their unique genetic footprints are unmistakable.”

“Well, I was certainly expecting as much,” Leo said. “I feel powerfully drawn to Lynx. I’ve never experienced this kind of need before,” Leo admitted ruefully, “and my protective instincts are going into overdrive. What if I had lost her, Roberto?”

Roberto brow furrowed, but his next revelation intrigued Leo. “The research we did on Lynx, well, that’s not all, Leo. Lynx has a brother from what our research garnered. Enid and Sing, her natural parents, had a boy and a girl only a few years apart. But here’s where it gets interesting.”

Leo’s ears pricked.

“Lynx and her brother work with the DEA. It’s a little group you might recall.” Roberto waited.

Enlightenment began to slowly dawn for Leo. Roberto quietly confirmed his suspicions. “As per your stories, Leo, I’m quite familiar with the extremes of this team’s loyalty. No agent of theirs could go missing for long without a heavy search, as you know.”

Roberto paused, and took a sip from his water bottle. “Obviously, someone else, aside from us, was looking for Lynx. They almost got lucky despite Lynx being a COBRA operative.”

Leo listened in disbelief. He couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“Does the name Shaunessy ring a bell? Daniel Shaunessy is Lynx’s brother, Leo. Sound familiar yet? How about ironic? Some of her closest childhood friends come with some pretty interesting and impressive family histories, as well. Some friends you might consider mutual, mutual as in COBRA. They come from your old team, Leo.”

Leo was still trying to digest the news. He had never, ever expected his new life to converge with his past one.

Before they could finish the conversation, the timer on one of Roberto’s many projects began to beep. The rest of their discussion could wait.

Roberto’s news had stunned him. Leo paced back and forth. He felt like a lion needing to prowl. But overriding that need was his need to get back to Lynx, and now.

After hearing that piece of news, Leo knew that he needed to make some calls very soon. He wasn’t sure he liked the implications of this new information, but what choice did he really have? If he were Daniel, her brother, he’d be looking for Lynx.

Daniel, as he recalled, had a big soft spot for family. But his soft spot extended to loyal friends and co-workers alike. Daniel must be devastated over his sister’s disappearance.

Daniel would be pulling out every stop to find Lynx. With COBRA’s backing, the search probably wouldn’t take long, either.

Leo had planned on notifying any of Lynx’s family or contacts once he had time to help Lynx process the information of her Imatu heritage. Once Lynx was convinced that her heritage was important, surely he could convince Lynx of his importance to her.

The fear that Lynx might leave clawed at him.

Resigned to getting the call to Daniel out of the way first, Leo headed for the porch before returning to Lynx. Sliding into a chair, Leo pulled out his phone.

It was time to reconnect. Daniel answered on the second ring. At the sound of Daniel's voice, old memories rekindled and history stirred to life.

Leo hesitated, but quickly recovered. "Hey, Daniel, it's been a long time."

The silence on the phone was deafening for a moment, but then Daniel blurted out, "Leo, is that really you? How long has it been now, two, three years?"

"Too long, believe me, I know, buddy." Leo stood up and started to pace. He thought better on his feet.

"Well, what's up with you these days, and can we expect or hope to see your return to COBRA anytime soon?" Leo had been expecting the question, but hearing Daniel express it left Leo's throat tight. How could he answer that? Remembering the importance of what he was calling for, he got right to the point instead.

"Uh, Daniel, I have some more important news I need to break to you right now." Leo's tone went serious.

"I'm all ears, Leo," Daniel said. "Do elaborate."

"Learning new words, I hear," Leo quipped, before getting serious again. "Daniel, I know about what happened to Lynx, your sister. I just wanted to let you know that she is safe and recovering here at my ranch. She was almost abducted. I brought her here to protect her. She's resting and safe. She was sporting quite a bump on the head, but she's doing much better now." Leo heard Daniel's swift intake of breath and knew Daniel had a lot to process. He waited.

Finally, Daniel spoke. His voice sounded broken, but relieved. "Leo, you can't possibly know how relieved I am to hear Lynx is okay and with you. I'm going to want the full story later, you understand. Unfortunately, I have somewhere I have to be within an impossibly short amount of time. Hold on a sec" Daniel said.

The sound of Daniel, a bad-ass COBRA agent, blowing his nose in the background made Leo smile. So, the news had made the big man cry. But Daniel's next remarks got Leo's full attention.

"Leo, Craig is the closest agent to you. In fact, we parted ways just a short while ago. He was as upset as I was that our last lead didn't pan out. I'm sure Craig will be more than happy to pick up Lynx and see you, as well. To be honest, it would relieve my mind. I can't wait to see her and bring her home. So, what's your address, Leo?"

Leo had expected that. He rattled off the address to the ranch for Daniel. Damn, he'd have to work fast if he wanted to convince Lynx to stay or her brother to let her.

"Daniel, Lynx probably should rest for a few days. She did come damn close to sustaining a concussion," Leo hedged.

Daniel agreed. "That's fine, she can rest for as long as she needs, but I know Craig's going to want to check on her, and hey, I'd love to come out and see your place, Leo. Hey, Leo, you do remember Marozi, don't you?" Daniel joked.

Leo and Craig had been partners, good ones. There wasn't much chance of that.

Leo laughed. "How could I forget Marozi, man? I haven't aged that much. How is he doing these days, Daniel? I feel bad about not staying in better touch with him, or you."

"He's doing pretty well, Leo. I think he'll be doing much better, though, when he hears the news that Lynx is okay. Marozi's been going a little bit nuts ever since Lynx disappeared. He'll be as happy and relieved as I am that Lynx is okay and safe with you. I'll inform him of your and Lynx's whereabouts. I'm sure you'll be getting a visit from Craig as soon as he can get there. Well, I need to run, Leo, but I'll be talking to you very soon."

"All right, Daniel, good talking to you, too. Bye, then." Leo flipped his phone shut. He knew better than to argue with Daniel when he went into commando mode. Daniel was used to snapping out

orders. He was nearly always team leader out in the field. Leo didn't need to set off on a bad foot with him now, either. Hell, Commando Bitch was his mate's brother. Leo chuckled, remembering the nickname his teammates and him had occasionally teased Daniel with.

He'd deal with Craig after he arrived, that part should be easy enough. They'd worked together pretty well before, he couldn't imagine not being able to negotiate with his former partner. But right now, it was time to go check in on Lynx.

Leo padded back into the house and then into the door of Lynx's room. He wasn't expecting to find Lynx almost at the door as he entered. Deftly, his arm slipped under hers, bearing her weight up again. Lynx's eyes were wide as saucers, big in her too-pale face.

Lynx leaned against him, breathing heavily. She was unsteady, shaky. Her heart was pounding, beating against his. She clutched at him for support.

Lynx whispered against his neck, "What's wrong with me? I feel odd, almost feverish, but I'm not. I keep having these...dreams," she finally admitted. Tears had gathered in her eyes and threatened to fall. She stared up at him. She blinked and a tear trickled down her cheek.

Leo held Lynx securely against him. Then he bent slowly, draping his other arm beneath her legs. He lifted her until she was cradled fully against his large and solid chest. He could hear her heart hammering against his. It beat a staccato rhythm right through the silky shirt Lynx wore, courtesy of Felice.

Lynx licked her lips. Leo's eyes were drawn in, magnetized to the delicate movement. His fingers itched to run through the silky mass of hair. He wanted to touch her and let it slip through his fingers as he lowered his head to hers. He wanted to savage her trembling lower lip. He wanted. Period.

He carried Lynx back to the big bed and laid her back down carefully.

But that look she gave him, it was tempting him past all sanity. She looked so innocent and sweet, but there was raw sexuality humming in his blood. His control was being sorely tested. He wanted to devour her, take her for his.

Leo had to force himself not to rip her clothes off. Instead, he sat down beside her on the bed. He cupped her chin, lifting her face to him.

Lynx sighed. Her lashes drifted shut for a second, but Leo had seen. Her eyes betrayed more than she knew. Instinctually, his mouth sought hers. His head lowered, his hand lifted her, and his lips crashed down.

Heart in his throat, Leo plundered. This was the mouth that tempted him. The taste of Lynx's kiss hit his senses like a sledgehammer, immediate and devastating. A groan climbed his throat. Both his heart and soul echoed through it. He lost the war. He couldn't wait anymore.

He kissed his way down Lynx's face as he held her to him. The compulsion to be with her was too strong. He had to touch, taste, and take her. He couldn't pull away. His hands slid of their own accord under her shirt and over her delicate shoulders as he stroked the sides of her arms, murmuring the ritual Imatu words of love and blessing as he stroked.

"Earth mother, come bless this, our union of body, heart, and soul. Goddess of creation, make it fruitful and may love forever bind it."

With a groan, he sealed the ancient blessing with a kiss. Hungry, he moved over Lynx. He reveled in the little gasps she gave, her sigh of surrender as he unbuttoned her shirt between them.

Looking down at her, Leo could feel Lynx's trust as she submitted to him, and he gloried in it.

~ CatPurr ~

She really should protest, but his husky words made her ache with longing. She wanted to belong to him. As he nibbled his way down her neck and over her sensitive collarbone, heat spread. A wildfire of sensations burned, overcame any last resistance she might have had. His mouth teased at her nipple with warm, easy licks. Leo nipped, tugged at the lacy material of her bra with his teeth. He laved the swollen tip and retreated.

How was she supposed to think? Lynx whimpered at his retreat.

Leo purred deep in his throat. The sound made her shiver. He slid the fabric away from her breast and lowered his mouth to purr again. The hum rippled through her body. Waves of pure pleasure arced straight to her pussy.

Her hands tunneled into his hair. She could feel her panties growing damp. The sheer lace there felt unbearably coarse and provocative against her sensitive, throbbing flesh. Her clit was a swollen bud of sensations. Every nerve in her body seemed connected to it.

Lynx's throat constricted as Leo released her aching nipple to move toward her indented naval. His tongue's foray incited a long, slow burn. She gripped him to her, guided him lower, need building.

When Leo found her center and dipped his head to it, her hips arched to meet him. Wicked, rough, his tongue lashed at her. She moaned as he suckled the sensitive bud. She fought to quell the rising cream in her, to no avail. His tongue scored the slit of her pussy and penetrated. The sensation had her hips lifting again, but she needed so much more.

~Cat Cream ~

Leo lifted his head from her. Her juice was still on his lips. He groaned, his voice gone husky with need. "Your pussy's silky hot and wet for me. Kitten, you taste exquisite."

Lynx arched to meet him.

He found her with his tongue again, felt the flutter of her around him. Lynx moaned and more of her essence spilled to his hungry tongue. He flicked it over her clit in a long stroke and then suckled the little knot of flesh gently, experimentally. When he nipped lightly at the aroused bud again, more hot cream spilled to meet his tongue. His groan mingled with hers.

The sounds she made ratcheted his already heightened senses a notch higher, if possible. He was already hypersensitive to Lynx's growing hunger. It echoed his. His body responded readily to her, naturally reacting to her body's needs. His cock was hard and rubbing against the stiff confines of his jeans. Leo shifted and put his hands about Lynx's hips. His rigid cock ached for the relief only her little pussy could give.

His dick was brick hard. Just the feel of Lynx's core pulsing on his tongue had sent his blood pulsing in rhythm with hers. The same music played for them both. Desire strummed through him, his body attuned to hers. He had to play her. He wanted to hear her sing.

She writhed under his tongue, twisting. His fingers splayed the folds of her wet pussy. He bent to feed more from the swollen button of her clit, suckling the little nub deep into his mouth. She bucked under him. He didn't want to, couldn't stop. He was ravenous. Ecstasy poured onto his taste-buds with every sweep of his tongue. A drumbeat deep inside him began to pound, the rhythm wild and untamed. She wasn't fighting this. He was glad. He didn't want her to.

He lowered his head, finding more of her sweet, hot essence. He rubbed a finger through her, coating it. Slowly, he breached the entrance of her slickened labia.

He slid a second finger to join the first. She was tight, damn tight. She wasn't quite ready, but she was a feast spread before him. Leo lapped greedily at the answering honey that combed his tongue. The taste of Lynx only spurred his appetite. He could eat her up until she

screamed in satisfaction. He wouldn't stop until she was weak as a kitten.

Lynx moaned and whimpered.

Good, getting there...

Leo licked the sweet spill. The rough of his tongue was smothered in warm syrup pouring straight from Lynx. His kitten was devastating his senses. Maybe it was time to devastate her.

He pressed his fingers up, found the perfect spot and rubbed. He slid in and out, rhythmically filling her. He went back to suckling as he fingered her in tight circles. The clench of her creamy opening destroyed him. Each time he withdrew, Lynx bowed to his hand, her body pleading to be filled again.

"More," she moaned, as he slid his fingers free. "More. Please." Lynx arched up. She begged so pretty.

Leo lost his breath for a second.

Then, in a lithe movement, he backed off the bed and removed his jeans. His hard cock sprung free of the restraining material with a life of its own. It was pulsing towards her.

He saw Lynx's eyes widen.

In another fluid motion, he moved back to her and lowered his mouth to hers.

He wanted Lynx know her flavor on his tongue. Tangling his tongue to hers, he gripped her tighter. He took her mouth slowly, building speed. He loved her tentative little tongue. He bruised her lips with the softest of nips. He could hear her breath had grown harsh. It came in sweet, sharp gasps now. Trailing kisses and stinging licks down her neck, he rubbed his cock against her thighs. His shaft throbbed as the slick head of it pulsed rigid, unyielding at her core.

She was liquid heat, her pussy was dripping wet. Leo spread Lynx gently. He nudged her legs apart. The head of his cock was thick against her pussy's creamy slit.

Leo tried slowly working his way inside. Feeling her body's resistance, he bent to her ear and whispered, "It's all right, kitten, relax."

Lynx whimpered, but nodded.

He pushed forward, an inch deeper. He was going as slow as he could. It was like holding his breath when he needed air to breathe. He fought the urge to thrust and thrust hard.

Lynx's mewl of frustration spurred him on. Leo hovered a second, then plunged. His cock thickened even as her pussy sheathed him. He gritted his teeth.

He heard Lynx's quick intake of breath. She twisted under him with a keening sob as the barrier of her virgin flesh gave way to him. He lowered his mouth to hers catching her moan, reassuring her, even as his cock sank slowly in.

It was a long, slow, and tortuous slide. Once imbedded to the hilt, he stilled, letting Lynx adjust to him. At her needy, ragged sound, he rocked against her, gently at first. He lightly ground his pelvis against her clit at each thrust. He wanted the pleasure to whip through her. He was damn well flogged by it.

"I've wanted to fuck you so bad, kitten. I've thought of little else since first I saw you," He groaned in her ear on a thrust.

"Little else?" she shot back between a moan and a hiss. "Gotta say, that wasn't so little."

He smiled, worked his cock deeper again. She might not know it, but he was just getting started.

Lynx whimpered as he powered into her on another thrust. He bent to her breast, laving her nipple to a hard spike against his tongue. Electric shocks of pure pleasure ran straight to his dick when her muscles clenched him. White-hot needles of pleasure clawed him.

He released the sensitized nipple to better capture her gasps. With a groan of his own, Leo thrust harder, sensing Lynx's renewed responsiveness as her nails raked a blood-trail at his back. At each throb of his cock inside her, her body would spasm in response.

Leo withdrew slowly, sending acute sensations flooding over him again. Lynx writhed under him. The absence of her pussy's milking grip on his cock was intolerable. Leo plunged down to meet her upward arch.

He felt her pussy tightening with each thrust. The incandescent feeling built, burned. Each time he withdrew, her body rose to meet his. She wanted filled. He couldn't have stopped if he tried.

"Harder, please, now," Her voice rang in his head.

Leo responded, his thrust grew faster, deeper. *"Baby, you're going to make me blow,"* he gritted out. His cock was full to bursting.

"I'm going to explode inside you soon, baby." His groan echoed his restraint.

"Just don't stop," Lynx bit out. Leo smiled and withdrew to her gasp.

But only for as long as it took to flip her over.

~ PussyWhipped ~

Lynx didn't have time to form a protest as Leo pushed her hips high in the air. His strong muscled thighs nudged hers apart farther.

She felt his dominant presence behind her. It excited her. It made her nervous.

"So, what are doing to me?" she squeaked out, licking her lips as she looked back at him.

He only drew her legs higher and plunged deep as he answered, *"Fucking you hard, loving you more."*

Desire whipped through Lynx, sweet and sharp. Leo lowered his head. His lips were at her shoulder now. His teeth scraped slowly. At his growl, she felt the piercing bite and his cock as it filled her.

Heat and light exploded through Lynx. The pleasure burst over her in waves. She bucked, screaming as she shattered fast and hard. Stars danced behind her eyelids as her world collapsed. Her body fragmented and was reformed, pulsing with energy.

Spasms rocked her. She could feel every nuance of Leo's stone-hard, thick shaft inside her when her pussy clamped down. His every thrust set off new contractions.

Lynx felt the shudder that seized Leo. He rode her hard. At his roar, shivers coursed over her. She felt the hot blasts as he began to erupt deep inside her.

Then, a different sound of pleasure burned in her ears.

Somehow, Leo had only grown larger upon his release. Lynx's sensitivity was heightened. The sensation of him rocking gently inside her, still swollen and pulsing, was so exquisite, it was almost painful. Leo's cock curved, extended inside her. And more small contractions shook her.

Breathing hard, she was damn near panting. Sensuous aftershocks still rippled over her. Leo nuzzled, almost lazily at her neck. His tongue curled over and over the small mark he'd left before where his teeth had pierced her flesh in a lover's bite. But through her tremors, Lynx could've sworn she heard the man purring.

Her pussy purred back, bathing his cock in more cream. The sensitive folds were stretched tight by his swollen shaft.

She had to writhe. Sheer pleasure forced her to move. As his cock slid out, it hooked against the pleasure spot.

Leo drove hard and deep. Lynx's felt the tension, the pleasure building again, only higher and sweeter than before. His every thrust set off new charges, shockwaves to sensitized nerves and flesh. Her inner muscles clamped down on his cock harder with each tremor.

Surging faster, Leo growled. On every thrust, the swollen crest of his cock hooked against her pleasure button perfectly. The orgasm hit her like a tidal wave. She screamed as the climax hit her full force.

"Here we go, I've got you, baby." Leo's voice in her ear registered, barely. Leo came with a roar, but Lynx was already flying.

Semi-conscious, Lynx was glad for Leo's muscular arms that kept her from flying apart. Glad too that afterwards, Leo washed her gently. The heaviness of utter relaxation and tiredness seeped through

her, bone deep. In Leo's warm embrace, Lynx couldn't deny the lethargy trying to claim her any longer. She slid, purring, into a deep and dreamless sleep.

~ CatFood ~

It wasn't a purr she first heard when she next awoke hours later. It was a growl. Lynx tentatively opened her eyes. Leo was staring at her with hypnotic golden eyes. But, his expression was definitely amused. He had his large hand draped possessively across her and around her back. It tickled. This time the growl her stomach made was louder.

"I see you've worked up quite an appetite, little cat," Leo mused as he stroked the curve of her spine with his large hand. The calluses on his fingers stoked shivers in their path. But hunger of another kind distracted Lynx.

When had she last eaten? The food she'd had last seemed like a distant memory now, and a hazy one at that. "I could eat a horse," she grumbled.

Leo just chuckled. "Well, Lynx, I won't make you go that far. I'm sure we can come up with a better meal than that for you, kitten."

"A little meat would not go amiss," she quipped.

"Let's get something in your stomach first." Leo laughed, then purred as she ran her tongue across his nipple hungrily. *"I've got the feeling it'll be safer for me that way. You might just take a bite-"*

The thought was never completed. Lynx let her teeth sink in delicately, scoring a clear mimicry of his earlier mark on her shoulder. Leo went instantly hard. His cock strained towards her, engorged.

"Come here, kitten." This time Leo growled. He dragged her up against him. Thoughts of food were put on the backburner. Hungry for him, Lynx's hands moved over his flat, muscled stomach. She stroked down the hard ridges of his thighs. She reached for his heavy, hardened sex with both hands, stroking him reverently.

Leo groaned into her caress.

Lynx moved lower, intent on her prize. Leo's eyes smoldered with barely restrained passion. Lynx coyly looked up at him and then descended to the deep purple head crowning his cock. Her tongue teased, flicking over the smooth surface in soft strokes. She lapped at the drop of moisture already rimming the slit, tasting, tormenting.

His next groan was louder. His head was thrown back, golden hair rippling past his shoulders, even as his hands gripped and tangled in her hair. He growled when her mouth closed over him.

Lynx drew the long length of his erection deeper into her mouth.

His cock swelled in her mouth. Lynx struggled to take all of him, loving the feel of him pulsing against her tongue. She loved the spicy hot taste of him. She loved how he filled her mouth.

"Your mouth is sinful, Lynx. It's wicked. Hot as hell," Leo gasped.

She closed her mouth over his cock wetly and moved upwards again, only to plunge down again.

Lynx wasn't through. She wanted to see him lose control.

Groaning, he slid into the heat of her mouth, fucking it slow and easy.

"Lynx, I love how your lips press my cock so tightly, and then you open so wide for me. I love the rhythm of your tongue curling around my dick. It milks my organ like fucking music, kitten," Leo groaned harshly.

"I love your hands and tongue on my dick," he growled, "but keep that up, kitten, and I won't be able to stop my cock from coming down your hungry, little throat."

His eyes closed, his hands guided her to him, even as he warned her. She could taste him, he was close. She felt the oncoming surge of his ejaculation as it swelled within him, and his cock thickened.

Lynx purred against his shaft as she took him deep. His cock jerked. She felt the first hard spurt hit her tongue. She swallowed as he stroked in and out, greedily. Satisfied, she lapped up the cream Leo had made for her.

Her efforts were not fully successful. Leo erupted in a long, last spurt that marked her cheek as he thrust a final time.

“Now, that’s a sight I wouldn’t mind seeing every day of my life,” Leo said, his voice hoarse. “You’re a beautiful mess, kitten.” He gently traced a delicate symbol through it, before taking a tissue from the nightstand and wiping it away.

Lynx moved under him then, seeking his mouth on her. Leo parted her legs, more than willing. Leo’s pleasurable assault peaked as she came with raw moans and breathless cries. As the orgasm broke over her, Leo moved up, covering her. He swallowed her last scream.

~ *CuriousCat* ~

Just outside, Craig pulled up in his sleek, black Mustang beside the call-box at the entrance gate to the Lascaux Ranch. Interesting sigil on the gate by the Lascaux name, he noted, intrigued. He had seen some very similar ones growing up. At least while Gramps was still alive. His grandpa had stayed out on the Cherokee reservation. Fond memories drifted back as Craig punched in a series of numbers and waited impatiently.

Chapter 6

Leo grimaced as he reached over and picked up the obnoxiously jangling phone. “Yes, Demar, I’ll be right down. Hold on.” Leo hung up and quickly pulled on his jeans, a shirt, and some shoes. He bent to kiss Lynx, “Kitten, we’ve got company. I’ll take care of it. You can rest or come downstairs for something to eat when you feel up to it.”

Lynx murmured a barely audible, “Mmm hmm.” Leo grinned as he straightened and left.

Demar was the ranch’s main security guard. He stood well over 6’3 and was two hundred and fifty pounds of pure muscle. He seemed to gleam black as satin against the door. Leo could trust Demar to remain poised and ready to remove any threat to the Lascaux Ranch or its feline family.

His expression did not give much away as he gave the order for the ranch’s large entrance gate to be opened. Demar looked skeptical, though. The black Mustang pulled up the ranch’s semi-circular drive, and Craig Marozi stepped out.

“Relax, Demar. Marozi and I are old friends,” Leo said. He gave Demar the look and nod that said everything is fine. Demar managed a half-smile towards Craig and muttered a greeting, of sorts. Then, Demar turned and strode away, his rifle slung close to his side.

“So, Leo, where’d you pick up the new tough guy?” Craig commented. Leo slapped Craig on the back, and then led him up the steps to the ranch house’s wide porch. Tropical plantings of hibiscus, palm, and fern surrounded the porch in elegant, manicured profusion. Craig paused as Leo considered the question.

“Uh, we discovered Demar a couple of years ago when we went to South America on a trip. His parents were former missionaries there, believe it or not. So, how about you, Craig? I take it Daniel was tied up on a lead, or he’d have come with you. But, hey, it’s great to see you again. I haven’t seen or heard from you since our rendezvous with that slime, the one we took down in Miami. That would have been right before the trip when Roberto and Felice introduced me to Demar.”

“Yeah, you left the COBRA unit right after we wrapped up the Miami drug sting,” Craig didn’t prevaricate. “You just up and left. So, tell me, what was so goddamned important that you’d leave your combat brothers at COBRA for?”

“Well, we do have a lot of catching up to do, that’s for sure, Craig. But first, welcome to my humble abode.” Leo motioned Craig through the huge set of entrance doors. The doors were studded by some rather large, ferocious looking stone lions and two very ornate lion head door knockers.

Craig hadn’t changed much. But, Leo noted, Craig’s brows were drawn together. That, tempered with a habitual hand through his hair, signaled that Craig had some serious questions.

Leo had become attuned to the body language of his COBRA comrades even before their stint together as top agents. Many of them had previously served together as Army Rangers.

He and Craig knew better than most the faith it took to put your life on the line every day and trust each other. They knew the benefits, too. Neither of them would be alive today if not for that trust. They had both saved each other’s neck more than once. They had been close once, closer than many brothers.

Craig turned the corner and stepped down into the large sunken living room just off the main foyer. Leo watched Craig’s reaction as he came face to face with Lynx. Craig’s whole face lit up. Hell, his smile could’ve cranked up the damn generator it was so big.

Lynx did look good in those tight blue jeans.

Then, Craig's eyes traveled over the small yellow tank top that left her lower stomach bare. But, Leo could see Lynx's hazel eyes had gone wide. She looked shocked and pale. As Leo watched, she swayed unsteadily.

He moved towards her with unnatural speed.

He probably should've mentioned to her about the call he'd made earlier, the one where he had talked to her brother. Hell, he probably should have mentioned Craig was on his way. But, he'd been kind of busy. Lynx was much too distracting. Around Lynx, his brain seemed to migrate south of the border, right below his belt.

Before Lynx had the time to fall to the flagstone floor beneath her, Leo caught her up in his arms. He scooped her right up and nestled her against his broad chest. Craig was barely a second behind him. Apparently, Craig had been prepared to catch her, too.

"Are you okay, Lynx? Leo, I thought you said she was doing better." Craig's words trailed off as he followed Leo to the sofa nearest them.

Leo shook his head as he gently sat down with Lynx still on his lap. Grabbing the phone, he just said, "Not now, Marozi, not now. I need to get Felice to bring the smelling salts."

Lynx gave him a look of censure. "Oh, no, you don't, Leo. I'm fine. I was surprised, that's all, and maybe just a little dizzy. I probably need to eat soon, though." Lynx quirked her eyebrow at him, and he had to suppress a grin. She was sure enough bossy and headstrong, not to mention a bit of a smart-ass. He loved it.

But then Lynx scooted off his lap. She reached out to Craig and Craig pulled her into a big bear hug.

A soft growl vibrated low in his throat as he watched Lynx and Craig embrace. Leo choked it back. Craig was like a brother to him. Lynx was his lover and mate, but they still barely knew one another.

Just how close were Craig and Lynx, Leo wondered? Lynx had been a virgin, he knew that. That in itself was truly remarkable. Lynx had remained untouched. She had remained a virgin at an age and

time period where many people took lovers indiscriminately. But, he didn't know the extent of Lynx's feelings for Craig.

A vivid memory flashed back to him. It had been one of his last and happier encounters with Craig, at least. Leo, Craig, and other fellow COBRA operatives had successfully captured Magellan Cervantes, the Miami drug lord. They had come damn near close to dying during that sting operation. But Craig had pulled him back just in time before the Cervantes lab had erupted in a fireball. After their mission was wrapped up satisfactorily, Leo went back to Craig's apartment for a celebratory beer.

Even now, the memory had the power to shake Leo. Craig's girlfriend at the time had been a petite blonde with grey-blue eyes, pert, medium-sized breasts, toned legs, and a killer smile. Kelly and Craig had become fairly seriously involved.

Leo lost himself in the reverie. It all began after one of the infamous touch football games that their captains would throw, usually around holidays. That year, it was around Thanksgiving, as Leo recalled.

Slater's team and Donovan's team had met for the inevitable game involving heavy helpings of macho bluster and showmanship. The field had been slippery after the recent rains. It was not an unusual weather pattern for that time of year, especially considering there had been a few tropical depressions late in the year and a smaller hurricane that had hit farther up the coast. The teams, however, had been raring to go.

The surging testosterone levels were evident everywhere on the field, with the one notable exception of a female agent on Donovan's team at the time. It was head-to-head in one of the closest games in recent history of their competition. That's when Donovan's daughter had walked out to the sidelines to stand by her father. She'd just returned from being away at college days before.

Leo could still remember how the sight of Kelly had affected him then. He had bulldozed his way through several more touchdowns.

He'd eventually made it over to Captain Dane Donovan's side, and that of his daughter Kelly.

Craig had beaten him there. From the beginning, Kelly's heart had belonged to Craig. Craig and Kelly had been inseparable from their first look at one another. Everyone speculated they were headed to the altar, and sooner, rather than later.

But that one night, the three of them had talked and laughed as they sat around the table eating the gourmet meal Kelly had cooked and served. Leo remembered Kelly and Craig seemed happy together. They had both insisted on breaking out a bottle of some rather delicious vintage wine. Just to celebrate the conclusion of another successful mission, they said.

It wasn't going to be a beer and chips evening with his teammates after all. He hadn't minded. It had been wonderful to finally relax after all the tense months on the trail of Cervantes. He'd been a bit surprised after dinner, though. Kelly had sat down in Craig's lap and kissed him. Not exactly the peck on the cheek, in public kiss. Craig and Lynx were doing the full-on tongue mambo.

Leo had gotten up to leave. He figured it was a not-so-subtle hint. Kelly had reached out, grabbed his arm, and pulled him back down to the couch by her and Craig.

She was astride Craig's lap, but Leo couldn't forget the utter sensuality stamped on her face as she'd turned to kiss him. The same way she had just kissed Craig. Implications aside, it had still been utterly shocking to him.

Leo remembered searching Craig's face for any sign of anger, disturbance, or jealousy. He'd realized then, this was not entirely unexpected. Maybe it was even planned. Leo would have never intruded on Craig's territory. Yet, the fires he saw banked in his friend's eyes were anything but hostile.

And Kelly's invitation had been much too sensual to resist. Not that Leo wanted to.

Her kiss had been languorous, and then Kelly had slid both her hands down his chest. Leo remembered how she tugged his white tee out of his jeans, adroitly maneuvered it over his head. It was, he had to admit, a turn-on. Kelly had taken charge and initiated everything between them.

Leo recognized the burn and flicker in Craig's eyes. He enjoyed watching Kelly's seductive invitation. Kelly took what she wanted.

Craig had joined in then and slipped Kelly's silky wisp of a blouse over her head. Craig's fingers had followed the outline of her satiny little bra as he kissed his way down the side of Kelly's arched neck.

Leo had never been a voyeur before. But it was damn titillating. Then, somehow, Leo recalled, he and Craig had both wound up wrapped around Kelly. Theirs, a mutual frenzy of need, with Kelly between them on the large plush couch.

Kelly had arced between him and Craig. She had been insatiable for both of them. After that, it was inevitable, Leo supposed. They'd all wound up in Craig and Kelly's bed together, fulfilling some of the wildest fantasies he'd never contemplated having before. It had been one of the most intense sexual experiences he'd ever known.

Yet, the recollection still had the power to haunt him, even now. Leo would bet the memories haunted Craig, as well. A mere week after their ménage occurred, Kelly had died in a fiery car crash.

No matter what Kelly's death had done to him personally, Leo knew Craig damn near crashed and burned that day, too. Hell, Craig had mourned for two long years. Craig had retreated deep into himself. No one had been able to truly lift Craig out of his depression. Craig didn't help. He'd distanced himself from everyone. The Craig he'd known often didn't seem there, even when he was present.

Craig's work ultimately saved him. It had been their next mission to route the rest of the Cervantes drug cartel. The same cartel that had rebounded under Cervantes's equally evil son, Donatello. Craig came close to dead on that mission. But this time, Leo had Craig's back.

Leo had mourned Kelly's death, only he mourned alone. Seeing his friend on the brink of the precipice like that had been frightening. His own grief had quickly turned to concern over his friend's pain. Granted, he'd cared for Kelly, as a friend and one-time lover. But his emotions concerning Kelly had not run quite as deep as he imagined Craig's had. He was never in love with Kelly.

He and Craig watched each other's backs for many years. On every mission, they were a team. It was deeply ingrained in their credo as Army men, as Rangers, even more so.

Perhaps the after-shocks of Kelly's death were more subtle for him. Still, Leo knew that he'd never been the same afterwards, either. Mired in his own grief and despairing for Craig's, he had experienced his first shift. It was Leo's first experience as an Imatu.

The shock had been huge, but especially in the wake of everything that had just transpired. Fortunately, by that time, the COBRA operatives had wrapped up their mission. They had taken down the remainders of the Cervantes Cartel. Leo had taken the opportunity to go on an extended leave.

Damn, had it been nearly two years ago when he'd first met Roberto and Felice? So many changes in so little time, Leo pondered. The life he'd all but left behind had turned up on his doorstep again. But it was good to see his friend. Hell, it was good to see his partner again.

How well did Craig know Lynx? Had they meant something serious to one another beyond Craig being Lynx's brother's good friend? Would Craig and his former relationship with Lynx change anything or everything?

Leo struggled to contain his thoughts while he watched the touching reunion between his close friend and his new mate. Irony of all ironies, the two people closest to him obviously knew and cared for each other.

"So, how did you manage to rescue Lynx, and why did you bring her to your ranch?" The question brought Leo out of reverie. Leo

cleared his throat, buying a limited reprieve before replying. He considered how best to frame his answer. Clearly, Craig wanted explanations now.

“We had to act fast, Craig,” Leo began. “We knew we had to get her out of there before whoever tried to take Lynx the first time returned to try again.” Leo hesitated. “We’d been searching for Lynx for some time. Roberto, Felice, and I learned that some old friends of my family, Enid Persia and Sing Young, had at least one infant daughter. When they died tragically, no baby was recovered. I had to know what happened. It only seemed right.

“It wasn’t easy to inveigle information on an infant that just went missing. We finally began searching adoption records privately as a last resort. Our persistence paid off when we discovered a girl who was adopted within the right time period by a couple known as Sean and Heather Shaunessy.”

Craig still looked puzzled. Leo could tell his answer had only brought up more questions.

“Why were you so desperately looking for this Enid Persia and Sing Young’s child to begin with?” Craig demanded.

“Yes, that’s a question I’d like to know the answer to, as well,” Lynx said. Her tone was curious. But, Leo could also hear a thread of peevishness. He inwardly groaned. Obviously, a healthy Lynx didn’t mean a docile one.

Leo knew explaining things in depth could be tricky for him. Lynx’s eyes were widened, almost innocently as she waited for his answer. He needed to carefully measure his words. Lynx’s Imatu senses would help her sense an untruth. He knew better than to lie.

“As I mentioned, Enid Persia and Singh Young were close friends of my parents at one time. It was just important that I find their children, find what happened to them. When I did finally find you, Lynx, it was obvious someone else was looking for you, too. They, without doubt, intended to hurt you or worse. So to keep you safe, I brought you here.”

Leo took a breath and went on, "I brought you here to guard you. Home was the one place I knew that I could protect you easier. I didn't realize immediately you were Daniel's baby sister. I never imagined I'd been that close to what I'd searched for all along."

Leo watched closely, gauging Craig and Lynx's reaction to his words. As he had expected, Lynx's nose slightly flared. It would be obvious only to a sensitive observer, someone looking for it like him. Lynx was, consciously or not, ascertaining the truth of his assertions. Leo was actually thrilled to see Lynx's instinctive responses.

He controlled his grin. It wouldn't do to have Craig or Lynx want to know what he thought was so damn funny and cute.

"Okay," Craig said. "I can accept that. It makes sense you couldn't have known that. So, did you realize you had rescued a new agent?" Craig winked at the now reclining Lynx.

"Wow, and yes, I'm impressed," muttered Leo, inwardly groaning again. That could put a slight kink in things. No, that little nugget of information didn't make matters any easier.

The dots slowly began to connect for Leo. His excitement at finding Lynx must have short-circuited the logic patterns in his brain. Goddess.

Daniel, Lynx's brother, would also have to be a shifter by blood.

Leo felt a growing excitement at the thought. If Special Agent Daniel Shaunessy was a natural member of the pride, it would only strengthen their numbers. The larger their numbers, the greater any Imatu's chances for survival were. Every member brought new strengths, gifts, and hope for the future of their kind. Sadly, those numbers had dwindled considerably over just the last few years.

"Daniel," Craig spoke suddenly. "Hey, that reminds me, I should've contacted Captain Slater by now like Daniel asked me to. Slater will be pissed if he's the last to know Lynx is fine. Not to mention, I should've already called Daniel back, too. He'll be relieved to know I'm here with Lynx and you."

Craig ran a hand through his hair and admitted, “Daniel was getting pretty desperate. Our lead on the packing company in Sarasota turned into a deserted dead end. When I dropped him back off at McDill, I thought briefly I was going to see a grown man cry. I thought Daniel might, too,” Craig added with a wink at Lynx.

Craig never took his eyes off her. “Lynx, I’ve never seen Daniel so worried. But then Daniel was as happy as I’ve ever heard him after Leo called to say you were at his ranch, safe and sound.

“Hey, will you two excuse me for five minutes while I go make a few quick phone calls?”

“Sure, Craig, use the deck outside if you’d like some privacy,” Leo offered, gesturing towards the large, but plant-secluded, patio.

~ When *Cat’s* Away ~

The deck was replete with luxurious seating. Lush plants and vegetation overlooked a beautifully delineated landscape. What else didn’t he know about Leo? Craig couldn’t help but wonder. Leo had never mentioned an interest in gardening. Smiling, he shook his head at the unusual thought. Craig dialed Captain Slater’s number and waited for the familiar, terse voice to pick up. Damn, it was going to be a bitch explaining things this time. Slater did tolerate excuses well.

“Captain Slater, Marozi checking in, sir. Just wanted to let you know that Lynx is no longer missing. She’s staying with Leo Lascaux.” Craig listened as Slater answered, his voice rising in decibel with every word. Slater’s speeches were known to alternate between reaming and lecturing.

Slater didn’t disappoint. “Glad to hear Lynx is good, but how the hell did she wind up with one of our former operatives? And why the hell didn’t you check in an hour ago?” Slater bit out an expletive.

“Well, sir,” Craig began, “I’m still trying to ascertain the full story from Leo, but I should’ve checked in. You’re right, of course, sir.”

“You’re damn right you should have called sooner, Marozi. Don’t make it a bad habit. Call in tomorrow, and let me know what you find out.”

A few nerve-testing moments later, Craig ended the first call on his list to make the second one. *This shouldn’t be as bad,. Daniel will just be over the moon to find out that Lynx is fine and safe and unharmed, like Leo promised.*

Pacing, Craig turned and looked in through the patio’s glass doors. His breath caught in his throat at the sight of Leo kissing Lynx. That was clearly more than just a friendly kiss, one Lynx seemed to be enjoying. Shock rooted him to the spot.

Chapter 7

Craig's throat constricted into a tight knot, and his hands started sweating. The phone was all but forgotten in his vise-tight grip. His eyes were glued to the scene on the other side of the glass until he heard Daniel's voice. Daniel's words finally cut through the haze and fog that had abruptly swallowed him.

"Uh, sorry, Daniel." Craig quickly gulped in some air and forced it back into his windpipe. "I was just distracted. Didn't mean to leave you hanging."

"What is going on? Are you there yet?" Daniel was obviously getting a tad worried by the uneven conversation. But Craig was still trying to download the input in front of his eyes. He found concentrating downright difficult. Watching Leo give Lynx mouth to mouth had certainly dried out his.

Scowling, Craig swiveled around. He went to the edge of the deck and leaned over the railing, mostly so he would have something to hold onto. He needed to block himself from the sight behind him.

Craig tried to collect his thoughts. There was no use worrying Daniel. "Umm, yeah, I just got off the phone with Captain Slater. Daniel, you should know I'm here with Lynx now. She's safe and seems healthy, just like Leo said."

"How long do you think you'll be staying there, Craig? Javier and I could meet up with you and escort Lynx back home safely."

"That won't be necessary. I've got a handle on everything. Lynx seems fine. She seems to be enjoying her stay." A touch of sarcasm leaked into Craig's voice.

He could hear the tense expectancy in Daniel's voice when he asked, "So, what exactly went down? How did Lynx wind up with Leo, Craig? Leo didn't exactly get into detail before." The silence was almost palpable.

"Leo says he'd been looking for the child or children of some old family friends who'd been adopted after his friend's tragic accident. That's how he came across Lynx. The timing just worked out to her benefit when he rescued her from whoever was out for her." Craig paused before continuing. "I know Leo's been on standby with the team for years now. I thought he'd checked out for good, to tell you the truth."

He continued tersely, "When Leo showed up just in the nick of time, he saved Lynx from the would-be abductors. According to Leo, he scooped a barely conscious Lynx up and kept her from harm's way by bringing her to his ranch. He didn't know then that she was your sister or that Lynx was involved with COBRA in any way." Craig swiveled back around to scowl again at the obviously happy couple behind him.

"Well, how's that for an amazing and lucky coincidence, or should I say accidental blessing?" Daniel said, sounding relieved. "He probably didn't realize. I don't recall that Leo ever met Lynx. If they did meet in passing, it would've been when she was much younger, too. I'm just glad it was Leo who found her when he did."

Craig, however, was still slightly irritated to discover his Lynx was under Leo's protective custody and loving every minute of it, apparently. Craig cringed momentarily, but then reflected. Lynx was safe. Leo had been the one who'd, inadvertently or not, interrupted the thugs about to kidnap Lynx.

One of the thugs, according to Leo's description, had been huge. Leo and Roberto had surprised Lynx's attackers before they had a chance to abduct the barely conscious Lynx. Lynx's attackers had heard Leo and Roberto pull up and had taken off out the back door. But, at least now COBRA had a profile on the thugs, however slight.

What if Lynx's would-be abductors had succeeded? For a second, Craig felt nauseous. The thought of any harm coming to Lynx was enough to cause him heart palpitations, even now. Leo finding Lynx when he had was a good thing.

Even so, the sight of Lynx tangled on Leo's lap with Leo's tongue down her throat sure wasn't doing his ego any good right at the moment. He had only recently succumbed to the idea of his Lynx, Daniel's little sister. She was supposed to be his little hellcat. Just watching her like that, all sweet and snuggled up on his friend's lap, was making him harder than hell. It was damn frustrating, that's what it was.

It took some effort for Craig to turn back to the conversation with Daniel. "Well, they seem to be getting to know one another quite well now," Craig murmured.

"What was that?" Daniel asked.

"Oh, nothing, Daniel, don't worry. Lynx seems to be recovering well enough. She's already making new friends," Craig said, trying to keep any sarcasm in his voice from being too apparent. No use upsetting Daniel. Lynx was, after all, a grown woman, even if she seemed to have developed quite the knack for worrying her brother and the people who cared for her. Like him.

"Daniel, I'm going to stay here, for now. I've got some time off anyway, now that Lynx has been found. No need to worry. I'll keep an eye out for Lynx until you can get here." He sighed. An eyeful would've been more apt.

"Thanks, Craig. You know I will get there as soon as I'm able. Take care of Lynx, and hey, tell Leo I'll be seeing him soon to give him my thanks. Later, gator." Craig snapped his phone shut as Daniel signed off.

Well, that was more like the Daniel that Craig knew. Daniel had used their old familiar, happy sign-off. He was relieved that Daniel was feeling better. The news of his sister being found safe and

relatively unharmed was enough, Craig supposed. Daniel knew better than most what a handful Lynx could be.

Craig had to smile. It hadn't been easy for either of them trying to keep Lynx out of trouble growing up. She always had what seemed to be an instinctive knack for finding it. Either that, or trouble just naturally found her.

Craig slipped the phone into his pants pocket, ruefully considering the conversation. He had reassured Daniel he wouldn't let Lynx out of his sight. He'd promised to stay on top of Lynx. Easier said than done, huh? But then, it might just be the only way.

Craig understood how Daniel must feel. It couldn't be an easy job being Lynx's brother. Hell, he could relate. Despite his and Lynx's smart-ass bickering at times, he had never once doubted that they would always be the best of friends. He would protect her with his life.

Heading back in, the half-smile slid off of Craig's face as he turned towards the sliding glass doors.

Now, where exactly did those two get to? he wondered.

If they knew what was good for them, not far, not far at all.

Puzzled, Craig strode back into the sunken living room in search of Lynx and Leo. He was unsure what to expect. His ears led him to the ranch's oversized kitchen. He hoped that the voice he heard seductively purring, "Ooh, please, one more bite," wasn't Lynx. Craig hoped the little minx wasn't asking for what he thought she was.

To his relief, Craig found Lynx and Leo at the large wrap-around bar. It was still a much more friendly setting than the suitably sizable table and chairs that dominated the adjoining dining room. The bar's lighting was much more subtle, too. The lighting here was subdued, more intimate when compared to that of the impressive chandelier's hanging over the stately dining room.

Craig walked in on their murmured conversation. The happy pair sat, sharing what looked to be a rather large bowl of ice cream. His thoughts immediately went from cool to hot as he saw Lynx accept

yet another spoonful of the treat from Leo. Maybe it was the way she lapped that ice cream from the proffered spoon with her tiny pointed tongue. That was quite enough to reroute all the blood in his body straight to his dick. Worse, Lynx uttered a little breathy moan of pleasure when Leo leaned over to kiss the ice cream residue from her lips. The sound was damn near enough to undo any man.

Craig made a coughing sound in his throat, as if trying to clear it, to get their attention before things got any worse, for him. Not that his hard-on was going away anytime soon. Hell, how much was a man supposed to witness before he went over the edge and just jumped right in?

Lynx's eyes looked a little glazed when Leo broke off the kiss. Leo, on the other hand, looked downright pleased with himself. He looked entirely too confident, too fucking primed, and too damn happy.

Meanwhile, here he was with his heart thudding out an erratic beat. His cock throbbed with unfulfilled desire over his little minx enjoying her ice cream with Leo, his ex-partner.

Craig couldn't think about the kisses. No, he wouldn't. It was bad enough thinking about the ice cream that had dribbled down Lynx's lips like, well, like other things he could too easily think of.

"So, are guests allowed dessert?" Craig drawled out before either of them could break the silence. His eyes drank in Lynx's swollen lips. They matched her cheeks. She'd flushed bright pink at the suggestive tone of his question.

"Umm," she licked her lips again.

His cock jerked. Craig suppressed a groan.

"I'll get some for you if you like. I hope you like Bear Tracks. I sure do." At the last part, Lynx's blush deepened slightly, and her voice went slightly fluttery. Her nipples had gone hard, damn her.

Leo was obviously getting a kick out of Lynx's, um, blushing, too, though.

Smiling, Craig gave the affirmative to Bear Tracks. He watched Lynx scramble up to go get the prerequisite bowl, utensils, and ice cream. Craig accepted the stool Leo had pulled out for him at the bar.

Leo lowered his voice as Craig sat down beside him. “So, how have you really been, since...?” From the look in Leo’s eyes, Craig didn’t have to ask what Leo was referring to. He knew Leo was asking him how things were with him emotionally.

Leo had known better than most how Kelly’s death had damn near shattered him. When Leo had left COBRA, he had still been grappling with the aftermath of Kelly’s death. Craig thought carefully before answering the question.

Kelly almost seemed like a lifetime ago, but being here with Leo and Lynx now, it seemed oddly relevant. Seeing Lynx with Leo did remind him of Kelly and him, strangely enough.

But, it was a situation Craig never would’ve visualized in reverse. Lynx had been under his skin forever, one way or another. Hell, even when they were children, Lynx always managed to provoke him. As a teen, she had been a tomboy turned temptress. But Craig had only recently considered Lynx as a full grown woman. She would always be one of his closest friends. But, Lynx was not just Daniel’s little sister anymore. She wasn’t just the little brat he helped Daniel protect any longer. At least, not according to his dick.

No, now Lynx was his want-to-got-to-have-her woman. Seeing her here with Leo reminded Craig, more than he cared to admit, of his time with Kelly. Hell, Leo had been part of that, too. It had been fun at the time, but not serious. Kelly’s accident had hit him harder because deep down he’d felt a little bit of relief. And the guilt had nearly killed him.

But this was his Lynx, and this was now. Lynx was the woman he’d waited for, even then, without realizing it. This was different than before.

Downplaying his response to Leo’s question crossed his mind, but Craig knew Leo wouldn’t be easily fooled. After all, they’d been

through hell and heaven together more than once. All the way from the very real jungles of Columbia to the urban jungle that constituted Miami. He and Leo had fought together, survived together, and even once held the same woman together. All were things not so easily forgotten. He could see in Leo's eyes. Leo hadn't forgotten either.

"I've been better, but I've definitely been worse," Craig replied as honestly as he knew how. "Until I got here and found Lynx safe and sound, my mind was going pretty crazy. When she turned up missing, I was petrified something terrible had happened to her. We didn't have any really hopeful leads. It was hard not to imagine worst case scenarios. Hell, you know what I'm talking about. We've both seen abductions that lead to horrific endings. So, we know what can happen, and all too easily."

Leo agreed solemnly. "Yes, we certainly do. I apologize if my bringing Lynx here added to your and Daniel's fears. I never meant to."

Craig shook his head. "Leo, I owe you a huge debt for saving Lynx. I don't know what I would've done if anything had happened to her. I don't know what Daniel would have done, either. He would do anything to protect her, and so would I. Even though she's an operative too, Daniel and I can't help but still want to protect her."

Craig admitted the last with a smile that became a near grimace. "At least you were there, Leo, when she was in trouble. We damn near failed Lynx."

Like he'd failed Kelly, the thought struck Craig again. Leo was the only one who could begin to understand how he felt. Craig had shared with Leo how he and Kelly had fought that day. He hadn't told anyone else that Kelly had stormed out after an argument. The accident had occurred shortly after she'd left. If only he hadn't let her leave.

"You didn't fail her, Craig," Leo said, reaching over to squeeze his shoulder.

Leo didn't have to say more. The sympathetic expression in Leo's eyes reassured Craig that Leo understood.

At that moment, Lynx returned with another large bowl heaped with ice cream. She set it before Craig with a smile tugging her lips. "Here's dessert, Marozi," she said teasingly. She returned to her stool between them and reached to ruffle his hair in a playful gesture.

"Is that all the ice cream I get, kitten?" Craig said with a wink. "Took you long enough. Did you have to milk the cow and churn it, too? Because I think I'm going to want some more," he teased.

"You would," Lynx pouted, but then a silly smile spread across her face, along with another stain of pink. Lynx bent to spoon more of the cold dessert. Craig could see the telltale color staining her cheeks.

Craig reached over and stroked the side of Lynx's face, brushing the side of her lips as he did.

Lynx lifted her head in surprise, "Wh-What?" she stammered.

Craig feathered the stroke a little wider, making sure to brush Lynx's lips again before bringing his fingers to his own lips and sucking them with obvious relish.

He smiled playfully. "You had ice cream on your face there, kitten. I couldn't just let it go to waste, now could I?"

Lynx just swallowed and, if possible, blushed more.

Craig laughed outright. "I love it when she does that. I've never known any woman who blushes so easily, Leo. It's almost too easy."

Lynx turned to glare at him. She turned and swatted Craig's arm.

"Owww," Craig groused. Patting his arm, feigning injury, he looked at Leo. "See how this woman brutalizes me? She only pretends to be sweet. Until you piss her off." He turned to Lynx with a knowing smirk.

"Yeah, well, I've never known a bigger caveman," Lynx said. "Do you drag all your women by the hair to your bat car?"

Craig grinned. "Yes, as a matter of fact, I do," he bantered. "But only you would call a GT500 Shelby Mustang a bat car."

“Oo-kay, so, a muscle car for a caveman, how surprising,” Lynx shot back smartly. “Hope your big head fits in there, too.”

Craig nearly choked, laughing on the bite he had just taken before he wise-cracked back. “Don’t worry your pretty head none now, sweetheart. It will fit. Yours did, remember?”

Her mouth opened, but Lynx just swatted him again, momentarily speechless. Craig knew it wouldn’t last long. He grinned, waiting.

Leo, by now, had cracked up, too. Lynx turned to glare at him.

Craig guffawed and slapped his leg. “Better you than me, pal.”

Lynx turned to Craig and snorted. “You’re in no way off the hook, wise-ass.”

~ Paws & Premonitions ~

Leo had to admit, Craig and Lynx were very entertaining to watch.

An unbidden vision of Craig and Lynx wrapped around each other, languidly fucking, flashed suddenly in Leo’s mind’s eye. He tried but couldn’t quite displace the erotic image in his head. Leo shifted in his seat. His normally loose and comfortable jeans chafed at him uncomfortably. He tried to refocus on the conversation.

He was surprised. Lynx let Craig off easy, he suspected that wasn’t always so. Lynx turned the subject to what had been going on with various team members since she’d been laid up.

Leo listened to Craig explaining to Lynx some of the gossip and news since she’d gone missing. He studied his old friend and his newly-mated lover as they talked. More than just words, Craig and Lynx communicated at a deeper level his senses told him. Leo knew exactly where this kind of intimacy could go.

Leo just wasn’t exactly sure where he wanted it to all go. Memories of the erotic week prior to Kelly’s death inevitably resurrected. In just a few short hours, fate had tangled his life to Craig and Kelly’s irrevocably. The memories gave Leo some pause.

Now that he had found Lynx, Leo knew he could never let her go. Did Craig feel the same way about Lynx? The biggest question Leo knew he had to ask himself was whether that love was big enough for the three of them. Last time it had been Craig who had opened the door for him and Kelly. Could he do the same this time? Would he be able to unselfishly share Lynx's love?

Lynx's laughter startled him.

"So, Captain Slater actually threatened to team you up with Jorgenson? Wow, he sure knows how to threaten you, doesn't he?"

"Yeah, he sure does," Craig admitted. Craig's grin was rueful. "Jorgenson, as you both know, can be about as much fun as a prostate exam."

Leo chuckled knowingly. He and Craig had worked with Jorgenson in the early years, and the man was completely humorless. Jorgenson did everything exactly by the book. If anyone so much as sneezed in the wrong direction, he took it as a personal affront. Needless to say, Jorgenson had never been that popular, really, even though he was as skillful a soldier and agent as any of the rest of them. Still, the man's social skills were nearly nil.

"Evidently, Slater's serious about us keeping a closer eye on you, Lynx," Craig said, his gaze wandering to Leo's. "If anything should happen to you, I don't think he'd hesitate to put me with Jorgenson's team, but only after he skinned me alive first. Lynx, evidently even as much of a hard-ass as Slater can be, he considers you a valued member of the COBRA team. Plus, he knows Daniel would never be the same if something should happen to you." Craig smiled.

Leo could certainly understand the sentiment. He doubted he could do without Lynx now that he'd found her. He also admired her brother Daniel a great deal. Daniel was an invaluable member of COBRA. Even the Captain respected Daniel's brawn and prowess with weaponry. Leo had seen Lynx's brother in action before. He was a fiercely ferocious fighter when necessary. But provoke his

protective instincts, and watch out. COBRA was indeed lucky to have him.

As Leo listened quietly, his stomach clenched with the tug of protectiveness. Part of him wanted to roar, to hide Lynx from the world. Yet, seeing the look on her face at the talk of her COBRA teammates, her second family, he knew the team was important to her. Maybe COBRA was as important to her as it had been to him.

In the fevered search for others of his kind, for his destined mate, Leo never imagined his search would lead him back full circle to COBRA.

Hell, Leo had intended to return after the Miami sting.

Then, his vacation had coincided with the unexpected event of his own shift. Then, when Roberto and Felice discovered him and saved his life, he'd gone in search of his mate and other members of his pride.

Now, Leo could see his search had meant so much more. He had come full circle, and he just knew. This was fated. It was meant to be. But then, destiny had been one tricky bitch, hadn't she?

Craig and Lynx looked up as he stood abruptly. His mind was churning. Still, Leo kept his expression neutral. "Hey, I know you two have a lot of catching up to do. I think I'll go take a run, then make sure things are locked down at the ranch."

Leo headed back to his room. He quickly changed into his loose-fitting running clothes and some more appropriate shoes. He didn't want to arouse Craig and Lynx's curiosity just yet. He didn't ordinarily need clothes for his runs. Clothes were more of an encumbrance.

However, Lynx was still largely in the dark over her true bloodline or what it would eventually mean for her. He didn't want to overwhelm her by saying too much too soon. But, Lynx's innate telepathic gifts were strong, he could already tell. However, controlling her gift, he knew, would be a different matter.

Telepathy was only one of the ways Lynx exhibited a shifter's bloodline. Leo had observed her scenting the air a few times already. Only time would tell how Lynx would develop, or what other gifts she might have. He could barely wait for Lynx to experience her first shift, for her to join him.

Leo stepped out onto the far edge of the ranch's lushly vegetated grounds, moving silently into the copse of trees that bordered the yards. He quickly entered the near-darkness beyond. The forest was densely populated by huge oaks and scrub palms, and in places, shafts of the dying sunlight faded through. Farther out, the swampy ground encroached. This was where gators, snakes, and numerous varieties of wildlife visited, such as turtles in every size and birds of every description.

The average hiker could certainly find the forest interesting, but Leo knew just how dangerous it could really be. Leo paused by the stump of a long dead tree and casually shed his clothes, right down to his comfortable running shoes. Carefully, he placed the pile of clothes on top of the old familiar tree stump and began to run.

Chapter 8

The change was a blur, almost instantaneous. In mid-form a man, then, abruptly, fluidly, a massive golden, amber-and-black maned lion streaked across the forest's floor. Leo's powerful form ate the ground in strides that seemed to erase the distance. Birds fluttered and skittered out of the tree tops and surrounding brush, sending out warning calls to others of their kind. Many times before, the warning had come too late.

Leo was not hunting tonight. No, the lions of the ranch's pride were careful hunters. They reserved true hunts for more remote locations away from home, sometimes even traveling across state or out of country to satisfactorily hunt. It was taking too much of a chance to do anything more than a cursory invasion of the forest and swampy areas surrounding his ranch. The land was protected by the government for environmental reasons, and there was no use attracting undue suspicion. That was the last thing Leo or the other pride members needed.

Leo's intimidating presence agitated the already wary wildlife as he streaked through the forest. Animals skittered away in fright as he passed by. But this night they needn't have worried. Tonight, the king of beasts was distracted. Leo finally slowed to an easy lope, silent as ever on the irregularly carpeted floor of the forest.

Leo lifted his large amber nose to the air, scenting. The smell of the forest could be exquisitely earthy to him in his man form. In lion form, the scents were even more tantalizing and beautiful. Hyper-aware in the growing darkness of the woods, Leo caught a new scent on the breeze-smoke. It taunted his nostrils as it lazily drifted by.

But smoke meant one thing, and that was fire. And fire could mean danger. Leo realized he had to find out where the smoke originated. He needed to determine the threat to the surrounding area, and quickly. The Florida summer had been an unusually dry one. Fires had been known to decimate entire forests, along with everything in them. Time was of the essence. Leo wasn't wasting it.

"Roberto, Felice, I need your help. I smell smoke in the woods." Leo's urgent telepathic message to Roberto and Felice was almost immediately answered by Roberto, *"We'll be right there."*

Less than five minutes later, Leo was met by Roberto with his lioness mate, Felice, flanking his side.

"We should split up, it would be quicker," Leo noted silently. Roberto and Felice took off towards the north, while Leo veered in the westerly direction. Somewhere, in the dark interior of the forest, the fire had an origin. The scent of smoke was still faint. However, even a small campfire left unattended by a careless camper could be catastrophic if left unchecked.

Leo silently transmitted to Roberto, *"Roberto, we have a lesser situation here, but possibly a problematic one. I'm going to need you to keep an eye on things for me until I've located ole man Mort. We've got some idiots camping here illegally who've obviously not heard of the no-burn statute in effect. Roberto, could you and Felice head on over here to keep an eye on things? I'll return to the ranch and make the call."*

Mort Green, their favorite environmental warden, was just going to love this.

He bit back a growl. Mort wouldn't be any happier to hear about this little outfit here.

"But I wonder, though, how much these guys are going to love dear old Mort? The old codger gets a mite cantankerous when people act carelessly in his neck of the woods." He could just imagine Mort's reaction.

"Coming, Leo," Roberto replied.

Leo's amber eyes never left the campsite as he waited out of sight for Roberto and Felice to circle back around to him. The campers seemed to be blithely breaking state laws. They needed to be reprimanded before real harm occurred. But, the sight of a large lion, or heaven forbid several, would only create panic. It could also invite an unwanted investigation if rumors of lions loose in the forest got out.

Leo watched and waited for Roberto and Felice to return. He needed to go get his clothes and shift back before Mort showed up. Mort would read the campers the environmental riot act. Hell, the poor campers would be lucky if they didn't spend the night in the can, knowing Mort like he did.

Roberto and Felice emerged silently beside him.

"Stay here, I'll be right back." Leo didn't elaborate. He turned and silently disappeared back into the woods behind them. Leo shifted back to his human form easily.

Felice went to recover her clothing as Roberto faded back into the brush. Now, they would wait for Mort and keep a wary eye on the campfire and the yokels drinking and laughing around it.

Apart from the crackling of the fire and the bawdy jokes the young men laughed and hooted over, the forest had become unusually still for the time of evening it was. No hoot owls hooted. The birds had become silent. The eerie, machine-like drone of distant gators was absent. Even the crickets had stopped chirping. It was as if the forest held its breath.

Felice returned. Leo motioned to her in warning. Felice nodded, her eyes still glowing cat-like in the darkness.

It was then the scent hit Leo. A minute later, a lone figure came out on the other side of the small glen where the campers had set up. A familiar feral odor curled and wafted around Leo's nose. He recognized it, but from where?

It hit Leo as suddenly as the stench had. The smoke had masked a danger far more malevolent than fire. Fires could be put out. Rogues, on the other hand, usually needed burying.

There in the small clearing stood the youngest son of COBRA's old enemy Magellan Cervantes. Leo recognized Adonis's odd face from one of the few photos he'd seen of Cervantes's mysterious younger son. Strangely enough, there had been few substantial reports on Adonis. Adonis usually escaped the publicity that seemed to dog the rest of the Cervantes family. The publicity hounds had loved to focus on the wealthy drug lord or his oldest playboy son, Donatello. Adonis must have been very careful managing to nearly avoid the press altogether. There had only been two small news-clippings in the entire file COBRA kept on the Cervantes. Leo remembered them vividly now.

He would never have known Cervantes had another son if not for those two pictures. He'd seen those towards the tail-end of COBRA's investigation and infiltration of the notoriously powerful crime family. COBRA had eventually taken the Cervantes patriarch down for good. But all the years and past investigations had yielded little information on Adonis.

Now, Adonis, the man, the shifter, was standing within striking distance of Leo.

Adonis had a unique look Leo was unlikely to forget. Hell, who could forget it? Adonis's face was distinctively angular in its bone structure. His hair was just as uncommon with its shades of cinnamon tinged by rust. No wonder Adonis avoided publicity. The press would've eaten him up and spit out mostly large bones and fiery colored hair.

Leo could understand now why the Cervantes cartel had been so difficult to disband entirely. Even the Rangers or their COBRA team of elite ops would be hard pressed to eliminate a cartel seeded with secret weapons like Adonis. Oh, yes, Adonis had powers. Leo might

not have recognized Adonis for the shifter he was before, but now he did instinctively.

He needed some serious time to consider their alternatives. *“Reconnoiter back at the house to determine the best course of action here, and we need to do it quickly.”* Leo mentally sent the order to Roberto as he and Felice faded back, silent as ghosts into the woods.

As far as Leo knew, his pride might outnumber Adonis and the group gathered around the fire. But according to the unique scent that had wafted Leo’s way, Leo knew Adonis’s bloodline was far older than most. It was as ancient a line as that of Lynx’s parents. The few like Adonis were usually feared, even among the most powerful of shifters.

His lion recognized the scent. It was as instinctive as the way he reacted. Leo’s muzzle curled into an instant snarl, exposing deadly teeth. Lions and tigers usually maintained a wary respect of one another, even when friends. Leo and Adonis were anything but friends. Leo’s muscles tensed in anticipation for an attack he knew would not be wise, yet. Hell, the rumors he’d heard were true. Some saber-tooth tigers were still alive and well.

When Adonis changed form, he would become the savage beast. His kind was among the fiercest of the big cats. So, the great and bony beast was in his forest, his territory. Leo fought to restrain the roar that vibrated in his throat.

He knew there would likely be more of them soon. Saber-tooth tigers were notoriously known as pack hunters. Their survival was integral to being part of a pack. No pride, just a pack. Leo tossed his head.

Leo scanned the forest as they headed back. He needed to know. Why was one of the few surviving saber-tooths and the last surviving Cervantes encroaching so close to his territory? What should he do about it? He needed time to digest the ramifications and come up with a workable plan.

He didn't know Adonis's real motive for even being here. But he had his suspicions. Leo found it difficult to believe Adonis's reasons for being there were innocent. So, the son of the drug lord that COBRA had destroyed only a few years earlier had just waltzed into his woods accidentally? Right. Even if saber-tooths didn't already smell funny, something sure did.

~RogueCat ~

Meanwhile, amid the shadows that danced around the dying campfire by the outskirts of the small encampment deep in the woods, two feral eyes gleamed menacingly. Nostrils flared, searching the night as new scents assaulted the keen senses of the rogue shifter.

The smoke drifted slowly away. A stench pervaded in its place. Adonis let a low growl escape. Adonis easily recognized Roberto's scent as one from the site of the botched abduction. There was no missing the other dominant male's unique odor either.

Adonis licked his lips. The third fragrance, the slightly pungent scent of a female nearing heat was quite arousing. Oh, yes, he was on the right track. Nothing would stop him now, not even the alleged king of the beasts.

Chapter 9

Back at the ranch, Leo reconnoitered with Roberto and Felice. They followed him to the large barn located at the northern end of the orchard behind the sprawling ranch house. Once there, he explained to Roberto and Felice who Adonis was and how COBRA had crippled the Cervantes' cartel.

"That sounds troubling," Roberto agreed. "Got any idea why Adonis is here now?"

Leo could only think of two possibilities. "Revenge could be an obvious motive. However, given that Adonis is Imatu like us, he could be searching for others."

"Like us," Roberto finished for him. Roberto looked over at Felice, concern reflected in his eyes.

"Yes," Leo admitted. "It could be that, too. Of the two clippings I remember seeing on Adonis, one was a society page with a picture of Adonis Cervantes with his pregnant wife. Her name was Drea. The other clipping was an obituary for Drea and their unborn son. They were both inadvertently killed in the sting operation COBRA executed. Nobody realized Drea was even in the building until after it blew. Drea was shot by an over-eager young agent as she tried to escape from the fire."

"Wow," Roberto breathed out, "that's not good. If Adonis is looking for revenge, he's got several tremendous motives. Being a Cervantes, an Imatu, and a saber-tooth means he's a triple threat." Roberto's face grew suddenly ashen. "What if he's here for the women, Leo?"

Leo had already thought of that. It wasn't out of the question. Lynx had almost been abducted already.

"Well, Roberto, we know what almost happened to Lynx before we got there. We're just going to have to protect them. I'll just have to fill Craig and Lynx in. Craig will, of course, let Captain Slater know. We're going to have to include the team in this. I'm sure COBRA will take an avid interest at the mention of Adonis Cervantes. We will have to count on their discretion. But I know from past experience, if you can trust anyone, it will be those guys. And truthfully, we're probably gonna need them."

Roberto nodded. "I guess that's all we can do right now."

"By the way, Roberto, I didn't reach Mort, but I heard back from Sheila," Leo mentioned.

Roberto asked, "So, where's Mort and how's Sheila?"

"Luckily, this time 'Ol Smoky' is out of town, according to Sheila. That housekeeper of his is one funny dame. Did you know, Roberto, that Sheila's pet name for Mort is 'Smoky Bear' or 'Ol Smoky' depending on the day?" Leo chuckled.

"Anyway, Sheila returned my message and let me know Mort had taken off on a short trip. She said Mort wouldn't be back until Sunday, a week from tomorrow. At least that takes care of one problem. Knowing what we know now, there's no way in hell we want to get good ol' Mort involved in this little fiasco. Mort would never be a match for the likes of Adonis. We can't be sure yet how many more pack members Adonis has with him."

He'd just have to be prepared. For anything. Leo began to plan. "Roberto, I want you to inform Demar we need to increase security around the ranch's perimeters. Everyone at the ranch needs to be on high alert. We can't take any chances now. The situation just got serious. The threat posed by Adonis is too real."

"I'll go take care of that," Roberto replied.

“Now I’m going to go see to our guests’ comfort. Then I plan on doing a little more research on one Adonis Cervantes.” Leo strode towards the house.

~ *CatInstincts* ~

Roberto looked into Felice’s troubled eyes. Felice reached for his hand, and he gave her a gentle squeeze of affection. “I just hope Leo figures this out soon,” she whispered. “I don’t have a very good feeling about all this, not a good feeling at all.”

Roberto pulled her to him in a gentle embrace, nuzzling the top of her head and silky raven hair. “Everything is going to be fine, Felice. Don’t you worry. Leo’s got a great head on his shoulders, and if necessary, I know he’ll call in his old team.”

“But that’s part of what worries me, Roberto. Don’t you see? We can’t afford that kind of exposure any more than Adonis could. Just imagine the media and then the public uncovering the existence of shifters like us? We would be hunted down like animals.”

“Shh, baby, you worry too much.” As he bent to claim her lips, Felice’s moan was her only reply.

Chapter 10

Upon his return, Leo was vastly amused to find Lynx defying Craig. It would seem that his Lynx was very poor at taking directions, much less orders. He grinned wryly to himself. It was something he'd have to be careful of in the future with her. Lynx, he knew, could be as ornery as any wildcat. That was certainly the case right now.

Leo caught the pure frustration in Craig's tone when he'd tried to point out to Lynx that perhaps she should wait until tomorrow for an update on their assignments. Craig wasn't having much success convincing Lynx of it. She just shook her head stubbornly when Craig reminded her that it was late.

"I'm exhausted, aren't you?" Craig ventured. His tone was hopeful.

"Nice try, Marozi," Lynx told Craig dryly, "but if it's past your bedtime, you go right ahead."

Leo could read that Craig was just concerned for Lynx's health, given her recent misadventure. But he had to stifle a laugh when he saw the appraising glare Lynx gave Craig.

Yeah, nice try there, buddy. Leo chuckled to himself. Obviously, Lynx was not buying that Craig was really tired.

Craig was obviously only looking out for Lynx.

He could see the dark shadows under Lynx's eyes, too. But sparks of fire also glinted in their depths. Observing Lynx argue with Craig only solidified what his intuition told him. Craig and Lynx were as tight as he'd ever been with any of his COBRA teammates. Even disagreeing, their camaraderie was easy to see. There was definitely something more with these two. They sizzled and sparked around one

another. More than mere friendship lurked beneath that surface. Lynx and Craig were swimming against some powerful undercurrents.

"I know how you feel, Craig," Leo said to himself softly. "I've been there."

"What was that you said, Leo?" Craig gazed over at Leo with a bemused look on his face. Lynx eyed him thoughtfully, now, too.

Damn, can't afford to get lost in memories within earshot of these two. Struggling with amusement, Leo slipped into full view of the living room. "Can't a man talk to himself anymore?" Leo asked.

"Well, it's your house, Leo," Craig replied, "but you could join the discussion and come to my aid. I need you to help convince Lynx, stubborn minx that she is, that she needs her rest more than she needs another long update on work."

The pure male frustration on Craig's face had Leo smiling, too. It was obvious that even Craig, with his alpha tendencies, struggled to maneuver Lynx. The thought made Leo's pride swell a little. After all, he hadn't had any such trouble convincing Lynx of anything. Yet, he reminded himself.

As if on cue, Lynx adamantly set out to put her determined foot down. "Oh, no, you don't! You two overgrown beastie boys are not going to gang up like bullies and boss me around. I'm not having it. So, don't even think about it." Lynx trounced out of the room.

"She probably went in search of a phone." Leo snorted dryly, his lips curved in amusement.

"Yeah, what do you wanna bet she's on the phone with Slater in less than five minutes, tops?" Craig's frustration was evident on his face.

"Well, I tried, buddy, I tried," Leo offered. "Hey, you want a drink while we wait for her?"

"Sure thing. What's on offer?" Craig's head bent slightly towards the direction Lynx had left in. "Hey, you don't think she'll go far, do you?"

Leo shook his head. “No, but if she’s not back within the next fifteen minutes then you and I will go make sure of it. I doubt she’ll leave the grounds at least. Besides, Demar’s patrolling them. But to be on the safe side, we do need to keep an extra close eye on her. Frankly, Craig, I need to fill you in on some of the activity I noted out in the woods earlier before Lynx gets back.”

Leo gave Craig the familiar “this is dead serious” look.

Craig’s posture changed perceptibly. He looked alert and prepared. “Give it to me straight, Leo.” This was a groove they both knew well from their years of working together in COBRA.

Leo pulled two chilled beers from the wine bar’s fridge and handed one to Craig. “Well, tonight, when I went for my run, I smelled smoke coming from the woods. Knowing how dangerous that could be, I went to check it out. I came upon a campsite. At first, I thought it was just a group of campers, so I figured I’d just call old Mort Green, our resident forest ranger, to come out and take care of them. After all, the woods bordering my property are state owned and protected. Later, another man joined the campers. You’ll never believe who the man was.”

“Well, don’t keep me in suspense,” Craig said, taking a swig from his beer.

“Adonis Cervantes.”

Leo watched Craig’s face freeze into an expression of pure shock. “What? You honestly mean to tell me that an heir to the fucking Cervantes Cartel is camped out in the woods behind your property?” Sheer disbelief resounded in Craig’s voice.

“That’s exactly what I’m saying to you, Craig. There’s more, but we should probably go check on Lynx first. She was almost abducted recently. We don’t know by who or the reason why. What if the two are connected?”

“Yeah,” Craig agreed, “we definitely need to check on Lynx. I don’t think it’s a good idea to let her out of our sight right now.”

“Why don’t you think you should be letting me out of your sight right now, Craig?” Lynx said, her eyes flashing.

Before Craig could get a word in edgewise, Leo spoke up. “Lynx, you know you were injured before when you were almost kidnapped. If we hadn’t found you when we did, who knows where you’d be or what could have happened. Fact is, like it or not, you are still recovering from that. You’ve had a few dizzy spells. Is it surprising that Craig would be worried about you, too, just as I have been?”

~ CatSwitch ~

Lynx shot Leo a telling look that Craig didn’t fail to notice. Lynx almost looked guilty that she’d questioned his intentions. *That’s absolutely, utterly amazing.* Leo sure knew how to push her buttons. Hot damn, because the Lynx he knew would’ve just continued to argue, no matter what he might have said. Lynx’s next admission was even less characteristic.

“You’re right, of course, Leo. I know you both are just watching out for me. It’s just been hard being cooped up like this. I’m just not used to it.” Craig had to stifle the urge to laugh out loud at that one. Wasn’t that the truth? He’d rarely seen Lynx when she wasn’t in motion.

There had been a few exceptions, of course.

At the thought of the last time he’d seen Lynx resting, the fit of Craig’s well-worn Levi’s grew snuggly. Lynx had looked so innocent and sweet, like an angel lying there that morning. The morning he’d dreamed about her. What a dream it had been, too. He remembered waking up, his cock in hand, with those incredible, surreal, erotic images seared into his mind. He had mindlessly guided his hand over himself, like Lynx’s hot mouth had just done in his dreams.

“What are you meditating on over there, Marozi?” Lynx asked.

“Oh, just wondering how Leo does that,” Craig answered innocently.

“Does what?” Lynx asked, sounding suspicious again.

“Oh, you know, gets you to agree with him so quickly,” Craig answered with a grin this time.

“Ha! Shows how much you know,” Lynx said. “You’d be surprised at just how much Leo can get me to do because he knows how to ask nice.”

At their banter, Leo laughed deep in his throat. He set his beer down on the coaster. Leo grabbed Lynx’s hands and guided her over to the sofa with him. Craig had claimed the overstuffed leather chair and quietly watched the interchange and byplay now. A feeling of nostalgia crept over him.

This was all too familiar. The only difference was it was Lynx this time and not Kelly. And Leo had the girl, not him. Craig took another swallow of beer to ease the lump that suddenly rose in his throat.

Beside Lynx on the luxuriously soft, buttery brown leather sofa, Leo was lightly massaging her small shoulders. Leo glanced over at Craig. Leo arched an eyebrow almost questioningly and continued to knead in small circles. Craig swallowed the lump in his throat. Craig didn’t doubt that Leo too, remembered.

When, Craig wondered, had the situation been so neatly reversed? Goddess knows, he would never forget that single incident with Kelly, either. He had a whole dossier of private memories to reminisce over, but that one instance was etched deep.

Leo continued to gently knead the slope of Lynx’s enticing shoulders. She let out a low moan. Craig rose from the chair where he’d been sitting, then strode over to the bar’s small fridge and grabbed another beer.

“Hey, you two, I’m going out to get a breath of fresh air.” Craig strode towards the French doors. “I’ll just be outside for a bit.”

~ CatSense ~

“Huh?” Leo noted. “Boy, he’s got it in a bad way.”

“What do you mean by that?” Lynx wanted to know.

“Lynx, what are you doing to me?” Leo asked silently as he bent over her left shoulder to nibble her earlobe. She shuddered.

“What does Craig have in a bad way, Leo?” Lynx let out a small moan as chill bumps raced up her legs.

“Oh, nothing for you to be concerned about, kitten. He’s just overwhelmed by your sexy presence.”

Leo’s next transmitted thought gave her pause, though.

“I can smell your desire from a mile away. You smell incredible. Better than honey butter would to a honeybee. You smell like home.”

“You cannot smell that well,” Lynx blurted out, embarrassment flushing her cheeks with heat. “How can you do that?” She unconsciously flared her nostrils. To Lynx’s surprise, it was only then she noticed how much more distinct smells had become to her. She’d never in the past been inundated with so many smells. Nor would she have been able to classify them so easily. The candle in the kitchen that they’d blown out earlier had a distinctive and decidedly fake vanilla smell. The beer that Leo had left on the coaster on the end table, at the far side of the sofa, had a sharper tang of malted hops to it, one she’d never really consciously noticed.

There was a scent of people in the room, too. Lynx was faintly surprised she hadn’t noticed it before. Yet, now that she was paying attention, she could still faintly smell Roberto in this room. Felice’s odor was definitely stronger, but not bad. Lynx wrinkled her nose. Hell, she could even faintly smell the big guard that patrolled the grounds. Oh, what was his name? Demar, yes, that was it. She could smell him, too.

Lynx’s nostrils flared out delicately again. Mostly, she could smell two deliciously male scents upon the air. Leo’s musky scent was a delicious mix of masculine undertones of smoke and fire, sweat and heat. They commingled perfectly with his more exotic, musky fragrance. Leo’s scent, Lynx realized, still lingered on her.

Lynx also easily recognized the scent Craig had left in his wake. It was storm-dampened, earthy, and sexy just like him. It was intoxicating.

What the hell was wrong with her? When did this happen? People didn't just converse telepathically and develop their senses so acutely overnight. Or did they? Perhaps she should get one of the medics back at base to look her over again when she got back. After all, maybe all this had something to do with the blow she'd received before Leo had rescued her.

Leo interrupted the tide overtaking her thoughts. It was the one way that worked. He slipped his arm around her waist, curved her back to him, slid her face to his, and kissed her. His tongue slipped past her lips. She was unable to think any more. Another moan broke in her throat as moisture pooled inside her.

"Mmmm, honey butter," Leo growled.

~ *Cat's Got Your Tongue* ~

Out on the veranda, Craig tried to tamp down the flood of memories that inundated his memory banks. He had loved Kelly. But the worst of it was that he knew he loved Kelly more after she died than before. Even now, strangely enough, he could feel her presence stronger than before the accident.

It was assumed by one and all that he and Kelly had planned to marry. Sure, they had discussed the idea, and had even been joined at the hip from the time they met. However, Kelly had been unsure about committing to something so permanent, and to be fair, so had he. Everyone had just believed that was exactly where the two of them were headed. In the aftermath of Kelly's fatal accident, Craig had not had the heart or will to disillusion Kelly's dad or anyone else as to their real plans, or lack thereof. The guilt had been killer. It still ate at him some days.

He had finally broken free of Kelly's ghost. But, the knowledge that he'd never been as serious about her as he should have been still haunted him. She had died, damn it. But Craig also knew now that part of him had always been waiting for something else, make that someone else.

He had been waiting for Lynx to grow up. Now she had, and by the gods, he was in a similar situation with her, only it was reversed. She was with Leo now. That much was obvious. He was the one wanting in. Time sure had a funny way of turning things around. Yet, one could never completely escape the past, he supposed. So, where exactly did he go from here?

Even the idea of Lynx with another man had him confused, hot and bothered. Only he wasn't sure which emotion was the strongest. Through the light foliage of the hanging orchids and ferns that dotted the porch, Craig could just see the outline of Leo and Lynx on the couch.

Lynx lay across Leo's lap, and it was apparent Leo couldn't keep his hands off her. Seeing the sensuous silhouette of their bodies that way was enough to make him burn. Unfortunately, here he was the third wheel. *Out of sight, out of mind. Oh well, probably just need to get a good night's rest to clear my head.*

As he strode through the ornate French doors and back inside, he muttered abruptly, "Goodnight, you two. I think I'm heading upstairs to bed. I'll see you both in the morning." Craig headed for the stairwell at the end of the long hall.

~ Let the *Cat* Out ~

"Hmm, do you think he's all right?" Lynx asked him, tilting her head with concern in the direction Craig had just gone.

"Probably," Leo answered. "Craig likely just has a few things on his mind, and it has been a long day, you know. We should get some

rest ourselves, too.” At that, he bent to nuzzle her sensitive earlobe again. Lynx was not satisfied fully with his explanation.

“So, what do you think is bothering him?” Lynx purred softly.

“Mmmm...Craig’s just gets too revved up watching us make out,” Leo mumbled into her ear, distracted by her alluring scent. “And it has, I’m sure, reminded him of a time before Kelly’s accident.” Leo’s mouth, tongue, and teeth lightly grazed over Lynx’s throat and ears. He nibbled farther down. His lips blazed a slow but sure trail towards the twin peaks tempting him. Unfortunately, Lynx had not missed his innuendo, intentional or not.

“What exactly do you mean it reminds him of before Kelly’s accident?” She pulled out of his arms and shifted around.

Women, he sighed to himself. Leo knew he was in trouble. If he lied, she would surely sense it with her superior nose now, but if he told the truth, how would she react?

This wasn’t good. No, it wasn’t good at all. Leo couldn’t think of a way to explain now. How could he explain why the two of them on the couch making out had reminded Craig of Kelly years ago? He couldn’t, at least not without Lynx sensing a lie. Perhaps the truth was best. Lynx was not a child, after all.

“Ahem, well, let’s see. A week and a half before the accident, I went over to Craig’s cabin. We were celebrating the end of the Cervantes case as we knew it. Craig and Kelly had been a couple for some time, but they invited me over to celebrate with them. It wasn’t any surprise, really. I was a close friend to both of them. I thought we’d probably have a few beers after a simple dinner, watch a game, and then go home. It didn’t exactly happen that way.”

Leo paused and Lynx blurted out, “So, what do you mean by *exactly*?” She had caught on to that pretty quick.

“Hmm... Everything was pretty much what I expected. Kelly had cooked a nice dinner and there were the usual congratulations and small talk about the final choke the team had put on Cervantes before he crumbled. Only, instead of the usual beer, Kelly served us this nice

little wine with dinner. She even brought out a second bottle of it after dinner was done. I assumed it was all just in honor of the end of a long, hard, dangerous case.

“But then Craig and Kelly started really kissing on the couch after dinner. I just assumed they were ready to be left alone for the evening. I figured, you know, that they were giving me a nice but not so subtle signal the evening was over.”

“So, was the evening over?” Lynx asked quietly. Her eyes sparked with curiosity. Perhaps there was a bit more interest than her soft question would necessarily give away.

“No, Lynx, it wasn’t over yet,” Leo answered just as quietly. “It was far from over.”

Leo wasn’t sure exactly how to address the matter of the ménage that he had shared with Craig and Kelly. It wasn’t like Lynx had a world of experience. He knew that, but he could also see the interest that had leapt in her eyes. Leo expected she knew where the conversation was headed, at least by this point. What he didn’t know was whether the light was interest or just a morbid curiosity about something she’d never try.

Still, Leo was uneasy with just laying the truth out cold like this. He didn’t want Lynx to question his feelings for her.

Leo forgot everything as Lynx slowly pulled off her small top, the one that had somehow miraculously managed to cover twin mounds of perfect flesh. Evidently, Lynx knew all she needed to know. He almost purred in anticipation as Lynx’s nipples hardened in the cooler air.

Would Lynx be turned on or off by the idea of his past? Would the idea of a ménage be abhorrent to her or a turn on? Evidently, Lynx had questions, too.

“*Did you fall for Kelly, too?*” The words were the softest caress in his mind, as Lynx snuggled closer to him on the couch. “*Did she affect you the way I remember she affected Craig?*” Leo struggled to think as Lynx niggled her way partially onto his lap. She wrapped one

arm around his shoulders and neck. She pulled him down to her with her other hand as she stroked his hair.

"I was...mmm...definitely affected, you could say," Leo replied telepathically. *"But Kelly did not complete me. She was not the mate of my heart."*

Leo's husky murmur in her mind coincided with the gentle crush of his lips on hers. Then he was crushing her closer to him. He tangled his hands in the back of Lynx's hair, mimicking what she'd done with his.

Lynx obviously had more questions, but one taste, and he was intoxicated. And her questions also seemed to fade when his tongue danced with hers. He couldn't think. He just wanted more.

Lucky for him, she seemed to feel the same way. He couldn't stop. He mated his tongue to hers, his lips to her lips. The sight of her bared breasts against his chest was a temptation he could not resist. Slowly, he nibbled his way down her neck in little bites and heated licks.

Leo's tongue rasped as he stroked the hollow of her throat with kisses. Lynx gasped at each new assault. When she moaned, he could feel the vibrations against his tongue. Leo purred as he moved down towards her breast with his tongue. He teased her with sensuous, tender ministrations to the surrounding skin of one orb before moving to the other breast to do the same. But he avoided direct contact with her nipples. Nipples that were spiked hard and needy, aroused by his previous tongue-play. She was edible, good enough to eat.

"Please," Lynx pleaded.

His reaction was another playful lick around the areola of her breast before his mouth descended to draw her breast to him fully, sucking her strongly into his mouth while laving her nipple with a raspy tongue. The effect she had on him curled all the way to his toes and then everywhere in between. The sweet scent of her moisture pooling had the sensations building. His whole body throbbed in

need. He fumbled, and then tugged her jeans off her legs in a smooth motion.

"Is that better, baby?" Leo asked the question, laughter in his voice.

"You're a sadistic tease in bed, aren't you?" Lynx shot back at him. The sound was part laughter and part desire. Her voice sounded husky in his head now.

"Who's teasing?" Leo asked as his long fingers played over the slip of fabric between her legs.

"You are, Leo. I'm burning. You're making me burn." Her sultry words would burn him alive. The added sounds of Lynx's little gasps of pleasure might as well have poured gas on an already raging fire.

Leo descended again, following the path to her navel with the same sensual streak of kisses as he'd used before. He slid Lynx's panties away. This time, stopping just short of her center, he mercilessly teased with soft strokes of his tongue around her clitoris. He stayed shy of the glistening bud. *So, this is how a honeybee feels.* Wonder vied with his arousal.

Leo tried to stay in control. But, Lynx's scent drove him crazy. He could smell her desire. It beckoned him like addictive nectar. She coated his tongue like melting butter as he bent to taste.

He wanted her to enjoy every minute, for hours on end. Perhaps it was selfish, but he also wanted to savor every heavenly inch of her, over and over and over again.

"Please, Leo," Lynx groaned. Her thighs trembled under his touch. He could feel her need as she used both her hands to draw him closer to her. With a growl of pleasure, Leo sank his head to her core and feasted.

She was a vortex of white-hot heat. She was sucking him in even as he lapped at her like a cat after cream.

And she was creaming.

His cock responded, bulging thicker, slicker between his legs. With his arms and hand, Leo held Lynx's hips in position. But every

lick only served to make her writhe and grow wetter and hotter than before. She fed him willingly. She melted, dripping over him like a favorite dessert. He flicked his hungry tongue over her sweet slit, and then teasingly bent to nibble her knee.

“Don’t you dare stop.” The command she uttered in his mind was more pleading than bossy.

“What will you do for me if I continue, then?” Leo growled back. He teased her mentally with the erotic image of him feasting again.

“I’ll come for you.” Lynx’s simple breathy admission was more than Leo could take. Wild, sweet, hot honey flooded his tongue as he gently drew Lynx into his mouth once more. Then she arched to him on a long cry of pleasure.

~ Catcha ~

On the staircase above, Craig heard the scream. He’d fallen asleep briefly, only to find he’d been jerked awake less than an hour later by something. Maybe it was just being in a strange bed. Then he’d decided to go see about finding something herbal and soothing to drink. Surely, that would help him get back to sleep.

Midway down the flight of stairs, he heard Lynx cry out again. Without thinking, he rushed down the rest of the way. Craig turned the corner to find he’d just made an idiot of himself.

Lynx faced the opposite direction of him. She didn’t see him. But at his entrance, Leo immediately looked up and met his eyes. Craig knew he would never forget the look of sheer pleasure and stark desire on Leo’s face. From what he could see of Lynx, she looked pretty fucking happy, too. Damn her!

Craig turned and, just as quietly, went back the way he came. Nothing he could drink could help him sleep after seeing that. Not by a long shot. What he really needed now was a very stiff drink. Fortunately, there was small guest bar in his room, and it was stocked

with all the alcoholic beverage choices a man could ask for. Until now, he hadn't craved any. That had just changed.

~ *Catch 22* ~

Leo quickly moved to nuzzle his way up Lynx again. Her little aftershock moans enticed him onward and upward. He knew he'd have to talk to Craig later. The look on his friend's face had been one he had recognized all too well.

Leo figured that's pretty much how he had looked at times in the past after seeing Craig kissing Kelly. But Craig had admittedly gotten more of an eyeful tonight than Leo ever had back then. Well, at least prior to the one ménage tryst. Hell, he probably did need to talk to him. Craig seeing what he had tonight could not have been easy on him.

But later, who could think? He couldn't anymore, not with Lynx lying under him looking like a starving sex kitten, all claws, fur, purr, and cream.

Leo held himself over Lynx. She still mewled in satisfaction. Quickly, he shed his clothes and realigned his body to hers. Lightly, he nibbled at her ear and then sank slowly, deeply into her heated, slick pussy. Groaning, he laved a salty path to her neck. On a thrust that tore his breath from him, his incisors simultaneously sank into the delicate skin on her shoulder.

She was his. Lynx's orgasm broke, pulsed against his cock on her scream. Then, the sweetest, hottest cream bathed his dick. The tight walls of her pussy clenched around him.

By the goddesses, he couldn't hold back any longer. Leo thrust deeper, sliding in and out, the velvety resistance of her tight, creamy little pussy sheathing him. The sensation dragged another growl from him. Leo plunged, so deep he could feel her womb opening to him as her small eruptions continued. Those continuing little spasms proved his undoing.

He erupted, hard and fast, and came deep inside her. Her answering scream was primal. His cat roared in approval and release.

~ Catharsis~

Above stairs, Craig took another swig of his drink and sat it back down on the ornate end table beside his bed. He went and closed the door to his room. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He couldn't help hearing Lynx scream. Again. It took everything he had not to go back down there. But he was the outsider this time. He hadn't been invited.

"It's okay, buddy. I guess it's just me and you this time," Craig said, as he absentmindedly stroked the length of his engorged cock through his Levi's. "We'll be all right, won't we?" As was typical, there was no answer, just more of a general stiffening in reply. He had about forgotten how good strong whiskey could be. It was the last thing Craig remembered before he slipped into a surreal, trance-like state and then literally slipped out of his skin.

Chapter 11

Pale moonlight filtered through the room. The gauzy curtains drifted against the light breeze. A soft and breezy zephyr rippled, lifting them and letting them fall. It was October in Florida, but it wasn't even chilly yet, although the air had crispness to it that hadn't been there before. Craig had left the window slightly open, the better to appreciate the presence of fall on the air, his favorite time of year.

With the moonlight casting shadows and the scent of Lynx still on his nostrils, Craig's body contorted and changed. Whether the whiskey eased the process or just left his mind relaxed, the physical metamorphosis was much quicker than many first-time shape-shifters usually experienced.

Craig couldn't appreciate this fact. No, he just felt it as the change roiled over him. The sleek, muscled cougar that stretched out unfurling claws against the room's wooden sleigh-bed didn't care. His cougar just wanted to run and to hunt. But, strongest of all, the mating urge fired his veins like a blood-catalyst.

Craig's cougar began to process the changes automatically. His thought processes adjusted to the newer input of his animal. His cougar retained the man's intelligence as well. Instinct and intellect synchronized as one.

Prowling the room impatiently, Craig used the newly enhanced vision of his cougar's eyes. He spied the half-open window, the roof outlined beneath it, and the distance of the ground below. With a running leap, Craig's cougar gracefully sailed out of the window and landed on the roof outside. He landed on the ground just as seamlessly.

His was a shadow that moved quickly through the other shadows. Only the sharpest of eyes could catch his movements. Luckily for him, the occupants inside the house were quiet now, perhaps sleeping. His cougar eyes had instantaneously adjusted to the darkness. He could see the lights had been shut off in the living room. Somehow he knew Leo and Lynx must've gone to bed.

~ Catalyzed ~

Lynx softly padded her way to the kitchen to forage for some relaxing hot tea. She had been just about to drift off, but a noise had awakened her. It could have been anything from a branch falling to perhaps one squirrel of a squadron that sometimes swarmed the surrounding trees.

Regardless, she was awake now, might as well give up on the idea of sleep. Sleep obviously planned to elude her. Hearing nothing more and restless, she decided if she could just find some chamomile to do its soothing trick for her restless state, she might get some sleep tonight. One glass of wine at supper had not been enough, and strangely, the super sex with Leo earlier had only wound her up this time. Lynx couldn't help pondering her and Leo's earlier discussion about heightened senses as she headed for the patio.

~ CatWalk ~

Craig made his way to the edge of the shadows at the corner of the ranch, sensing Demar was on the far side of it. Demar was always on watch, ever on guard. Craig's cougar processed these thoughts lucidly, rapidly. The cougar he'd become would have mystified Craig the man. His cougar knew inexplicably what Craig as a man knew.

The darkness was not a problem. He began scanning the surrounding area with the eyes and ease of a nighttime predator. Then

Craig heard the patio door creak. Quietly, he eased back into the shadow's edge, making his way silently back closer to the veranda.

In the moonlight, Craig could see Lynx sitting at the patio's table, and he drank the sight of her in. As soon as the door opened, he'd known it was Lynx. Her scent enticed him. It was incredible and so unique. It rippled across his taste buds, tempting him. Now he understood instinctively why he had reacted even more strongly to her, not just as a man to a woman, but as one animal to another. Lynx would soon be in full heat. The urge to go to her rose up in him like a tidal wave. Craig's cougar very nearly snarled.

Restraint kept him watching her silently, carefully. Lynx sat her cup of tea down and rose to go to the edge of the veranda's railing. Craig stared at Lynx's soft, delicate features amid the lush fall of her chestnut hair. Hair that lay bewitchingly about her, it framed her face delicately, perfectly.

Craig could see Lynx's nose twitch. He thought she was about to sneeze, but then he realized. Of course, Lynx was scenting the air, just as he was doing.

"Craig?"

He heard the question in his mind and answered before the realization hit him. His simple, *"I'm here, Lynx"* was enough to shock her, apparently. Her eyes went wide, before she blinked rapidly. Then Lynx stepped back quickly, away from the rail.

"Where are you, Craig?" This time the question was a throaty, half whisper in his mind.

Craig could see Lynx's throat constrict as she swallowed. She went back to the small table where she'd set her tea. She picked it up and took a drink. She took a gulp, swallowed again. She appeared nervous.

Craig's cougar understood instinctively that the sight of him right now, as his cougar, would be too much. Tonight, he just wanted time with her.

So, Craig lied. He could only hope Lynx wouldn't smell it. *"I went for a run on the edge of the property. I'll be there shortly."*

Only, he didn't know how he would. He needed to get back into the house, into his clothes, and come back out to reassure her without her noticing anything. Instinct and intellect were often at odds with the man, but Craig's cougar easily sensed the right solution. *"Lynx, I could use something to drink when I get back from my run."*

Lynx responded hesitantly, picking up her tea and swallowing the last of hers. *"I'll go fix something for you if you'd like."* The innocent, seductive sweetness of her response tingled down his spine, as if her fingertips had raked there instead.

"I would really like that, thank you," Craig answered, easing a bit farther back into the shadows. He heard the slight creak of the French doors opening and shutting. He didn't waste time. He raced for the tree out beyond his window. With a leap, he was halfway up, and then, just as smoothly, back in his room.

Craig shifted back to human form, not pausing to think about his natural ease or the transformation. He had so many questions about what had just happened to him. He didn't even know where to begin. But he didn't have time to reflect now. He needed to be near his mate, one way or another.

Craig pulled on a pair of his comfortable jogging pants and a plain white tee. He returned to the window and roof and then shimmied down the tree. With just seconds to spare, he walked up onto the veranda's porch as Lynx came out the door.

Craig quickly went and took the steaming mug of tea out of Lynx's hand as she tried to shut the door behind her. "Thanks," Lynx said, "that's a lot easier to do with at least one hand free." She smiled up at him as he took the tea. Lynx sat down at the cozy teak table and sank back into the cushioned chair.

Craig took a sip, wondering what to say now that he was here with her alone. He was still intoxicated by her smell. It distracted him past reason. Lynx smiled again, and Craig could see the questioning look

she gave him. He knew she probably wondered what he was doing up and about so late. Craig decided it would be smarter to answer a few questions before she had a chance to ask them.

"I couldn't sleep, so I decided to take a run and work off some excess energy. How about you? Why are you still up?" Craig didn't think he should mention he'd seen her and Leo before, but he couldn't help wondering why she wasn't already deep in sleep. Leo probably was by now, judging by the workout he'd surely had.

Lynx took another sip, and then answered. "I couldn't sleep, either. I'm not really sure why. I thought maybe it was the noise I heard earlier. Really, I think it's just sensory overload."

Craig reached over to stroke the back of Lynx's hand soothingly.

"So, how do you feel about a moonlight stroll? I'm still not tired, and we could maybe work off some of that excess energy we both seem to be afflicted with tonight. Besides, we haven't had much time to talk alone since I got here." He waited for her answer. Lynx fiddled with the tea bag in her cup, seeming uncertain.

Craig drew light circles over her free hand with the pads of his fingers, waiting.

"Sure, why not?" she finally answered. "You know, I'm really not that tired yet, either."

"Good." Craig grasped Lynx's hand before she could protest or change her mind and started down the porch's steps. "I think you'll appreciate the garden at night as much as I did." Craig couldn't help but notice the shiver that she gave as they walked. "Are you cold?"

"No, not really," Lynx replied softly. Craig tucked her closer into his side anyway, liking the feel of her slighter form against his larger one. Looking down, he could see the light robe she wore was loosely belted at her waist. At the right angle, he could see the lacy edge of her negligee peeking out. He could see the swell of her breasts straining against both the lace and her robe. Looking down, Craig noticed her slippers. "Well, hell, we won't go too far with those on your feet," he murmured.

Lynx looked down and grimaced. “No, I guess you’re right, but they’ll be fine as long as we don’t go into the pasture. Or behind the barn. Or into the woods.” Lynx laughed.

Craig pulled her closer to him. “Hell, I’ll just carry you if I need to, little minx. You look like you’re light as a feather.”

“I can still kick your butt, Marozi. I don’t need you to carry me,” Lynx grumbled half-heartedly. He noticed she still snuggled closer, though.

Craig tucked Lynx firmly against him, holding her hand. He felt a sharp tingle of awareness buzzing through him. Did she feel it, too? The hum of her blood was like a distant thunder in his ears. A storm of warm awareness surged through his veins. Did her heart beat the same way when she was with Leo?

Craig could feel the pulse erratically pounding at Lynx’s small wrists. They had wandered past the garden of blooms. They were far enough away from the house not to be seen, near the barn at the far edge of the property. Craig stopped at the small grove of orange trees to the left of the barn and pulled Lynx around to him. He looked down into her wide, hazel eyes and tilted her chin up so he could study them.

Lynx looked up at him. Her hazel eyes met his, soft and trusting. She felt familiar and right in his arms. Yet, looking at her, need and arousal roiled through him. How was he supposed to fight the feelings he had for her, old and new? He longed to touch the gentle lines of her face, to tangle his fingers through her long curtain of hair, to draw her close. He longed to love her. But could he now? Did she feel as he did?

“Whatever are you thinking, Lynx?” Craig asked softly. “I can almost hear your mind going a hundred miles per hour. Your heartbeat’s nearly as fast, but the scent of you is plain driving me crazy.”

On a groan, he tilted her chin up. Craig lowered his lips to hers, unable to resist the desire that flared in her provocative, mysterious

eyes. Sweet goddess, how was he supposed to resist the provocation of her tempting, lush lips so close to his? His tongue delved, dragging a soft, strangled moan from her in response. The sound echoed from his as he deepened the kiss.

He had to taste more, slide deeper. Craig doubted he'd ever get enough of Lynx's sweet mouth, or her rosy lips, or those delectable elfin ears of hers above her tempting throat. His teeth nipped and teased. He took his time, pulling from the drugging sweetness of her kiss. He was a thirsty man, dying of thirst at the fountain of life. He dragged Lynx closer, aligning his body to her body, his tongue to hers.

Lynx trembled in his arms, but she didn't resist. He drank his fill, nearly overwhelmed by the soul-deep hunger that shook him. Each nibble he took, every touch of his lips to hers, was better than the last. Need became an ache. He felt it growing, burning, unrelenting. The fire had been stoked. Craig knew there was no going back for him.

He could not keep his hands still. The feel of her body against him was perfect, everything he'd imagined it would be. As she clung to him, Craig trailed his hands to her waist. He bent to the curve of her hips, drawing her closer to him with one hand, touching and exploring with the other.

Before Lynx could protest, the robe she'd been wearing was in a puddle at her feet. It fell on the grass, forgotten. Craig drew lazy circles above the lace of her nightgown. Smooth as silk, he fluttered the straps of the gown down over her one shoulder, cupping her warm breast in his hand. The nipple strained to taut attention under the caress. He circled it teasingly, lazily. Gently, he tugged the hard point between his fingers. She gasped.

He nipped her ear and tugged again. He was about to bend in for a taste of the morsel tempting him when he heard an eerily recognizable sound. Craig bit back the answering snarl of warning.

Lynx heard it too, distantly, but her body was held captive by too many pleasurable sensations. Hot cream pooled, as her arousal heightened. Craig's fingers streaked pleasure that spiraled straight to her pussy. Each tug of them at her nipple made her clitoris ache and her body prepare. She was wet, again.

Lynx could feel liquid heat gathering in response. She swayed toward him. Craig's lips trailed over the sensitive spot on her neck. It was Leo's mark.

At the memory of her earlier rendezvous with Leo, Lynx stiffened. What kind of woman was she? How could she love Leo and then feel this way for Craig? How had this happened?

Seconds later, they both heard the eerie sound of a large cat's cry. It sounded closer this time. "What the hell is that?" Lynx asked, with renewed alertness. Then, she noticed her state of dishabille. She pulled back, the seductive moment gone. Lynx quickly adjusted her nightgown back in place.

"I guess we'd better get you back to the ranch, little minx," Craig said. His voice sounded tenderly regretful. "I wouldn't want to take any chances with you. Are you all right?" The last query was made right before he bent to give her a last, lingering kiss. It left her weak.

It shook Lynx. "I'll be fine," she murmured, albeit a little nervously.

"Good." Craig picked up her robe and helped her into it. He pulled her back against him as they started walking towards the rear of the sprawling ranch house. As they neared the porch, they could see the small flickering light of a candle that now burned on the teak table.

"Well, somebody's up," Craig murmured.

Lynx tensed. "Looks like. We could have some explaining to do."

Craig reassured her. "Don't worry, Lynx. I'll think of something. Let me do all the talking."

"Okay," she whispered back to him.

Leo sat comfortably on one of the porch chairs, languorously awaiting, it would seem, their return. He'd been asleep when she left, or so she had thought. Maybe Leo had noticed her absence. Coming up to the house, Lynx stepped out of Craig's embrace.

Lynx could only hope Leo had missed their show of affection earlier. Judging from Leo's genuinely guileless smile, it seemed as though he had. He pulled out the chair for her to sit in.

"So, I take it neither one of you could sleep tonight? Must be something in the air," Leo said equably, conversationally.

Craig cleared his throat. "Yeah, I wasn't getting much rest. The full moon, the wonderful breeze...Well, seemed a shame to waste it on sleep. I went out for a run, and I came back to find Lynx here. Seems she couldn't rest tonight, either. So, I thought I'd show her your lovely garden and how tranquil it can be by moonlight."

Leo glanced over at Lynx. "So, Lynx, what did you think of the gardens by moonlight, then?"

"They're every bit as beautiful as they are by day, Leo. But I'm sure you know that better than anyone."

Leo regarded them both somewhat seriously for a moment, and then turned to Craig. "I hate to be bringing it up, but I probably should. Demar patrols the grounds, and everything is fairly secure here at the ranch." Leo paused and sighed. "Still, it would be best if we maintain a buddy system out of the house. Between Lynx's near-abduction and the odd activities in the woods lately, why take chances? Going out in pairs is the best idea, but at night especially."

Leo paused again, and then added, "Craig, I'm really thankful you walked with Lynx tonight. Did either of you happen to hear or notice anything unusual?" Leo asked the last casually. Leo was looking at Craig when he spoke, but Lynx didn't wait for Craig's response.

She chimed in before Craig could get an answer out. "We heard something that sounded like a large cat right before we headed in." Craig frowned. Lynx ignored his admonishing look. It wasn't like she had to let him do the talking, was it? She could answer questions, too!

~ CatScan ~

Leo managed to restrain his smile. He had noted the look that passed between them, the parsimonious glance between Craig and Lynx. In fact, the whole exchange amused him. He was learning exactly how well Lynx listened, or didn't, rather.

"Well, you do realize that with any large body of forest in Florida, there is a good possibility of cougars and other large, dangerous beasts." Leo said it in his characteristically low-key, matter-of-fact manner. But the surprised, "oh, fuck he didn't just say that," expression on Craig's face, however fleeting, was even better than Craig's reaction before.

Oh, this was fun. Leo bit back another smile.

Craig must have a struggle on his hands. Leo could identify. It was definitely more fun being on the other side of things, though. He remembered trying to sort through the few disconcerting facts at his disposal after his initial shift. Craig's night had probably not gone as planned. Hell, if Craig's shift was unexpected, and it most likely had been like his was, Leo could guess what Craig must be feeling.

Craig probably wondered if he was going a little crazy right about now. His first shift had been dreamlike, Leo remembered, almost surreal. Either way, Leo could only guess what Craig's cougar had thought of Lynx, his mate.

~ Cat and Mouse ~

Craig had the oddest sense that Leo was toying with him and Lynx. Was it possible Leo had noticed something? Perhaps Leo was clued into their growing attraction and had decided to play with them now? If so, how could he know about Craig's odd changes earlier? *Goddess!* Craig ran his fingers through his hair, hoping to clear his thoughts. Although not that tired physically, he was exhausted by the

list of questions running through his head. *Craig, admit it, you're confused, conflicted, and tired. Tomorrow, dude.* His inner voice was right, as usual.

Craig made a show of yawning big behind his hands. "Cougars, wow, guess with a stretch of forest behind you like that, anything's possible."

Leo smiled, not giving away much. Then, Leo changed the subject abruptly.

"Hey, are you two night animals ready for some sleep yet, or do I need to go get us some more chamomile tea from the kitchen?"

Lynx looked ready to escape from her corner. Craig could see her barely stifled yawn. Apparently, she was eager as he was.

Lynx latched onto the offer of tea. "I'm ready now," Lynx said, this time not trying to hide her yawn at all.

Craig could see an out when he was given one, too. He didn't need the rest nearly as much as he needed time to think over the events of the evening. "Yeah, me too. I'll see you both of you in the morning. I'll just take these cups to the kitchen."

"Thanks, Marozi," Leo said as he stood up and took Lynx's hand. Lynx stood up, nodded at Craig.

"Goodnight, Craig," she said as she bent over the table and blew out the lone candle's guttering flame.

Back in his room again, Craig punched the pillow for the third or fourth time, trying to get comfortable enough to go to sleep. *Tomorrow, Yes, tomorrow will be a good enough time to analyze tonight's events.* Still, his troubled thoughts and questions followed him into equally elusive dreams.

~ Caterwaul ~

Long after sleep finally overtook the residents of the Lascaux Ranch, a roar rent the night air. It shook the dark and the forest behind the ranch. The sound echoed deep in the seclusion of wood, stream,

and sky. The saber-tooth watched where the moon's light illuminated the shadows of branches, trees and all matter of other wild things. Unsettled, Adonis stalked back and forth under the cloak of the forest. Sleep was the last thing on his mind.

Chapter 12

The sun's golden light had replaced moonlight by the time Lynx rolled and stretched languorously, purring in satisfaction. With a start, she realized she sounded exactly like Daniel's feline Soxy did any time anyone would pet him. Soxy was not at all a discriminating lover of humans. Whoever petted him, Soxy loved unabashedly. Shaking her head almost reflexively, Lynx disabused herself of the notion. Surely, she had only hummed.

Leo was no longer in bed with her. Lynx looked at the bedside clock. No surprise there, she had really slept in. It was after nine already. Well, ranches didn't run themselves.

Idly, Lynx stretched one more good time before rolling out of bed and getting up. She couldn't do this every day, she mused. But, she had to admit, sleeping had felt heavenly.

She padded to the bathroom to brush her teeth and find her robe and slippers. Still struggling to wake up, Lynx pulled on the robe and stopped dead in her tracks. The memory of last night's interlude with Craig flooded back to her, and she swayed, unsteady, the blood rushing to her cheeks. Oh, what had she nearly done? What was she going to do now? How in the hell was she supposed to choose between Leo and Craig?

These thoughts and more tumbled through her head as she methodically brushed out her hair in long strokes, reminiscing over the previous evening. Lynx was so deep in thought she didn't realize she had company until she saw his face in the mirror behind her. Lynx squeaked and jumped. Despite the fact that her senses seemed to be

absurdly heightened since coming to the ranch, Leo still had the ability to sneak up on her, it seemed.

Leo bent his head and nipped the exposed skin of her neck. Lynx groaned. Shivers followed. And it was entirely too arousing the way he licked his way up to her earlobes.

“Sleep well, little minx?” He growled at her ear.

“Mmm...very well, actually.” Lynx could barely speak at first. It took a concerted effort on her part to answer him as he tongued the sensitive shell of her ear. His erotic nibbles sent electric pulses skittering over her skin in every direction. Her nipples pebbled as waves of heat flooded her clit. He ravished her responsive lobe skillfully.

Leo’s next move, however, caught her off guard. He whispered huskily, “So, what did you and Craig talk about on your little moonlit walk last night?” The timing of the question was unexpected. Lynx had expected it the night before, when she and Craig had walked up and found Leo waiting for them. But the questions she’d assumed would be asked last night had not materialized. Now, only half-awake and surprised, she was ill-prepared to lie. Craig wasn’t here to answer for her now, either.

“Um, we didn’t really talk all that much, Leo. We mostly just enjoyed walking in the gardens by moonlight.”

Lynx wasn’t about to lie, but she wasn’t prepared to tell the whole truth, either.

~ *CatFood* ~

Leo doubted Lynx and Craig spent the whole time just talking. He had known Lynx was highly aroused when she’d returned to the veranda, just by her scent alone.

Craig, Leo had noted, had given off some very telling olfactory scents, too.

He would have to carefully ease into this discussion with Lynx and Craig, though. Neither understood the gifts that came with their ability as shifters. Neither fully knew their gifts' ramifications, either. Soon, but meanwhile, he had some ranch business to clear up.

"That's nice," Leo said. "Glad you enjoyed the gardens with Craig, kitten." Leo nipped the lobe of Lynx's ear playfully. She gasped. Leo changed the subject abruptly. "Speaking of Craig, he was kind enough to help Demar and I search for some lost bovines."

Lynx's eyes crinkled up when she was confused. Leo hid his amusement. He waited for the expected question. It didn't take long.

"Lost bovines? What exactly are bovines, and how did they get lost?"

Leo hooted with laughter, abruptly stopping when he saw Lynx's crinkles become a scowl. 'Bovines' is just another word for cows." Turning serious, he continued, "I'm a little concerned, actually. Bovines just don't go missing." He absently stroked the slope of Lynx's shoulder and arm under her robe.

Lynx nudged her way back against him, the curve of her hip rubbing him. Leo felt the caress all the way through his jeans, straight to his cock. The friction was damn distracting. His cock didn't mind.

"So, did you, Craig, or Demar find anything helpful to do with the 'bovines' disappearance?" Lynx asked, and then added, "Oh, and FYI, I know lots of big words, so don't get too cocky on me, you erudite beast. I'm just not necessarily familiar with your ranching lingo."

Leo groaned as Lynx deliberately rode her hips over the bumpy ridge of his jean-covered cock. *Torturous little minx.*

Leo made a few well-aimed thrusting motions that he knew registered an impression through the thin silk of Lynx's robe. Her sexy moan at contact proved him right. He repeated the motion for good measure. Her robe parted, revealing an inviting mound, already slick with desire.

Judging from her enticing scent, increased sexual responses, and appetite, she was getting closer to heat. A low growl escaped his lips.

Given the predatory roar they'd all heard last night, Leo sure didn't want to be caught off guard. The fact that he'd seen Adonis Cervantes just days ago and within such close proximity to his own ranch was hardly reassuring. His time of half-sheltering Lynx from the truth of her genetics and latent abilities was nearly at an end, natural or otherwise.

Leo felt the Goose bumps emerge on Lynx's legs at his growl. He could feel himself growing restless. His jaws ached and his fangs itched.

He hadn't shaved yet, and he knew it was prickly. However, Lynx's neck was too tempting. He added to the rasp, lightly scraping his teeth as he moved towards his target. Lynx arched to him, offering the smooth column.

Leo paused on the brink of sinking the sharpening fangs of his incisors into her neck there and then. No big cat worth his claws could ignore when his pussy acted like this. But that thought only made him realize Lynx in heat would be impossible for Adonis to resist. It didn't matter what the rogue's original motives were for being nearby.

What big cat in a fifty mile radius could resist a female in heat, alpha or not? There were feline enemies right at their borders, waiting for either Lynx or retribution against Leo or both. Leo's guess was that it was personal this time, damn personal.

Either way, Leo knew Adonis and his pack of saber-tooth rogues would not just go away quietly. The threat was very real. His ranch, the people working for him, and Lynx were all in danger. But Lynx very possibly faced the gravest danger of all. He needed all the help he could get to protect her. He needed Craig.

Lynx suddenly shimmied around, facing him. Plainly, she'd expected another nibble. Leo smiled. His hands at Lynx's hips, he ground Lynx's mound with the bulge straining his jeans. Lynx let out a gasp.

He didn't have much longer. Lynx was close. Leo longed to stoke the fire higher. However, another powerful instinct warred within him-danger. Leo couldn't ignore the warning.

Leo knew without being told that Craig would give his life for Lynx's if it came to it. Craig cared for Lynx. From what Leo had gleaned, Craig had cared for her since childhood.

Craig was not fully aware of his latent Imatu abilities, much the same as Lynx. But those abilities, coupled with the fact of Craig's military training before and with COBRA, would give Leo and his pride an edge. It could well be the edge needed if Adonis Cervantes made a move on Lynx again.

"You're a hundred miles away," Lynx pouted. She arched her neck and upper torso in blatant invitation.

"I know. I probably am somewhere else this morning," Leo sighed regretfully. "Lynx, it's just ranch business. I guess it's still bugging me. I'm sorry, kitten. I'll make it up to you in just a little while. That, I promise."

Leo pulled Lynx to him tightly and claimed her lips. He would love to show her exactly what he promised to pick up later, but he had too many things to take care of first. He wanted the time to savor Lynx slowly, mark her permanently as his, without question. After just one long, heated, teasing kiss, which only extended past her lips to the tender flesh above her bared shoulder bone, he broke away resignedly. His siege of Lynx, regrettably, would need to be put on hold momentarily. With one last, heated kiss, Leo reluctantly turned and left.

~ ClumsyCat ~

Lynx sucked in a deep breath. She leaned on the bathroom sink and examined her face in the mirror. No, she didn't really need to add any color to her face this morning. Her skin glowed already.

She quickly pulled on a bright, flowered sundress, trying to ignore the way her pebbled nipples scraped against the soft fabric or the way her lacy underwear was already moist between her thighs. Her thoughts buzzed with the memory of Leo's earlier teasing promises.

She headed downstairs to assuage the hunger that had begun to assert itself in her growling stomach. Food sounded great at this point. Her other hungers would have to wait. Lynx made her way into the kitchen and began searching for something to scrounge up.

By ten, she had foraged enough eggs and cheese for a skillet full of omelet, along with a plate of bacon, and she had already had her first cup of coffee. She was starting on her second cup when Craig walked in with Leo following right behind. Lynx started filling her plate, trying to ignore the shivers that went through her system at the sight of the two of them in blue jeans and comfortable tee-shirts. They looked utterly male and delicious.

Demar followed right behind them, completing the trio, and it was obvious that the three of them had been quietly talking. The minute they all saw Lynx seated at the smaller kitchen table nestled into the corner, their conversation abruptly stopped.

"Well," Demar cleared his throat and ran his fingers over his shaved head in a gesture that Lynx couldn't help but notice was rhythmic and just slightly sexy. "I'd best be checking that out for you, Leo, and good morning, Lynx." With that, Demar put his hat back on, ran his finger around the rim, another habit she'd noticed, and strode out towards the foyer. He seemed to be in a hurry to get on with whatever errand Leo had sent him on.

Craig looked to Lynx and then back at Leo before asking, "So, what do you have there, and is there more?"

Leo had wondered over to the stove, giving everything an approving sniff before he answered for her. "Well, I don't know how she'd eat all that. I don't think she'll mind sharing, would you, Lynx?" Just the way Leo drawled that last part out had heat rising to her cheeks. Her mind *had* wandered involuntarily.

“No, no, of course not,” she blurted out. Lynx bent her head, letting her hair curtain her overheated cheeks. She knew she needed to keep her eyes off the two of them or else give away exactly where her thoughts had headed. Leo’s innocuous but provocative suggestion didn’t mean anything, right? A sudden fantasy of being sandwiched between the two of them was more than Lynx could take at the moment.

Lynx, stop it right now!

“*What do you need to stop, Lynx?*” This time the sensuous drawl of a voice in her head was Leo’s. She kept her head bent to the two men who were now seated at the small table enjoying their coffee. Sexual tension roiled through her. This telepathic communication that she seemed to have alternately with Leo and Craig was for the birds. Especially, like now, when she needed to explain.

She carefully thought the answer back. “*I tend to rush, get clumsy and break things. I broke a glass just yesterday.*”

“*Sure,*” Leo replied. He was unapologetically cheeky too, “*I’m sorry about that, kitten. Did you get wet?*” Leo asked.

Lynx just knew if she turned around right now, Leo would be sitting there with a knowing smirk on his face. She could just feel the wicked humor and sensuality emanating off him in waves.

She listened to the casual conversation Craig and Leo carried on behind her. Lynx battled to regain her composure before joining them at the small alcove. If she could feel their silent regard of her without turning around, she couldn’t help wonder how it would feel to be sitting so intimately between the two of them. Oh, well, last night they’d shared tea on the porch, and she’d been wearing nothing but her robe and gown beneath. Now at least she was fully dressed.

Lynx took her refilled coffee mug back to the small table.

Immediately, both men quickly made their moves to get up and draw out her chair for her. Craig backed away first, allowing Leo to do the honors. Leo grinned wickedly at her as he pulled out her chair.

Lynx sat down. She tried to pretend she hadn't noticed their little byplay. "Thank you," was all she said as she sat back down. She sipped her coffee intently. At first she could ignore the very male thigh now brushing her own. She tried not to act aware of a set of very male feet from the table's other side that nudged her own smaller, delicate ones between them.

Oh, this is certainly comfortable. How could she look at one and not feel what the other was doing?

Lynx could feel the heat burning her cheeks, and she knew it wasn't the steam from her coffee. If that weren't bad enough, Leo chose that moment to secretly allow his free hand to slide alongside hers and his thigh. Leo's caress left fiery sparks on her skin as he inched up the edge of her sundress. At the same time, Craig used one foot to skim up the calf of her other leg, flirting shamelessly. It worked, too.

More than the cream from her cup spilled as Lynx nearly knocked over her coffee cup in her hurry to get up. "I-I need to warm up my c-c-coffee." She stammered over the words as both men looked at her somewhat askance.

Leo drank down the last of his coffee. Getting up for a refill, he practically chortled, "Well, at least you didn't break the cup this time, kitten. Don't get up. I'll grab a towel and a fresh cup for you, too. By the way, Craig, after you're through with breakfast, would you give Captain Slater a call and tell him what we've discussed?"

Lynx eyed both men suspiciously. "What do you both know that you need to talk to Slater about?"

Craig looked over at Leo, as if waiting for him to answer first. "Well, it's a situation I've been keeping my eye on, Lynx."

Felice walked into the kitchen and went to pour herself a cup of coffee. Roberto followed. Lynx felt growing uneasiness. Her sensitive instincts were not going to be put off any longer. "What situation, Leo?"

“Lynx, Roberto, and I recently came across a campfire in the woods. We were startled to find one of the campers had a familiar face, a face one doesn’t easily forget.”

Lynx looked back and forth between them, waiting for the pin to drop. Impatient, she blurted. “Well, who was this mystery camper, Leo? And what does this mystery camper have to do with Captain Slater? Why would he need to be told?”

For a second, Leo hesitated. But he knew he didn’t dare delay long before answering.

Lynx glared at him, waiting.

Leo finally spit it out. His tone was dead serious. “Adonis Cervantes, Lynx, that’s who Captain Slater needs to know about.” Lynx’s mouth flew open. She shut it. She recognized the name. For a few seconds, she was speechless. Oh, but she had questions.

Lynx made her way back to the coffee pot, poured what was left of the coffee into her cup, then went and sat down at the small table. “So, what is Cervantes’s remaining son doing in the woods so close to your home, Leo? And why do I get the strangest feeling this has at least something to do with me being here?” Lynx asked, though this time in a quieter voice.

Leo shrugged, walked over to Lynx, tilted her chin up as he looked at her, and said. “We don’t know for sure what Adonis is after, Lynx. But I don’t want you worrying, do you hear? I’m not going to let anything happen to you. Neither will Craig or any man or woman who works for me. Do you understand me?”

Lynx looked up at Leo for a second, her hazel eyes wide as saucers. She stepped back, her voice was clear. “I’m not worried, Leo. You, with all of your macho, protective, me big male, you little female chest pounding, don’t forget I’m a COBRA agent. Even if I was almost kidnapped before, I won’t be so easily caught off guard again. While we’re on the subject now, don’t you think it’s high time you returned my baby?”

Leo, Craig, and Roberto all looked at her with similar quizzical expressions on their faces. Felice just grinned like a Cheshire cat, and finally broke the silence.

"I think what Lynx means, boys, is she wants her gun back." Felice chuckled and added, "I know I wouldn't feel right without my baby close by, either."

Roberto laughed as he went over to nuzzle Felice's hair in an affectionate gesture Lynx had noted was typical for the couple. "Yeah, Felice never wants to take the damn thing off, either." Roberto said, but in the same teasing manner. Felice just laughingly elbowed Roberto lightly before snuggling deeper into Roberto's lanky frame.

Leo grinned at the couple and groaned.

Roberto didn't seem to mind, though.

Lynx watched the affectionate byplay with Roberto and Felice in amusement. She smiled and agreed. "Felice is right. I mean my gun. I was unconscious when I came here, but I've had time to recover. So, where is my piece, Leo?" Lynx swallowed down the last of her coffee, and looked at Leo expectantly.

Leo swallowed down the remaining dregs of his now cooling java before he answered, "Don't worry, you'll get your baby back. I'll just go retrieve it from the den. It would be best for all concerned here at the ranch to be packing at all times. Since we don't know the extent of the threat that Adonis poses, it only makes sense to be armed and ready. Give me five minutes, Lynx, and I'll return her to you." Leo strode out of the kitchen and headed towards the den.

"Well," Craig said, looking thoughtful as Leo turned the corner, "I wonder how long it'll take Captain Slater to send in the rest of the team on this one? It would be kind of difficult to believe that Cervantes is prowling an area this close to us without some kind of connection, some sort of illegal activity going on. I just wish we knew exactly what Adonis was up to here." In Craig's blue-grey eyes, Lynx could see the curiosity and concern that his voice clearly reflected.

She had to restrain her desire to reach across the table and reassure him. She had a strong urge to ruffle Craig's thick, dark hair playfully to tease him out of his worries. Truthfully, she was worried, too. She might not have been part of the operation COBRA had run during the time period when Adonis's father and brother had headed the Ombres drug cartel, and she may not have seen the intense drug war that her team had very nearly lost, but she'd heard the chilling tales. The Cervantes name was not one to be taken lightly.

Her worried thoughts were interrupted by Craig's hands enfolding hers. "A quarter for your thoughts, little minx," he all but purred.

Lynx shivered. What was it about his touch? When his fingers stroked the back of her hand and he made that sound, it sent tingles through her. Then, Leo came walking through the hallway that led to the kitchen. She quickly removed her hands from Craig's a split-second before Leo came into the room. Lynx tried to compose her expression.

Lynx's anxiety vanished as soon as Leo held out her baby, her nine millimeter Beretta 92. She loved having the feel of the gun's light but solid weight back in her hands once again. Her Baby Beretta, as she called it, was just one of the standard guns issued to the special ops teams back at McDill.

Lynx understood what Felice had meant. She'd felt naked without her gun on hand, too. But then she no longer felt disoriented or weak. She had when she'd first arrived. Now, despite a few dizzy spells, she was beginning to feel as energetic as she ever had, if not kinetic with energy.

"Thanks, Leo. You obviously took good care of her." Lynx purred with delight as she carefully examined her beloved gun. Lynx noted automatically, and with satisfaction, that it was still fully loaded. All ten clips in the magazine were there, safety locked but ready to go. Still, Lynx hoped she wouldn't need them any time soon. But if she did, she could at least defend herself again.

~ Every *Pussy* Needs to Play ~

Every soldier or operative Leo had ever known valued their personal weapon. Why not? A weapon became a powerful extension for a soldier. In COBRA, camaraderie and protectiveness for one's team members was paramount, though. Craig and Lynx were no exception he could see.

Craig reached over and gently took the gun from Lynx's hands. He carefully checked it over before returning it. Leo sensed the fierce protectiveness Craig felt for Lynx. It was only natural, of course. Craig had been protective of Lynx long before he had, he reminded himself. The years since he'd left the team were the same ones that Craig and Lynx had worked, and perhaps played, together.

The thought brought him up short. He and Lynx hadn't yet had time to really play together. Sure, they'd had mind-blowing sex once she'd recouped enough. But she had still been weak after her arrival at the ranch. There hadn't been time yet to find out what Lynx did for pure fun. Well, he recollected fondly, other than satisfying their crazy urges and devouring each other.

That was going to have to change, Leo decided. He didn't want all of Lynx's memories of fun to consist only of a time before him. "Hey, what do you both think of a night on the town this evening?" he asked. Two startled pairs of eyes looked inquisitively at him.

Craig, in particular, looked confused. "Are you sure we can protect Lynx if we go out on the town?" The question was legitimate, Leo knew.

"Don't worry, Craig, I'll protect you. I won't let any big bad bitches bite you." Lynx got up and came to stand by Leo. Reaching up, she ruffled his hair. Leo eased closer, wanting more, wanting to purr.

"I can't wait, Leo. I hope you boys know how to dance. I hope you can keep up with me." Lynx smirked at them. Then, she

suggestively waggled her eyebrows before turning on her heel and sashaying out of the room.

“Ahem, well, she sure told me.” Craig cleared his throat, still gazing in the direction of Lynx’s exit. “*Love to see you coming, but love to watch you go, too.*” Craig was broadcasting, loudly, whether he realized or not. Leo shot him an amused look. He had not missed that last lustful look Craig had directed at Lynx’s disappearing, and all too appetizing, tail.

“*So, I’m not the only one who loves to watch Lynx come and go?*” Leo thought pointedly in Craig’s direction. Craig in turn, Leo noticed, had the decency to flush red and look over questioningly at him.

“Yes, I suppose she told us,” Leo redirected aloud to Craig, turning serious again once he heard the door to Lynx’s upstairs room close. He hadn’t wanted Lynx to overhear what he had to say to Craig. Her hearing was acute, more so every day. But all of her senses were sharpening. Lynx’s was tip-toeing on the verge of her heat cycle, and it was driving him crazy. She was harder and harder to resist. He understood Craig being attracted to Lynx more than ever.

“Craig, you were right,” Leo said thoughtfully, “we really do need to be on guard and exercise extreme caution while out with Lynx tonight. But I believe it’s just as important Lynx gets out and has some fun, especially since she’s been cooped up here recuperating. Still, an outing like this has inherent dangers since we know Adonis is probably still nearby.” Leo paused, considering how best to address the rest with Craig, then continued.

“There are some other issues we need to discuss, as well. To begin with, what exactly did Captain Slater have to say about the situation, Craig? Are we going to have our team to count on for backup soon or not? Are they coming to investigate this possible new development, or are you expected to be the lone wolf on this end, so to speak? I can’t imagine Daniel not wanting to be here to keep an eye out for Lynx, not after knowing he might have easily lost her.”

“Whoa there, Leo, slow down. Slow down, buddy, one or two questions at a time, please. You’re talking almost as fast as Lynx does at times.” Craig grinned. “Na, nobody can talk that fast.”

Leo sat back and spread his long legs out before continuing. Craig wasn’t answering fast enough from his point of view.

Finally, Craig answered in his usual, unhurried manner. “Yeah, Slater wanted me to reiterate that as soon as Ethan and Javiar get back from their latest trip, they’ll be available should we feel the situation warrants it. Right now, they’re out of the country for at least a few more days. Daniel should be here by tomorrow, sometime before noon most likely. Oh, and Slater wants to be notified immediately if anything new turns up on the Adonis front. He promised to come out himself, if needed. Slater plans to enlist Captain Donovan and request his team’s help, if necessary. Oh, and by the way, Leo, Slater wanted me to ask you something.” Craig paused.

“What did he want to know, Craig?” Leo asked.

“He wanted to know when your *extended leave* was going to be over. He made it quite clear that you’d still be a welcomed asset if you returned to COBRA, Leo.”

Leo’s gaze was thoughtful, but just as he was about to answer Craig’s question, Roberto walked into the kitchen.

Roberto washed his hands and dried his hands. “Black Jack, the new stud is here,” Roberto noted casually. “I could use a hand or two at the barn.”

“I’ll be right out,” Leo told Roberto, “just give me a moment.” Leo looked at Craig and added, “We’ll have to finish our discussion in a few hours, Craig. I need to go help Roberto. Studs can be quite temperamental. They require careful handling, especially until they’ve adjusted to a new farm. Besides, it’ll give me the chance to see about asking Roberto and Felice to follow us out to the club tonight. I’m sure they could use a break from ranch business, and we could use the extra eyes tonight. I don’t want to take any chances when it comes to Lynx’s safety.”

As the door closed behind him, Leo's keen ears caught Craig's barely audible answer, "Neither do I, bro. Neither do I."

~ Here *Kitty* Comes ~

Lynx hummed softly to herself as she rifled through a few dresses in the room's spacious closet. Her mind flitted ahead to the night's coming entertainment. She hadn't been dancing since, well, since the night she and Craig had run out of Smoky's Joint. What a rush that had been. The recollection made her smile, although at the time, she'd been anything but pleased to leave.

Lynx had just started enjoying herself when the shooting had started. Oh, well, tonight would be different. Lynx's cheeks warmed at the thought of Leo and Craig both on the dance floor. The room was decidedly warmer just thinking about it. She could only imagine what the reality of it would be like.

In her mind, she could very nearly picture it. Both men were a study of fine contrast, Leo with his amber eyes, golden hair, and rangy, but solid musculature. Leo defined raw masculinity and power. In his arms, she felt nothing could hurt her. Under Leo, she was female to her core.

Then there was Craig. The man should market his brand of male charisma. That long, midnight hair, cheekbones to die for, those slate-colored, smoky eyes, his perfect butt, and those long legs. Craig was like sex on a stick, a very sexy stick. Did it matter she had wanted him for years, or that his friendship had been a lifeline many times?

Lynx had observed Craig through the years, and whether roughhousing with his teammates or handling his lovers, he was a mixture of strong and gentle. He could be rough and tough one moment, yet he could wax poetic on a whim. Yes, Lynx sighed, reminiscing. Craig was an intriguing mixture. His hard body belied a tender side.

She also knew Craig had a cache of poetry he'd written through the years. Lynx had only read a few of his poems, but she'd been surprised by them, that he wrote at all. But, she mused, hints of this tender side of Craig were betrayed if one looked past his body.

That was difficult sometimes, looking past Craig's body. His mouth was unlike the tough steel of his body's hard lines. It was softer, gentler.

She simply had to distract herself. She began deliberating between a little red number and a deceptively simple black sheath. Craig had thoughtfully packed some of her clothes before coming out, and Felice had generously brought by some dresses.

She was alternately considering Craig and Leo's reaction to the sexy little numbers, lost in her own world until she heard the sensual voice in her ear.

"Wear either of those, babe, and all I'll be able to think about is ripping it off your sweet, luscious little body." Craig's hoarse, low voice in her ear sent shivers up and down her legs. Her toes curled and tingled. She'd gone weak at the knees and all he had done was whisper in her ear. As Craig bent to her, his fingers worked in and around the straps to the sundress she wore. Even the slight feel of his fingers drawing patterns there sent pulses of desire fluttering through her.

Lynx whirled around to face him. "Craig, how did you sneak up on me like that?" Her mistake was that she had to grab onto him to steady herself. She suddenly felt weaker than a kitten. She stared into his eyes a fraction of a second before he answered.

"It wasn't hard to do, Lynx. That must've been one hell of a daydream you were having. Either that or picking which dress you'll wear later is one helluva decision to make." His lips twitched, as if holding back the laughter behind them was all he could do.

She couldn't stay mad at him. She stared, memorized the shape of the lips she'd been fantasizing about moments before. If she could

just taste them one more time to see if they were as good as she remembered.

From the look in Craig's eyes as he bent over her, she was about to get her chance. His muscular arms slid around to her slender arms as he locked his fingers intimately with hers. His mouth slanted over hers.

He parted her lips with his tongue.

"Lynx," he groaned.

She opened for his invasion, hungry for the taste of him. His other hand curled around the base of her neck, drew her against him, dominating her. He didn't ask. He was taking. She moaned low in her throat. She could feel him throbbing against her, growing even harder as he pressed her back against the wall.

She felt every inch of him. He was iron hard, his jean-clad cock providing friction against her swelling clit. His tongue continued to devour her mouth. She could barely breathe. The need for him was stronger, more potent. She'd breathe later.

His mouth and tongue plundered, sensual, melting down on hers. When Craig snaked his tongue around hers, she could already feel the pulse of the sexual rhythm their bodies would drum later.

"Now!"

Lynx telepathically linked with Craig. She needed.

"Now what?" Craig demanded. He was going to make her say it.

"*I need you now, Craig.*" Lynx felt him quiver in response. She watched him slowly unbutton the first button at the top of her sundress. He didn't rush. He undid the next twelve buttons at a speed that nearly had Lynx grinding her teeth in a mix of frustration and erotic hunger. It wasn't just that he didn't rush. No, every button Craig undid bared new skin for him to explore, to suckle, and to torment with his mouth.

By the very last button, Lynx was sure she had reached the limit, the very edge of her endurance. She could feel the tension build steadily in her body.

“Do you need me to do this?” Craig asked, then thumbed her nipple, flicked it. Electricity arced straight to her clit. But Craig moved, nibbled his way down her naval and beyond to the now slick V of her sex. Her dress fell to the floor.

“What about this, little minx?”

Craig’s tongue finally encircled the aching swollen knot of her clit. The whole world shifted around her.

Lynx could feel ecstasy building, threatening to blow from his first lick. The burn left her gasping, but not from pain. No, she was aflame. Heat swirled, intense, hotter than lava with every foray of his tongue. Seeing Craig’s cheeks hollow in worship as she stood there open to him, made her burn more. Her hands tangled in his dark hair as she offered herself to him. Craig held her open and licked slowly, his tongue lapping at the cream that pooled between her legs.

Lynx moaned in a sound husky with need and want. Eruption imminent, she could feel the explosive tightening inside her. It was inevitable. She was going to come.

“I’ve wanted to taste you for so long,” Craig groaned. With his broad hands, he pulled her hips closer. Then he slowly dipped his tongue inside her, and then back out again.

She whimpered, needing more. Lynx wrapped her hands in his dark hair tighter, trying to draw him closer still.

“More now, Craig, I need more,” she admitted, trembling.

He drank from her, drew more juice to his tongue in wicked lashes that made her writhe with need. She clutched Craig to her as he laved and licked her tender clit. He suckled her into his mouth slowly and the tide of pleasure built.

Craig wasn’t through. He slowly spread her apart with his hands. Lynx saw his eyes, then. They were storm-dark and intent. Craig lowered his mouth to her again as he slipped two fingers inside her. She shuddered out one long shudder. He stroked in and out, swiped his tongue over her as his fingers speared her. Her breath caught.

“That’s it,” Craig crooned, “come for me, little minx.”

She flew over the edge and fragmented apart. Breathless moans tore from her throat as she rocked to Craig's hands, fingers, his mouth and tongue. Lynx rode the ripples that ravaged her. The ocean itself seemed to roar in her ears as wave after wave of pleasure washed over her. Floating, she was floating.

~ SweetPuss ~

Craig groaned. Greedy, he couldn't get enough of the cream spilling between her silken legs. Drawn to Lynx's honey like a bee, it was rich, hot, and impossibly wild on his tongue. This was surely the sweet dew of the goddess. It must be. It was the sweetest ambrosia he'd ever known.

He was ready to take her to the floor. Then Craig heard voices below and a door shutting.

Damn, now just isn't the time. Lynx was barely registering anything. She'd slid down the wall and leaned back against it now. Her eyes were half-shut, and she occasionally shuddered.

He took one last, long look. His cock ached with regret, but this would have to wait.

"Lynx, maybe you should go take a nice warm bath. I'll be imagining you in it, believe me. But, Lynx, I hear voices downstairs. They're back." Craig stood up and held out his hand, urging her up.

He offered his hand, she took it. He helped her to her feet. She stood and steadied herself against him. He brushed a soft kiss over her lips. He wanted to stay right here, with her. But that probably wasn't a good idea right now. He broke from the kiss.

"It's okay, go. Leave, now, Craig," she whispered. Lynx looked slumberous, satisfied. She shooed him to the door, after she had peeked out the upstairs hallway. She gave him the nod to go ahead.

Craig eased quietly back to his room. If somehow he were caught with Lynx, no matter how bad the reaction Leo might have, one taste of Lynx would have been worth it.

Damn, he was still harder than a brick. No warm bath for him. Craig grimaced. A cold shower it would have to be.

~ CatHouse ~

Roberto poured himself some iced tea from the fridge, while Leo finished washing his hands in the big stainless steel sink. “Hey, Leo, so what do you think of Captain Black?” Roberto questioned.

Leo finished toweling off his hands. “I think that’s some of the prettiest horse-flesh I’ve seen in ages. He’s going to make some gorgeous colts with Lady Jane, don’t cha think?”

Roberto nodded his head in agreement. “Sure do. So, how much longer before she’s in cycle to breed?”

“Probably only another week at best,” Leo answered. “Well, Roberto, our favorite sibling ranch hands should be arriving tomorrow.”

Roberto quirked his eyebrow questioningly at Leo. “You don’t say. Well, good. It’s been *almost* quiet without Colby and Drake.” Roberto grinned.

“Yes, looks like the ranch is going to become quite the bed and breakfast here soon, Roberto,” Leo admitted. “Between various and sundry members of my old team coming for a visit, for however long, and with Colby and Drake back, well, looks like we’re going to have a full house for a while.

“Demar will love it. He enjoys extra mouths around to sample his gourmet cooking skills. Hell of a hobby for him, huh? He’s damn good at it, though.” Leo paused, considering.

“Oh, and by the way, have you and Felice managed to store up enough of the serum for reserves? I realize that between extra guard duty and helping out with the farm labor around here since the twins were gone has kept you busy. Still, it would be wise to have extra serum on stock, in case of emergency, you know.”

“It’s not been that bad,” Roberto countered. He wiped the sweat off his brow with the back of his bandana. “Anyway, Felice already took care of it, Leo, so, not to worry. We’ve got enough extra serum for any emergency that might crop up.”

“Good.” Leo was relieved. “Well, in any case, I hope you and Felice will join us when we go dancing tonight. I’m sure the both of you could use a night off and some fun, too. Besides, we will all be safer as a group. I won’t worry half as much about taking Lynx out, either. Just as soon as we step foot off the ranch, I’ll activate the security system, of course. With Demar patrolling the ranch, it should be fine.”

Leo slapped Roberto heartily on the back. Then he stepped around Roberto and headed for the stairs, calling over his shoulder. “Don’t forget to take a shower before we go, though, buddy. Else I’m thinking Felice won’t wanna dance with you.” Leo cracked to Roberto in a parting shot.

Roberto’s laughter rang out as he took the stairs two at a time. Leo grinned the whole way. He could hear Roberto whistling a happy tune now.

Leo opened the door and stepped in. Lynx wasn’t in the bedroom, so he headed for the bathroom.

From the fogged glass on the beveled mirrors to the left of the huge tub, Leo could tell Lynx was taking a hot bath. A sudsy one, too, she must have used half a thing of bubble bath. He could see Lynx’s head rising over the top of the bubbles as he looked, but not much else. He very much wanted to see the rest of her.

“Hey there, beautiful,” Leo said, swallowing the frog that rose in his throat all of a sudden.

Lynx’s head swiveled around. Apparently, he’d managed to startle her again.

Leo couldn’t help but notice there was something different about Lynx. She looked sated, slightly guilty, even. Perhaps it was only his

imagination playing tricks. “So, Lynx, what have you been up to this afternoon?”

“Oh, nothing much, just trying to figure out what to wear when we go out tonight.”

Leo didn’t press the issue, but something didn’t smell right. His suspicions weren’t allayed by her attempt to redirect, either.

“So, what did you and Roberto think of the new stud that arrived earlier?” Lynx moved up a little in the tub just enough to expose the tip of a sudsy breast. Her movements were languid and sensual. She was damn distracting, all right.

Leo moved closer to the tub. He sat down beside her on a stool, close enough to touch her. He picked up the loofah sponge and then answered. “Captain Black is gorgeous, but not nearly as beautiful as you are, kitten.”

Captain Black was far from being his primary focus at the moment. All he could see was his mate in front of him. She was naked and she was wet. “Want me to wash your back?” Leo growled huskily.

“That could work,” Lynx murmured.

Leo quickly undressed. Then he moved behind her and soaped up the loofah sponge. Slowly, he started with caressing strokes over her shoulders. Then, he began to explore freely with the sponge. As his explorations laved over her nipples, the hard peaks jutted proudly through the bubbles.

Lynx leaned back, eyes closed. Leo circled one breast with the sponge and palmed her other one, stroking.

How did her responsiveness make him go weak in the knees and hard as a rock at the same time? he wondered idly

His hand drifted lower. Her clit was already swollen, and even through the soothing warm water, Leo could feel the syrupy juices pooling at her sex.

He slowly and deliberately moved the sponge past her navel to gently score the small triangle of burnished curls surrounding her

tender nub. Lynx's moan was an audible testament to her pleasure of it.

Leo didn't stop. He continued the soft circular motions, lightly, then harder. Lynx's moan came softly again. Her breathing grew harsher. He rubbed the slick button faster, catching it between his fingers before sliding one smoothly in the slicker slit beneath.

Lynx's moan this time was louder. He could feel her inner muscles pulsing around him. Getting closer...

He paused. Lynx groaned, this time in dismay. She opened her eyes. Leo stood up, grabbed a nearby towel, and then reached for her to help her out of the bath. He somehow managed to help Lynx towel off. Every touch and fleeting brush of her flesh made him harder.

Leo pulled Lynx to him. Her lips begged to be kissed, parted and soft. Her breasts rose and fell with her ragged breathing. Her nipples stood wanton, needy and erect. He could easily see the swollen hood of Lynx's clit peeking through the slick curls at her mound. He dragged her to him, hot, bothered, and at this point, dangerously hard. They were groin to groin, his chest solidly planted against hers. He could feel her stiff nipples like a brand against his skin.

He wedged his heavy, thick length against her. It throbbed in demand. Lynx's slick, needy heat would be the perfect sheath for him. He could already feel the syrup that clung to her. His cock gushed more.

He didn't want to let go of her. The bed seemed too far away. They stumbled out of the bathroom, just making it to the lushly carpeted floor of the room before he pulled Lynx down with him. He kissed his way down her delicate throat, neck, and shoulders. He trailed his lips past the dewy fine hair on her arms as she shuddered.

Unable to deny his need any longer, Leo circled the peak of one breast intently, hungrily. He ignored the tempting, taut nipple.

He could feel the tug of Lynx's fingers in his hair. She was trying to redirect his attentions.

Leo wasn't about to be deterred. Instead, he moved to her right breast to perform the same intricate patterns against the delicate skin there. With excruciating slowness, he returned to the other side, intent on teasing her past the point of reason. The torture went both ways as far as he was concerned. His mouth watered at the sight of the erect tip. It was but a mere fraction of an inch from his tongue.

He knew Lynx was almost painfully aroused. He'd seen a brief glimpse of her eyes as they went from ovoid to elliptical. He'd struggled not to mount her then and there. The temptation of her nipple, jutting hard against his jaw became too mouthwatering to ignore. Leo grasped the taunting pink morsel between his teeth.

She arched under him with a suddenness that surprised him. She gasped, and then trembled as he slid his free hand down to stroke her. Leo suckled, nipped. She arched into his hand, bucking against the fingers that found, and then filled her moist entrance.

"Don't stop, please don't stop!"

Her plea cum demand came as Leo plunged two fingers inside her creaming pussy. He swore she was going to break them. Lynx's rhythmic pulsing around his fingers made him shudder and groan. What he needed was Lynx wrapped around him, everywhere and completely. Her throaty moans and her tantalizing essence dripping from his fingers just weren't enough. He wanted it all.

Leo kissed another moan from her mouth. He heard the beginning of a purr in there as well. She watched him through dazed eyes. Leo slowly, languorously, took the fingers he'd thrust inside her and brought them to her lips. Tentative at first, she slowly licked then sucked them inside her sweet mouth as she stared back at him. Innocence and wildness captured in her gaze.

Leo brought the fingers back to his own lips, licking them in blatant approval. He purposefully re-traveled the length of her body to find more. His hard length kept grazing her leg as he moved. A purr vibrated on his lips as he lapped at her.

“*Cream and honey,*” he purred in her head. Her sweet essence clung to his lips. He licked them in approval. Perfect, the way he liked it, as in Lynx, au jus.

Lynx appealed to him in reply. “*Do you like it then?*” Her hips undulated, pleading.

Leo moaned raggedly before answering. “*Baby, I love the way you taste. You’re so creamy, even better than honey. Sooo sweet on my tongue, you’re melting like a sugar cube in my mouth. I can’t get enough of you, kitten.*” He bent to sample more, drawing from her slit more of the slick sweetness.

Lynx didn’t respond outright. Her body did. Her head lolled back. She spiraled fast and hot. He could feel the small pulses, as her body gathered, tightened, readying for its release.

Leo sensed the change and felt the heat rising in Lynx. Maybe it was the cream that coated his tongue slickly, or perhaps just the slight tremors that already shook her. But he positioned himself above her.

The full, hard length of him knocked at her snug entrance. In a long, but swift thrust, he surged inside her, demanding and hard. Lynx gasped and scored his back with her nails.

Leo barely noticed. He concentrated on keeping a steady rhythm to the perfect tempo of his thrusts. The silken slide was ah, just right. But the temptation to accelerate the beat was getting damn difficult to ignore.

Lynx obviously felt no such compunction. “Fuck me now. Harder,” she panted into his mouth. That was all she needed to say.

Leo slammed into her, pounding deeper with each driving thrust. She groaned long and deep as his cock drove into her. She wrapped her legs around him tighter, rocking closer to him with each thrust of his taut hips.

He timed the strokes, rubbing swollen flesh with each movement. He tweaked her nipples with his teeth lightly, kneading the flesh at her hips with possessive fingers.

Each impalement, each series of thrusts, ground his pubic bone against her mound and raw clit as his cock slid home deep. The vibrations of her pussy, the honey coating his cock with every thrust, Leo knew he was a goner. He groaned as he felt the first rush of seed swell and burst from his cock.

“Oh, goddess!”

Lynx was tight, incredibly tight. Her contractions around him sent delicious shivers racing and cum boiling in his balls. Those tight spasms when her pussy squeezed his cock like a hot little fist drove him over the edge. It was a free-fall. On a final plunge, Leo felt the hard spurts of heated cum jet forth.

The hot release of his seed seemed to drive Lynx’s keening cries of pleasure higher. He felt his cock swelling harder. Leo groaned as Lynx went wild under him.

~ Cat’s Got Your Tongue ~

Craig shook his head in stunned amazement as he listened to the muffled screams coming from Leo and Lynx’s room. He knew the sounds. Craig didn’t doubt what they were up to in there. But if his calculations were correct, Lynx had cum once, maybe twice since Leo had been in there. Craig didn’t doubt Lynx had come earlier when he’d surprised her in her room. But knowing what Leo and Lynx were doing down the hall had Craig’s own dick throbbing harder.

He had more than satisfied Lynx this afternoon. He had tasted that satisfaction on his tongue. She had come for him. But due to the interruption, he had never seen any relief himself. The cold shower was, well, cold. Sure, he could have jacked-off in his room. And it was getting tempting listening to those two get it on. Craig doubted a substitute would do it for him this time. No, he decided, he’d wait until he could get time with Lynx again.

Maybe then he would be able to get the smell of Lynx out of his mind and the tantalizing taste of Lynx off his tongue. Bleakly, Craig looked down at his raging erection.

Wishful thinking on my part, right, buddy? 'Cuz we both know that ain't gonna happen.

Chapter 13

Leo eased off Lynx, breathing hard. He cradled her to his side. With one hand, he gently smoothed the hair away from face. As their breathing slowed, Leo reached around to pull Lynx on top of him. He got little resistance from her.

Incredibly satiated, Lynx barely moaned in question. Although, from Leo's cock still jutting against her thigh as he positioned her, there was little doubt he was still a rutting lion. The unbidden realization gave her a start. Where did that come from? The surprising notion was followed by a quick flash of thin pain as she felt Leo's large hand come down with a sharp smack across the bare expanse of her ass. She yelped. That kind of hurt, damn it.

"What did you do that for?" she sputtered. She could already feel the heat rising from where his hands had marked her. He dragged his lips across hers, one hand at her head, the other at her hips. Leo's intensity startled her.

His large hand came down in another flash of fiery heat across her buttocks. The flames spread to her clit. Really, wow, but what the fuck? Heat poured through her veins at the slight hint of pain, Lynx realized through her shocked daze. Still, just who did Leo think he was, handling her like this? Turned on, but irritated just the same, Lynx moved to get up. She felt the new sting begin anew before she could even register that Leo had swatted her again.

With a lurch, Lynx tried to scoot off the bed, trying to ignore the betraying throb of her body. The sight of his cock, still engorged, sure didn't help.

“Get back on the bed, Lynx,” Leo commanded. His egotistical arrogance infuriated her.

“Bite my ass!” Lynx hissed.

“Better watch out, or I just might,” Leo growled, low and throaty. “Or I could just spank your ass, and bite here,” he threatened.

Her indignant gasp turned to a purr as he made good on his threat. He captured her in his arms and pressed her against him at the same time his mouth and teeth claimed the slim column of her throat. Lynx could feel the brush of his incisors scraping over the small bite marks he’d left there only a few days earlier.

“I could just eat you up, little kitten.” Leo whispered as his lips trailed up to her ear.

“I thought you already did that,” Lynx whispered, trembling in anticipation.

The rough caresses only had her grinding against Leo again. Lynx could feel his desire once again pulsing heavily against her and the strokes of his hand and fingers against the cleft of her rear now gentled and soothed away the burn.

“So, what did you really do this morning, Lynx?”

Leo’s voice was calm and mesmerizing, but his next slap to her quivering flesh was not. The brief bite of pain bloomed to pleasure at her already overheated rear cheeks. She gasped at the impact. The question he’d asked finally registered. Before Lynx had time to formulate an answer, Leo’s next slap to her ass had her creaming over him.

He was iron hard again, but not quite inside her yet, where he needed to be. Lynx squirmed, unexpectedly turned him on. Leo repeated the question from before. Lynx hesitated, just long enough. His hand came down again in a flash of white-hot pleasure. She could still feel the imprint of his hand through the wicked burn. Lynx’s moaned gutturally. Need and the slight edge of pain made her as hot as her backside.

“Umm, what do you mean, Leo?” Lynx twisted, compelled to move, avoiding his question. She wasn’t sure what Leo knew or suspected. His next slap to her taut buttocks was blistering.

Lynx very nearly came at impact. She sobbed as his heavy sex brushed hers. It throbbed, she throbbed. Her moisture was slick against his engorged length, but still Leo made no direct move to enter her again.

Instead, he reached up to nick the underside of her neck with his teeth once more before he picked her up and tossed her to the bed and onto her back effortlessly. He stared down at her. Before Lynx could even protest, he rolled her over, this time to her stomach. He was behind her. Somehow, this position wasn’t comforting right now.

Oh, hell, no. Lynx hadn’t missed the oddly predatory gleam in Leo’s eyes before he flipped her over. Lynx tried again to squirm away.

But his next slap to her rear had Lynx’s hands fisting the sheets as she tried to ease the intense burn, the heat of his hands from her system. The bed was too soft without Leo under her. A soft mewl of frustration escaped her.

“Did. You. Fuck. Craig?” This time it was his voice in her ear that sent shivers up her spine. Leo leaned over her. His throbbing cock brushed against the small of her back, giving added emphasis to his words.

“No, I didn’t fuck Craig.” She sobbed against the pillow, breathless, anticipating the burn.

Leo pulled back, his smack landing quick and low. As another hard smack landed again, Lynx groaned. Unable to help herself, she ground back against him.

“Not so quick, kitten.” His husky endearment vibrated against her ear.

Leo’s hand stroked over the last mark he’d made. She could feel the rosy bloom of his handprints criss-crossed there. His fingers slowly trailed to the cleft between, and then deftly slid in like a

honing arrow. She gasped, but her cheeks clenched too late against the slick intrusion.

“Did you want to fuck Craig?” Leo’s fingers stilled, poised over the soft bud betwixt her cheeks, stroking. New sensations assailed her, forbidden and exciting. Without warning, his other hand flashed down hard, again.

She cried out at the pain, the lash of heat catching her off guard. She wanted to simultaneously grind onto and back from that hand and Leo’s punishing, hard body. Lightning sizzled along her nerves, sensations thrumming, and he wanted answers now? What the fuck?

“Answer me, baby.” Leo’s command was soft, but there was no give to it. Another powerful smack to her bottom had her nearly coming off the bed and on it.

“Yes,” she whimpered.

“Yes, you wanted to fuck him?” Leo growled in her ear, as he once more stroked his fingers over the sensitized bud of her ass. Her arousal heightened unbearably, she writhed, unable to go over the edge, yet unable to stop the heat winding down the center of her, heat that licked like flame over gasoline. She was wet, dripping wet. It didn’t matter. He was playing with fire.

“Oh, goddess, it burns,” Lynx groaned. This time Leo’s smack very nearly impaled her on his fingers.

“Answer me, Lynx. Did you want to fuck him?”

“Yes, I wanted to fuck him,” she sobbed into the bedsheets, still trying to strain back onto him or away from him. She didn’t know which. Leo’s hand at her waist restrained her. He slid it to her breast. With one hand, he lightly twisted the jutting nipple, while his other hand splayed her rear cheeks, still stroking.

“But did you let him touch you, Lynx?” This time his question was lower, huskier. Lynx felt one finger slip into her tight back passage, a mere fraction of the way. Then without warning, before she realized Leo had even moved, his hand bore down on a slap that tore a strangled groan from her throat. Leo’s finger slid in deeper.

“Yes, I let him touch me.” Lynx’s muffled sob arrested him. Leo shuddered over her.

“Do you want him to touch you again?” The question was soft this time. She could feel another finger poised to enter her. “Do. You. Want. Him. To. Touch. You. Again?” This time he growled in her ear as he thrust two of his fingers inside her, reaching around with his other hand to brush her wet and aching clit.

She felt Leo grind against her leg. His cock felt even harder than before.

“Yes. Damn you. I want Craig, too. I want you both to touch me.” Lynx’s voice hitched as she sobbed her confession. He withdrew his fingers. The burn eased. But then he splayed her cheeks open.

In a smooth, long stroke, he massaged the length of his steely staff in her cream. The stroke of his hard length against her raw clit and weeping slit had Lynx gritting her teeth with need. She moaned. He moved up instead, his cock jutting against the tight rosette of her back passage. Her cheeks clenched, but his next burning slap caught her breathless, screaming, and open to him.

Leo bore down, and the head of his cock slipped in, excruciatingly slowly, pushing past the resisting flesh.

She tried to wriggle back, but moaned instead as his heavily veined cock stretched her and slipped further inside the forbidden little hole.

Pre-cum pulsed from his cock, easing his passage further. It burned as he slid inch by inch, until Lynx didn’t recognize the sounds coming from her own throat. Leo’s hand at her hip held her in place. He grunted as the head of his cock finally slipped past the tight ring. He surged forward and Lynx moaned again, pain and pleasure mingled.

Leo groaned at her ear. “I can’t stop now, Lynx. Your ass is mine.” He cursed hoarsely, grinding Lynx into the sheets as he impaled her in a thrust that claimed her and filled her. She could feel him everywhere.

Lynx's moan was strangled. She bit her lip, but screamed anyway. Leo's thick cock penetrated her in what seemed to be a never-ending burn and slide. Tension mounted, her clit throbbed, and her fingers automatically went to her clit. She stroked mindlessly, sensations battering her. How could something hurt so damn good?

Leo had one hand on her hips, but his other hand tangled in her hair. He drew her against him with each downward thrust of his muscled thighs and cock. Her scalp tingled, and her body was on fire. She could feel the burn each time his thick cock stroked in and out. The pleasure built. He was riding her hard, a primal claiming she couldn't deny. Not when his cock stroked every single nerve-ending she had. Not when his cock was deep in her ass.

Lynx felt the tightening begin, the spiral of heat gathering her body into a bow ready to fly. Then, she saw Leo reach for something under the pillow. His hand moved beneath the compress of their bodies. That's when she felt it, the cold, slick, perfectly hard intrusion as Leo moved her hand aside.

Leo thrust the symbolic penis-shaped vibrator into the wet heat of her pussy and growled in her ear, "Practice makes purr-fect, kitten." His teeth at her shoulder grazed skin. Lynx felt his teeth pierce her tender nape. Pleasure steamrolled over her so fast, it was like a freight train out of control as it crashed over her.

It was out of control.

Her whole body began to spasm in pleasure, the orgasm nearly painful in its intensity.

Leo's strokes behind her grew faster, harder as slammed into her. "Are you full enough now, kitten?" He purred in her ear.

Lynx groaned as the vibrating, simulated cock pulsed in time with Leo's thrusting one. His cock was really filling all right, a real long and hard pole up her ass.

Leo growled. "Here I cum deep, Lynx, ready or not."

Leo's feral threat, his harsh groans and heavy spurts deep inside her back passage sent Lynx crashing, crying as another explosive orgasm hit.

This climax burst through her brain like meteor fragments. Lynx couldn't bite back her screams as she hit another crescendo. Light dissolved into a shower of sparks. The sharp spasms seemed to go on forever. She bucked, arching and jerking back to him. She cried out hoarsely as Leo's final thrust left him shuddering against her.

~ *CatConundrums* ~

Contented, Leo gave a sigh of repletion. He slipped the vibrator away and slowly slid his cock out. Lynx collapsed, inert. She seemed incapable of further movement.

Her absolute stillness now didn't surprise him. It had been an extreme coupling, but he wasn't about to let Lynx think he was unaware of her needs or desires. He wanted to see them all, know them all, and have her trust him with them all. Lynx was his mate, his in every way.

She was satisfied and sanguine, curled against him. She was his perfect mate. But she was still an Imatu female, nearing her time of heat. He sensed Lynx's desires were close to overwhelming her. He respected the bond of affection she'd developed over a lifetime with Craig. Their bond was an instinctive one of recognition because of their mutual Imatu heritage. Soon, Lynx's innate heritage would only increase her sexual cravings.

Leo got up and went to get a warm cloth. He returned and gently cleaned her. Lynx slept, not moving a muscle that he could tell. Settling, Leo wrapped his newly clean, relaxed form back around the soft, lush contours of her. She was still as he spooned her, but Leo could feel his desire stirring again. It was less insistent, but still there.

Even before his change had occurred, when his hormones were triggered by the slightest tempting smell or movement of a desirable

woman, even then, his desires had not been as fervent as this. This was different. It was more. Lynx was everything he'd ever wanted or needed in his life.

But Lynx was about to become an irresistible temptation for Craig.

He knew it. Lynx would also be insatiable for sex. Two not-so-small things Leo had to consider.

If not for his history with Craig, he would fight Craig for rights to Lynx and win. Of this, Leo had no doubt. However, he and Craig shared a history. He respected Craig. They were friends and brothers-in-arms. Leo knew Craig's innate loyalty.

Craig's generosity was also unquestionable. Craig had shared Kelly's arms and her love unselfishly.

It was an interesting conundrum to be sure, and Leo wasn't blind. He'd seen the sparks building, burning between Lynx and Craig. Despite every attempt otherwise, a fire would combust eventually.

Watching her sleep, Leo finally concluded, the solution was simple. He wanted to watch his wild little Lynx burn and see passion consume her, to see her lose control, to watch her be loved. Sweet goddess, how could he not enjoy that pleasure with her? And the three of them needed each other. Sometimes it was as simple as that.

Maybe the bonds established with Craig long before were vital links. Leo couldn't help but believe it. Fate kept pointing towards a close relationship between the three of them. Leo felt the link, and it negated the jealousy that could have raged, but didn't.

How could he deny the signs? Craig was his former partner and Lynx's current one. Craig also had a long friendship with Leo and Lynx. Craig was in love with Lynx, and Leo knew it. Lynx was his mate. Craig had shared his former love Kelly with Leo before her untimely death. Neither would forget her.

But Lynx, Leo realized, would link them together in a way Kelly could never have done.

Leo, Lynx, and Craig all shared a shifter's soul.

Chapter 14

The sun set slowly as Lynx slowly drifted back to conscious awareness, her dreams quickly evaporating as she slowly eased away from Leo's arms. Lynx pulled herself upright on the edge of the large bed. Rubbing her eyes, she admired the ropy muscles of Leo's chest and the half hidden whorls of downy hair that disappeared behind the sheet on Leo's stomach. Lynx fought the impulse to run her fingers down the trail to what she knew lay beyond.

Lynx's stomach growled. She could still feel her body's tenderness in more than one area. She blushed as the memories of earlier returned. What exactly had she become? Lynx had always had fantasies, but lately, they'd been getting the better of her. She'd never been so overtly sexual before in her life, until she'd met Leo. Yes, she'd lusted for Craig for years, but their lust had never culminated in a physical relationship, until recently.

Sure, she and Craig had teased and flirted even, but how had she wound up here with the two of them, caught in the middle and wanting both? Even the thought made her burn. She could only imagine what the reality might entail. A sound from below interrupted her daydreams. Then, she remembered, they were going out tonight. The thought brought her to her feet. Lynx padded to the room's master bathroom, carefully closed the door, and splashed some water onto her face.

The face that stared back at her in the room's large mirrored vanity was the same one that had always greeted her, just different somehow. There was a subtle glow to her eyes, Lynx realized. There was also a slight sheen to her skin. That was new. Her nipples, well,

they seemed darker, too. It was as though her newly discovered sexuality had enhanced her body somehow and was being reflected back to her. As if no longer hidden, the current of her change roiled like an electric charge across her features.

Lynx blinked. For an instant, she could have sworn she'd almost seen something wild staring back at her. Fur had tufted her pointed ears. Hell, her eyes had even glowed. Lynx looked down at her hands. Had she felt claws emerging? Now, neither her hands nor her image reflected any of it. Something wild lurked beneath the surface. Lynx wasn't ready to face it, yet.

Lynx blinked and hurriedly applied the light makeup she knew enhanced her eyes, making them more cat-like in appearance. Strange, how she was just noticing that now. She carefully accentuated her bone structure, and then inspected her face once more. Finally, Lynx gently smudged the gloss over her full bottom lip. Just her fanciful imagination getting away with her again, she tried reassuring herself.

Leo padded into the bathroom and sidled up behind her. Lynx felt him harden behind her. He rubbed his cock against her hips. He repeated the motion and brushed up against her again, deliberately, slowly.

Lynx had the strangest urge to return the gesture, to rub up against him and just purr. As it was, Leo took the decision away from her. He gripped her with both large hands by her slender waist and drew her closer to him. He stroked his body intimately against hers. Lynx caught the musky scent of him, and her pussy clenched in reaction.

Leo ground his heavy and rigid cock against her buttocks just long enough to whisper in her ear, "Until tonight, kitten." Lynx squirmed back against him, already hoping for more. But Leo backed away. He grinned and winked at her in the mirror, and then he was gone.

Damn it, Lynx thought, it was hours before she could jump Leo. Everyone at the ranch but Demar was heading into town for a night of dancing and fun. Lynx was excited, too. Only now, all she could think

about was satisfying the ache Leo had purposefully left her with. Oooh, but the man knew how to drive her crazy! Teasing her like this wasn't fair!

She'd show him a thing or two about teasing before the night was over. Lynx smiled smugly to herself. She'd have that big, cocksure, muscle-bound alpha male yelling uncle. He would be begging before dawn. If Craig or Roberto and Felice got an eyeful, well, that would just be Leo's own damn fault. The imagined scenario in her head pleased her. Now, all she needed to do was to get dressed to thrill.

Leo had told Lynx all about the small bar where the group was headed. It didn't sound like a fancy place, more like a good ol' boy hangout. It was definitely a jeans and white tee-shirt night, she realized. With a devilish grin, Lynx padded over the drawer and pulled out some clean, white panties. A no-bra, white tee-shirt night, she thought. She padded back to the closet and pulled out her favorite jeans. Thankfully, they had been among the clothes Craig had grabbed for her. They fit like a second skin and accentuated the taut line of her high butt and long legs.

Now, all she needed was the right top. She found what she was looking for. It was plain and white with little straps and grazed just above her belly-button. To accessorize, she chose the wide, black belt for her low-slung jeans, and black cowboy boots. Hmmm...yes, that set her outfit off perfectly. Lynx speculatively eyed herself in the mirror. She began brushing her long chestnut hair over her shoulders, debating. Then back to the closet she went. She pulled out the black cowboy hat.

Leo had brought her the boots, belt, and hat just yesterday. He'd asked if she wanted to ride any fences with him, and winked suggestively when he'd said it, adding she'd need to be properly attired in real cowgirl getup to giddy-up-and-go.

Lynx slowly tipped the cowboy hat up and looked her reflection over. She was satisfied she'd achieved the look she was going for.

Although, she didn't try to kid herself, riding a fence was not what she had in mind for this outfit.

No, the only thing she wanted to ride tonight was a sexy cowboy. An eight second ride, ha! She was going to ride her mustang wild and hard. Mustangs reminded her of Craig. Hell, maybe two cowboys should just ride her.

Flushed, Lynx adjusted the small top, smoothing it over her firm breasts and erect, slightly sore nipples. "Down now, girls," she muttered under her breath, "no use giving me a hard time about it. I'm in the exact same predicament as you are. We're anti-fucked, girls, purely out of luck until later tonight."

~ *CatCocked* ~

As Craig slipped into his well-worn Levi's his dick felt like it was carved out of stone. The predicament didn't make getting dressed easier. The damn thing wouldn't go down. Every time Craig thought it might ease its throbbing, he'd have one stray thought about Lynx. He'd be damned if it didn't start aching worse.

Even now, against the confines of his jeans, as comfortably fitting as they usually were, his rigid erection pulsed painfully. The thought of what he wanted to do with it-with Lynx-was much too tempting. Craig closed his eyes and groaned, stroking the long, hard length through the jeans. The rough material against his sensitive erection was unbearably arousing, yet equally frustrating at the same time.

Standing there, sans shirt, feet spread apart, Craig slowly cocked his fist rhythmically. He moved up and down against the Levi's, encasing his aching shaft a few more times, and then gritted his teeth. Damn it, he probably shouldn't do this now. He really wouldn't have time to enjoy it properly. It was almost time to go. Slowly, Craig let his hand drop, knowing it was the only sane way. He couldn't very well walk downstairs like this.

To distract himself momentarily, Craig went to the bathroom and threw some cold water on his face, then towed off. His cock still throbbed, relentless. Craig quickly shed his jeans and turned the shower's faucet on. Maybe another quick cold shower would do the trick. Craig grimaced. It would have to.

~ *CatCompany* ~

Leo and Roberto discussed routine ranching issues and the various plans for tomorrow. Colby and Drake, the twin brothers who also worked the ranch, were due back. Daniel was also supposed to pull into town, which Leo figured was a good thing.

"Leo," Roberto said, changing the subject, "out back of the barn this morning, I came across fresh tracks, just behind the fence line. The tracks were really large. The cat who made them is huge, I can tell you that much. Now, whether they came from your old enemy Adonis or not, I couldn't tell you for sure, Leo, but I knew you'd want to know."

"I appreciate that, Roberto. I suspected that Adonis and his pack of rogues were most likely still canvassing the forest and wetlands behind the ranch, but I just wish we knew exactly what Adonis was after."

Roberto agreed. "I know what you mean. But we can probably safely assume Adonis is scoping things out for a reason. He's looking or waiting for something."

Leo nodded. "I think you must be right about that Roberto. I'll feel better when Colby and Drake get back. Between them and Daniel pulling in, we should be able to handle it, should Adonis try any tricks. The more skilled friendlies we have at the ranch, the better."

No Cervantes could be taken lightly, and Adonis was his father's son.

“Yeah, some extra hands would sure be better for peace of mind,” Roberto concurred, “and if Adonis does attempt to make trouble for us here at the ranch, the more soldiers here, the better I’ll feel too.”

“I know. I guess we need to get started on those repairs to the southernmost fence line soon. Do we need anything from the store or do we have everything for the job here?” Roberto’s answer was cut off as the phone rang.

It was Demar by the gate. “We’ve got company, Leo,” he said. “There’s a man here claims to be Lynx’s brother, Daniel Shaunessy.”

“Let him through, Demar.” Leo hung up the phone. Roberto gave him a questioning look.

Leo just said succinctly, “Well, let’s go greet Daniel. Guess at least one of the reinforcements got here early. Lynx will be thrilled that her big brother is here. I have a strong feeling that her brother arriving slightly ahead of schedule won’t bother her a bit.” Leo grinned. He could only imagine the excitement on Lynx’s face when she saw Daniel.

Roberto nodded. “I reckon you’re right about that.” They padded to the door.

When they stepped out onto the porch, Daniel was already pulling into the circular drive. Daniel got out and closed the door firmly on his black Camaro. His long-legged strides ate up the distance from the car to the porch.

“Good to see you again, Daniel.” Leo took Daniel’s proffered hand and pulled him in for a quick hug. “This here is Roberto, my ranch’s foreman and one of the finest men I’ve ever met, outside of COBRA’s finest, naturally.”

“Good to meet you, Roberto.” Daniel offered his hand.

Roberto shook it, smiled and said, “Well, come on in, Daniel, I’m sure your sister will be down shortly, as will Craig. Glad you made it here a little early. I hope you’ll join us all tonight for our night out, unless, of course, your trip was overly tiring.”

“Na,” Daniel quickly replied, “I’ll be just fine. All I need to do is freshen up and I’ll be raring to go. So, does there happen to be any fine-looking women where we’re going?” Daniel drawled.

Leo slapped Daniel on the back, pretending to think about it for a minute, and then he said seriously, “Well, there might be one or two hot babes, Daniel. But if I had to compare them to your sister Lynx, there aren’t any heartbreakers.”

Leo’s cell phone rang again. He picked it up. Cupping his hand to the phone, he apologized. “I’m real sorry, guys. Roberto, Daniel, I’ve got to take this. It’s business. Hey, Roberto, would you mind showing Daniel where things are in the house?” He walked out into the yard, listening intently.

~ *CatComforts* ~

Daniel waited. Roberto took the cue and swung open the ranch’s door even farther. He gestured for Daniel to follow him inside.

As he entered the ranch house, Daniel couldn’t help but notice the antique, ornate, lifelike lion doorknockers and the lion statues flanking the heavy door. But stranger still, stepping inside the house, Daniel felt immediately at home. It was odd, given that his decorating preferences tended towards minimalism. Other than one or two knick-knacks given him by Lynx or their adopted parents in the past, Daniel didn’t believe in clutter. Daniel treasured his family’s well-meaning gifts. But the less he had, the less he had to dust.

Daniel found a lot to admire about Leo’s place, however. Here the furnishings were fairly opulent. No expense had been spared to make it look regal. Yet, so far, the ranch appeared happily lived-in. It would’ve been a difficult effect to order up, but whoever decorated this pad, Daniel thought, made it look effortless. Nothing felt overdone. From what he could see, the ranch was comfortably tasteful, but gave the impression of artful and effortless elegance.

Roberto led Daniel through the foyer and large living area and straight to the heart of the home, the kitchen. Reaching into the cabinets, Roberto pulled out two generous coffee mugs, poured Daniel a cup and then fixed himself one. Daniel took a sip gratefully, and then set the cup down thoughtfully.

“So, how did you know I was craving a cup of Joe?” Daniel asked with a slight grin.

Roberto replied, somewhat seriously, “Stand to reason you might have been after the trip. Anyway, I figured it would undoubtedly help you revive some. After all, I’m sure you’re probably going to want to hit the town with all of us tonight. This rich Columbian dark will put a little extra zip in your two-step.”

Daniel finished off the last of his coffee and set his cup back down. “Quite right, thanks, Roberto. Hey, I should probably freshen up before seeing Lynx. I probably smell like a long, dusty road. Could you point me in the general direction of the room I’ll be staying in?”

Roberto nodded. “No problem.” Roberto slapped Daniel lightly on the shoulder. “Come right this way. I think you’ll find your room comfortable.”

“No doubt,” Daniel murmured, half to himself, half out loud. “No doubt.”

~ The *Cat* That Got Away ~

Daniel was turning the corner heading towards the room Roberto had said was Lynx’s when she plowed into him.

“Daniel,” she squealed, and she gave him a bear hug to beat all bear hugs. “I’m so glad you got here early. I couldn’t wait to see you. I’ve missed you so. How did you get here so fast?”

Grinning, Daniel noted that Lynx only slowed down a little because she probably needed to breathe again. “Whoa there, sis, I didn’t get here near as fast as you can talk. I left a little earlier than I thought I’d be able to because I finished some business up early. I

couldn't wait to see you." He hugged her, then stepped back to eye her critically, from head to toe.

"You certainly look like you're doing all right, sis. I sure hope my eyes and ears aren't fooling me. I want to hear every last detail from you about what's been going on with you since Leo and his team picked you up."

Her words gushed forth. "I'm just so glad you're here, Daniel. The earlier the better. Now you can go out with us tonight. I can't wait to get out and do some dancing. It's been too long since I've been able to do that. It's been pretty cool here, but you know me. I love getting out, dancing, and listening to music. I just can't wait. Hey, you want to go get a quick bite downstairs with me? We've still got an hour or so before we head to town."

He listened, awed. It always amazed him. Exactly how could she do that without breathing between? His sister could talk faster than most people could think. Daniel shook his head, both in admiration and to answer her last question.

"Thanks, sis, but I'm not really hungry yet. As you can probably tell, I could use a quick shower. I'll see you downstairs shortly. It shouldn't take me long to shower and shave. Give me a little while to freshen up, and we'll catch up."

"Sure thing, Daniel." But before she headed down the long set of stairs, Lynx turned and gave him another quick bear hug. "Missed you," she whispered at his ear, and then kissed his cheek.

Daniel could see every nuance of the joy and love on her face. Lynx turned and gave him one last quick look of pure, unadulterated affection before bounding down the rest of the stairs.

Daniel sighed and raked his hand through his thick crop of dark hair. Evidently, Lynx was still as hard to keep up with as ever. Leo was going to be kept busy if he had half a mind to keep up with her. Daniel had not missed Leo's comment in reference to Lynx being a heartbreaker. Something was going on between Leo and his sister.

Opening the door to the room where he'd be staying, another thought struck Daniel. He wondered what Craig thought if there was something between Leo and Lynx. Daniel suspected Craig had come to care for Lynx in more than just a friendly way. It wasn't anything Craig had said in particular to Daniel. Yet, Daniel knew Craig pretty well. Hell, he'd grown up with him and been through hell with him, too. There was just something about the way Craig referred to Lynx when they talked.

Craig and Lynx had grown up together, too. It was different back in their youthful days. Daniel could remember when Lynx had been just a knobby-kneed teenager angling for both his and Craig's attention. But now-now he wouldn't be surprised to find out Craig was carrying a torch for his sister. Hell, Leo probably was, too. Well, damn it, he could always count on Lynx to keep things interesting. At this point, he had to admit he'd be happy if Lynx could just stay out of too much trouble.

Daniel's smile deepened when he stepped into the bedroom suite. The bedroom was a study in comfort and solidly masculine furnishings. The room had a large four-poster bed outfitted in a black and blue, soft suede quilt. There was a set of solid ornate end tables and a dresser. The professionally painted walls gleamed a deep blue electric sheen behind the furniture and art.

The art. Daniel's throat tightened. He couldn't turn away from the beautifully carved eagle that appeared to float on the antique dresser. It was classic in its beauty, a study of true freedom.

Framed behind the bed, another eagle floated silently against the current. Daniel studied the familiar artist's signature. He had known it would be Cameron Blakely, a former COBRA agent, and his ex-lover. Daniel drew in a sharp breath. It echoed with forgotten pain and pleasure. Leo had been in contact with Cameron. How interesting.

Daniel began to undress. He had reminisced enough and had dallied almost too long. If he wanted to join the others for their night on the town, and he did, he'd better shower some of the long, hot trip

off him. He only wished he'd had time to get his Camaro's air conditioner fixed before he'd hauled ass here. But who wanted to wait around for that? He was anxious to see his sister again. He needed to see for himself that Lynx was really okay. Lynx was what was left of his personal world. She was the only family he had left aside from COBRA.

Already stripped to his jeans, Daniel quickly shed the rest of his clothes. The heat of the day had been brutal, especially the last half of his trip. He adjusted the shower towards the cooler side and stepped under the refreshing water. This was exactly what he needed. His mind shamelessly wandered back as he quickly soaped up. The cooler water didn't deter his dick from stirring to life.

Absently, Daniel stroked it, resurrecting memories he'd shelved under "best forgotten." Rock hard now, his dick pulsed under his fingers, on fire as his best forgotten old flame stirred desires he couldn't deny this time. Not now, when he was pumping through the fist he'd made of his hand. Not when pre-cum beaded his cock, and water sluiced over him. Memories rolled forward like a movie-reel's release.

Under the solace of the spray, Daniel's salty tears mixed with the deluge of his orgasm as his whole body shook in cleansing release. It cleansed him. The back-roads of past memories emerged, slippery and salient again.

Even then, fingers coated with his own seed, Daniel could still hear haunting strains of Eric Clapton's "Tears in Heaven" in his head. He hadn't forgotten. He knew he never would. It was a relief to cry, but his son was gone. Blakely was gone now, too. The grief had just been too much for either of them.

Daniel watched as the water washed away. It left only a fragile memory and perhaps a ghostly lover forever ensconced in his heart. But he hadn't forgotten.

Humming the remembered strains softly, Daniel finished washing and rinsed away the suds that flowed down the soft pelt of fine hair to

his navel. He watched as the suds spiraled quickly down the drain. He grabbed the large, thick towel by the shower door and rubbed briskly until the dark chestnut hair on his head was the only thing left damp.

Looking in the mirror, Daniel frowned at the light curls that sprang up at his neck. He'd deal with those later. If he didn't want to hold everyone else up, he had better finish up, dress, and get his butt downstairs. Lynx had missed him. Daniel knew it to be true, but his little sister would still fuss at him if he kept her waiting too long. He grinned. Stepping into the kitchen, Daniel was glad he hadn't dawdled very long.

Craig and Leo had already assembled, clearly ready, too.

"You look good, bro," Craig remarked, slapping him on the back.

Leo chimed in, clearly teasing him. "Yeah, you look good enough to hunt down a fine-looking babe."

Daniel laughed, and then had to ask, "So, who are we waiting on?" At least, Daniel surmised, he wasn't the one they were waiting on now.

Roberto, who'd up until now silently watched their joking byplay, shrugged expressively, and rolled his eyes. "Felice said she was almost ready when I headed over. Women."

Lynx drummed long fingers on the granite countertop to an unseen rhythm. She smiled when Felice finally walked through the doorway.

Lynx narrowed her eyes. Daniel could almost see her mind working. He wasn't the least surprised when his sister blurted.

"Felice, later you'll have to show me how you did that to your hair."

Felice made a feminine gesture, touching her hair as if puzzled.

Felice's answer must have surprised Lynx. "What I did to my hair?"

"You colored your hair, didn't you?" Now, Lynx looked puzzled.

"Oh, no, no," Felice replied, running her fingers through the layered fringes. "I just stopped trying to color it. This cut just shows

my hair's natural variations better. But just look at you, Lynx, you look good enough to dance with."

Felice grabbed Lynx and twirled her around in a small circle. "That is, if I can pry you away from all the cowboys who'll be looking to dance with you tonight."

Daniel saw Leo give Felice a sharp look. Felice just smirked back at him. Daniel recognized a mischievous twinkle when he saw one. Leo didn't appear too thrilled about it, though.

"So, is everyone ready?" Leo asked. "Let's get the show on the road. I talked to Demar just a few minutes ago. He's going to keep an extra-sharp eye out for trouble here. He knows to call us if anything the least bit suspicious should happen while we are gone. Oh, and we'll take the ranch's Hummer. It's the largest and safest vehicle.

"We all should still stick close together tonight, after we get there. We still don't know what Adonis Cervantes is doing in the area, and we have every reason to believe he could be close by. There is a certain safety in numbers. Okay, let's head out and go raise some hell in Dodge." Leo grinned and tucked Lynx's hand in his as he headed for the door.

"Right behind you," Craig remarked. Daniel could see him eyeing his sister's ass as she sashayed out the door with Leo. Craig added, "Trust me, I'm right behind you."

Leo snidely shot back over his shoulder, "So, does my ass look too fat or just right in these pants, Craig?"

Daniel let out a whoop of laughter. Even Roberto cracked up.

Craig laughed along and then, Daniel noted, placidly returned fire. "It'll do. But if your ass is as hirsute as your legs, Leo, the shape it's in is not going to matter much to me. I much prefer the hairless, female backside right beside you myself." Craig let out a long low whistle.

This time it was Roberto that whooped.

By the time they made it to the busy club, everyone's mood was jovial. Leo parked adroitly in one of the few small spaces left at the club, and they all headed inside.

~ Of Cats & Clubs ~

The Country Club boasted a large central dance floor. There were two walls of nothing but bar and a stage in the far corner. This was where local bands took their turn entertaining crowds. Then there was the narrow hall along the far wall where the back exit and bathrooms were grouped.

A good crowd had already gathered. The bar was lined with people. *The band tonight must be pretty decent.* After finding the perfect large table where it was convenient to watch the band and get to the dance area, Leo motioned to Daniel to follow him.

Even now, when their main goal was to have fun, it was integral to their training to stay alert and aware of their surroundings at all times. Leo knew that as open as this place was, it would be more difficult for anyone to make any unseen moves. Only the bathrooms and rear exit would be dicey with the narrow curving hallway.

Just to be on the safe side, Leo and Daniel quickly scanned the bathrooms and hallway for anything or anyone suspicious. Then they returned to their table. "Everything looks good with the club so far, but, ladies, I don't want anyone splitting up, so grab each other if you need to visit the ladies' room." Felice and Lynx both nodded in agreement.

Daniel laughed, then remarked, "You wouldn't honestly expect a woman to go to the ladies' room alone, would you, Leo? That unlikely feat would defy some natural law or something." He continued as the laughter died down. "I'd bet the ladies' room is a vastly different universe than the men's room."

"Why's that?" Felice asked with a puzzled expression.

“Well,” Daniel said, laughing, “it must be. Else what the hell do women do in there all day?”

She laughed, but Lynx just playfully punched her brother’s arm.

“Primp it,” Leo said, grinning ear to ear. This time, Lynx punched him.

Craig just grinned. Leo could see Craig was wisely keeping his trap shut for the moment.

“Ouch,” Leo faked a groan, rubbing his shoulder. He hadn’t been able to resist teasing Lynx. It was nice to see her enjoying herself.

Roberto and Craig went to see about getting a waitress for their table. The place was already hopping. In a few minutes, Roberto and Craig reappeared, along with a chesty blonde wearing itty-bitty short shorts and a tight shirt that barely skimmed her navel. Only a slip of an apron, from which she pulled an order pad and pen, betrayed that she worked for the club. Chewing gum between taking their order and answering their questions, their blonde waitress scribbled, while alternately blowing bubbles.

Once the waitress headed back to the bar, Daniel looked at Leo and widened his eyes mischievously. It was a gesture almost everyone at the table understood. Daniel’s predilection for chesty blondes with a streak of either ditz or glitz was well known by Leo and Craig. Daniel looked to be more than satisfied with the club’s eye candy. Although, Leo mused, as he eyed the waitress’s exit, that one acted almost too dizzy to be true.

Shortly the waitress drifted back with their drinks, but Leo’s attention was diverted as some scruffy-looking boys wearing cowboy hats set down to their left. One brave young punk even went as far as to eye Lynx up and down, like it was nothing. Leo glared over at him, baring his teeth ever so slightly. Leo had to resist a sudden overwhelming urge to upend the punk’s table and forcibly evict them.

Craig was resisting the urge to do the same. It helped that the punk in question had already concentrated his attentions elsewhere. He was now eying a striking blonde with a pair of double-Ds that had just walked in.

In the far corner by the stage, the band for the night had begun drifting in and out. They carried in all sorts of various instruments and assorted musical equipment to set up. Craig drained his glass, watching them, and narrowed his eyes. Apparently, this band wouldn't be starting up at the promised hour unless they were damn near miracle workers.

Craig had played guitar briefly with a band during his high school years. He knew how long setting up for a gig could take. Evidently, the loud music that was being piped out of the speakers would have to suffice for a bit. Craig wanted to dance. He wanted to move on the floor with Lynx, and the slower and dirtier, the better.

Hell, Leo might have something to say about that. Craig just shook his head and the thought away. Craig pushed back from the table and said, "Hey, does anyone need another beer? I think I'll go look up our waitress and remind her we're here. I bet she's already forgotten."

Daniel smiled and smirked, then drolly replied, "Sure, Craig, bring her back. I could use another cold one, too. Just don't be denigrating the object of my serial affections that way."

Craig pushed his chair in. He stood up then leaned back. His legs apart, he rocked slightly on his heels in an easily recognized stance, glanced over at Lynx, then back to Daniel again. His eyes met Leo's as he softly snickered. "At your rate of speed on trying to pick her up, Daniel, any tortoise, snail, or tree sloth moving at the speed of dark could leave you in the dust."

Leo let out a whoop of amusement. "He got ya there, bro." By that time, everyone at the table was laughing, even Daniel.

In COBRA, true camaraderie, respect, and humor had always been a strong and binding component between them. Hell, they ribbed

and dogged each other to death, but let anyone else mess with one of them, and an outside offender would pay the dire consequences.

Leo pushed out of his chair and said, "I'm going to go find our waitress."

Craig watched as Leo strode to the bar.

Lynx's gaze followed Leo as he maneuvered his way through the growing crowd.

Craig managed to catch her gaze. He unobtrusively sent her a knowing look. That quick, he could see the flush that rose to her cheeks. She quickly looked away.

"*Kitty want some cream?*" he mentally teased.

Lynx squirmed in her seat.

"*I'll make kitty cream.*"

"*Craig!*" Lynx shot him a look. It wasn't exactly censure, despite the tone of her voice. It was a look shuttered with sensual awareness and heat. It made him ache with need.

To his disappointment, Lynx nudged Felice. Felice was still engrossed in a conversation with Roberto. Their talk concerned some tests they'd run at the ranch earlier. Lynx nudged Felice again to get her attention.

Lynx, he noted, finally employed the old feminine standby. "Come to the ladies' room with me, Felice. The beer's already working its questionable charm."

She shot him a nervous but telling look. Craig smirked back at her as she grabbed her small clutch before exiting the table. "*Little scaredy cat,*" he pointed out helpfully. Lynx ignored his parting shot.

A few seconds later, as both ladies disappeared into the restroom, Leo returned to the table. Leo explained the unfair situation. "The manager says our blonde is busy with table number seven over there. But he did say he would send out one of the other girls momentarily."

"Shucks," Daniel groaned. "Had my hopes up, too."

Craig patted him on the back and grinned. “Don’t worry, partner. Do you see that other waitress over there? I bet you’ll like her even better.”

Daniel looked forlorn for a moment. Craig tried not to grin. But then the other waitress Craig had been pointing to turned towards them, and Daniel got a full frontal view.

Daniel didn’t seem that disappointed after all.

Grinning widely now, Craig slapped Daniel across the back. He couldn’t refrain from wise-cracking. “Looks like you won’t need therapy after all, Daniel, unless it involves full frontal nudity and a couch.”

The hopeful look on Daniel’s face was hilarious.

By the time Lynx and Felice had returned to the table, the men were in full bar-battle humor, retelling old success stories and even some old amusing pickup lines.

Felice rolled her eyes at Lynx, conspiratorially whispering, “And you work with these jokers on missions? Exactly how do you stand it? All that testosterone and macho posturing would drive me nutso, quick-o, and I mean it. Probably within the first week.”

Lynx whispered back. “You would do just fine, Felice. It’s not as bad as all that. They’re really just a bunch of pussy-cats.”

Craig, overhearing, leaned in and batted his eyelashes at Lynx and retorted. “So, did we go from cavemen to pussy-cats in the swing of a bat or the swish of a tail, Lynx?”

Felice grinned widely. Lynx just opened her mouth and snapped it shut. Further discussion was tabled as one of the band’s members finally took a mike in hand and announced that The Country Express Band was about to begin.

“About time,” Craig muttered under his breath as the band started the first riffs of an old Travis Tritt tune and settled in to play. He was glad to hear that at least the singer was decent. The other musicians weren’t half bad, either, which was good considering the band had delayed their appearance well past the scheduled time to start.

“This is more like it, huh?” Leo added. His eyes scanned the growing crowd on the dance floor. “Hey, like to give the dance floor some polish?” Leo asked Lynx. He took her hand and led her out.

“Uh, wanna dance, Craig?” Daniel asked with a grin two shades shy of malicious. “Your ass is looking finer with every beer I have.” The last was uttered with an appreciative wink. But the mischievous twinkle in Daniel’s eyes gave away the joke.

Craig had lost his sense of humor, however.

“Why, yes, I believe I will dance,” Craig answered tensely. He wasn’t looking at Daniel, however. His eyes followed Lynx and Leo as they moved round the crowded floor ahead of them. He swallowed the last of his beer and grabbed the hand of the waitress who had just set down another beer in front of him. He’d noticed her eyeing him up and down earlier.

So what if it wasn’t the first or even the second chesty blonde who’d served them? This one was a petite strawberry redhead, smaller breasted, indisputably sexy in her own way. The smile she gave him as he dragged her to the dance floor was definitely worth looking at. Far better in fact, Craig felt, than trying to keep his eyes off of Lynx and Leo slow dancing along the periphery of the big floor. Leo bent to whisper something in Lynx’s ear. She laughed and whispered something back.

She looked over, and her eyes caught Craig’s as he moved onto the dance floor. Lynx’s smile suddenly disappeared and her eyes narrowed. She turned to look back up at Leo.

Craig guided his new dance partner to a spot on the floor. The music ended, and everybody stopped to clap.

The band went into an up-tempo number. Craig watched Lynx covertly as he moved into the dance with his petite partner.

Lynx and Leo moved seductively together. He could see that. Lynx’s undulating form brushed Leo’s often in a sinuous, tempting rhythm. Craig gritted his teeth and tried to smile at the woman in his arms. He wouldn’t mind being the pole, if only Lynx was the dancer.

She moved like a very wet dream. Beads of sweat fell to Craig's lips as his eyes followed her every seductive step. If he were Leo, he'd be hard as a rail by now.

Craig could see Lynx's taut nipples straining against the simple white tank top she was wearing. She danced smoother than silk, all legs and long hair. He wasn't even going to think about that tight jean-covered ass. But he'd bet a wad every red-blooded male in the whole fucking bar sported wood by now, just watching his little minx.

Craig shook his head, irrational irritation competing with pure simmering lust.

He might be distracted as hell, but he'd be damned if he was going to let Lynx ignore him and steal the show. It wasn't like he didn't know how to dance. He fucking knew how. With ease, he grabbed his dance partner around and let the music guide him. His partner looked at him, obviously caught off guard momentarily. But then deciding to really enjoy herself, the redhead followed his lead with her own naughty interpretation of the dance number. Not bad, he thought. Red could move! So what if she wasn't Lynx, his dancing version of a wet dream?

Evidently, Red was good enough to catch Lynx's eye too, Craig noted, not without some satisfaction. Good, he sure as hell wanted Lynx to remember he was more than just friend material, even if Lynx was with Leo, Craig thought somewhat grimly.

Suddenly, a picture of him, Kelly, and Leo flashed through his mind. Their dance had been naked. Just that quickly, Craig could not erase the erotic fantasy of Lynx dancing naked between him and Leo.

He was relieved when the number finally ended and the red-haired waitress had to get back to work. The fiery cutie had slipped her number in his shirt pocket before she took off, but Craig knew he wouldn't be calling Red. The only woman on his mind, the real center of his attention, was headed back for the table with Leo on her arm.

Instead of sitting down, Lynx grabbed Felice before the other woman had a chance to sit either. "Hey," Lynx asked, sounding

breathless, “Are you ready to go to the ladies’ room again?” Felice nodded assent, grabbed her purse, and trailed after her.

“They really do travel in packs to the bathrooms, don’t they?” Roberto noted. His eyes followed the women’s forms as they weaved in and out of the crowd, heading for the women’s restroom. Craig watched as Lynx and Felice disappeared into the “unknown” dimension.

Companionably, Craig just nodded, agreeing with Roberto’s assessment. Daniel took a swig of beer before nodding his. Women, they all agreed, did indeed have mysterious bathroom rituals.

~ *CatNapping* ~

“At least the ladies’ room here is clean and has enough stalls,” Lynx said as she found a stall and went in.

“Yes, this place is much better than some bar restrooms I’ve seen,” Felice agreed. Felice took out her lipstick and began to reapply it. At the moment, Lynx noted as she went into a stall, they had the restroom entirely to themselves. But if the band were on break, she’d bet it would’ve been a different story.

Lynx went to wash her hands by where Felice stood, still checking her lipstick. Without warning, the lights ominously flickered out, and the music also cut out. For a second, silence descended out in the bar.

“What the hell!” Felice grabbed her by the arm. Lynx was glad of the contact. She could see in the dark fine usually, but it wasn’t just dark. It was dead-of-night, pitch black. Only worse, at least the night had stars. They had to stay together.

Suddenly, Felice stumbled, jerking Lynx’s arm. Lynx felt Felice’s arm go limp. She opened her mouth to scream, but nearly gagged as a sickeningly pungent cloth was shoved over her nose and mouth. A solid force of pure muscle immobilized her every move. The man was built like a brick wall of muscle, bone, and sinew. Were there two?

For a split-second, Lynx fought both her attackers and to retain conscious awareness.

The screams died in her throat. The chloroform choked her breath away. Darkness blurred her vision, and Lynx lost her battle for consciousness.

~ *CatEyes* ~

Leo caught just a fraction of their exit. His eyes had adjusted quickly to the utter darkness of the club. He raced towards the restrooms as he spotted the large form half-carrying something or someone out. Craig, Roberto, and Daniel followed his lead as he parted the throng of panicking and punch-drunk partiers on his mad dash. Frantic, Leo burst through the rear exit just as a van sped away.

Leo caught the faint taint of tiger at the rear of the club on the way out the exit.

“Damn it to hell!” Enraged, he cursed as the four of them raced for the Hummer and piled in.

Leo took the wheel and whipped the large vehicle out of the parking lot and onto the highway, still cursing. At the speed they were going, it would probably take every bit of driving skill he possessed to catch up. He prayed it would suffice because the thought of losing Lynx just was not acceptable.

Chapter 15

The van ahead had a good head start on them. Leo kept trying to close the gap. He was passing car after car at an alarming rate. Craig was tempted to buckle up, but decided against it. A seat belt could impede his movements. Up ahead, the van seemed to be losing a little ground. It was near midnight, so the roads were not teeming with traffic, but there were still enough vehicles on the road to make for hazardous driving, especially at the speeds they were now traveling.

Leo, Craig couldn't help but notice, wasn't accommodating to conditions though and didn't seem to care. The hummer's speed increased incrementally with every mile. Amazingly, they were now only three car-lengths behind the van and gaining with every minute. If Leo could just clear the car ahead of him, they might gain enough ground to force the van ahead off the highway.

Craig anticipated Leo's plan. He glanced back. Roberto and Daniel leaned forward tensely in the seats behind them. They were ready. Still, the old car in front of them blocked their getting closer to the van. In the left lane, a newer Dodge Durango blocked them effectively, maneuvering into position beside the van. Leo swerved into the left lane, tailgating the Durango aside the van, obviously trying to egg them into speeding ahead.

The sound of shattering glass was the next sound they heard. A bullet pinged the front windshield. It cracked as glass spider-webs spread across it. For a split second, the air seemed to hum, buzz, and pop. Leo swerved again, barely avoiding going off the road himself.

“There’s more of the pack in the Durango. Hey, is everybody okay?” Leo gritted out as he sped back into line behind the three vehicles. Daniel and Roberto quickly assured Leo they were.

“Try to hold the Hummer as steady as you can,” Craig said as levelly as he could, withdrawing his Glock from his waistband. Craig noted that Daniel and Roberto were already in position and rolling down their windows. “So, the bastards brought company along. I think it’s time we withdrew the welcome wagon.” Craig tried to line up a shot as Leo swerved again.

From the back of the truck ahead, they could see the outline of the shooter. But Leo weaved back and forth between the left and right lane. He was at least making it damn difficult for the shooter to get off a shot with any sort of accuracy. Even Craig’s first shot went wide. Another ping to the left of Leo rang out. This time, it was Leo’s driver’s side mirror that was winged.

“That was a little too close,” Leo muttered darkly. He continued to weave as he asked, “When are you three gonna take this guy out? I’ve got my hands full driving here!”

“Just give me a second to get my shot lined up, Leo, and I’ll have him,” Daniel grouched back. “It’s not like you’re making it any easier on us with your driving, either.”

Craig coughed back an echoing remark. He took careful aim through the partially decimated front windshield and began firing.

For a split second, nothing seemed to happen, and then all hell broke loose ahead of them. The Durango’s driver slumped over the wheel. Before Leo could swerve again, their vehicle slammed into the back of it as it slowed, losing its acceleration. The Durango began skidding across the road erratically. It took real driving skill, but somehow Leo managed to only cuff it with the front end of the Hummer before the Hummer went off the road onto the grassy stretch of median.

“Damn it!” Leo bellowed as they came to a skidding stop. Behind them, the Durango had gone off the road, too, but much more

erratically. They all turned to watch as it went into a long roll down the graduating slope.

“We don’t have time to go take out the other guy, if he even made it,” Daniel said quietly. “We have to get back after the van before we lose them completely.” Nobody was arguing that, but when Leo turned the key in the ignition, nothing happened.

“Damn it to hell,” Leo began.

Craig flipped open his phone. “Demar, we’ve got an emergency here. Lynx and Felice were abducted from the club by some thugs. We took off after them and ran into some car trouble during the chase.”

“Not just thugs,” Leo interjected, “Adonis and company.”

Craig listened as Demar exploded with a few choice epithets of his own. He’d definitely heard Leo’s comment.

“Fucking bastards, I’ll kill the rogue sons-a-bitches.”

Craig heard Demar’s quick intake of breath. He sounded calmer when he said, “Colby and Drake got here just in time then. I’ll fill them in. What’s your coordinates? It won’t take them long to get there.”

Craig quickly told Demar their location. “Drake said to tell you that they’re on their way. I’ll come, too. Just say the word,” Demar finished hopefully.

Leo, overhearing, shook his head. Craig nodded, understanding.

“No, Demar. Leo says to stay there, guard the ranch, and we’ll call if we need you.” Craig knew it wasn’t what Demar wanted to hear, but for now it was best. Craig hung up. Now, all they could do was wait.

Leo shot a menacing look down the stretch of highway where they’d last seen the van. Craig knew just how he felt. Lynx and Felice were now in the unholy clutches of Adonis Cervantes and his savages.

Leo got out of the car and paced.

“*Damn it, we need to get going before we lose the trail!*” Leo’s thoughts raged loud and clear.

"I'm with you, Leo. We can't afford to lose them. Lynx and Felice's lives are at stake."

Leo's confused expression cleared as it narrowed onto Craig's. Craig was as surprised as Leo looked.

"We will find them. We're going to eliminate Adonis and his pack of scum and bring Lynx and Felice home, where they belong," Leo promised him.

"I think the Calvary's here," Craig blurted aloud, relieved, already moving toward it, as the outline of a familiar vehicle appeared.

Seconds later, Colby pulled up alongside in the ranch's other Hummer. Colby grimaced as he got out, and they all got in. "Had to get one of the ranch's other vehicles to come pick you guys up. However, Drake's bringing the 'Vette along any second now. He just needed to pick up a few things from the ranch's supply room."

Colby uttered the last statement with a meaningful waggle of his eyebrows. Leo quickly pulled out onto the road. Almost immediately, Drake roared up in the black Corvette.

The consensus was clear. Get the show on the road, rescue their women, and clean some scum out. As they sped back onto the highway, everyone checked and then rechecked their weapons. Good to go, Craig tried to consciously relax so he could function unimpaired when the time came.

Now, if they could just find Lynx again.

However did the little minx do it? he wondered.

Was there ever a time she wasn't in trouble, unless of course, she was busy finding it?

Sighing, Craig prayed they'd manage to rescue the women quickly. Otherwise, he was going to wind up having a coronary at this rate. His heart just couldn't take losing Lynx again.

Adonis and his right-hand man, Chambers, pulled off on their usual exit. It was an exit that few people ever bothered to use, with the exception of the patrons of the small roadside rest stop. Adonis and Chambers had seen the Durango crash. They had to assume that Cyrus and J. Kelly were history, but at least their crash had slowed down his pursuers. Adonis considered it a worthy trade. After a few hooks and turns, he drove past Leroy's place. They honked a familiar greeting going by.

~ CityCat ~

Leroy glanced up as they drove past. He waved, but they were already too far down the dusty road. Now some people, of course, stopped for gas and a snack at the rundown gas station right off the exit. A few others, the unlucky ones having car troubles, might stop in at the small garage to the left of it. But few stayed. There were no burger joints or strip malls nearby. Only the most avid fishermen and hunters rented on for Leroy's tour. This was not a high-traffic exit. Leroy didn't really mind.

Leroy had met Adonis a few years back when Adonis had come through for one of his tours. Adonis hadn't been uppity, even if he had been a mite overdressed for a hunter or fisherman. But Adonis hadn't put on airs. Leroy had liked that about him. Adonis and his friends always showed a respectful, interested attitude, too. Adonis had asked plenty of questions and had seemed very interested when they'd passed the old, ramshackle house at the back quarter of his property.

At first, when the city slicker inquired about buying the old place, Leroy had been dubious. But Adonis had soothed his fears, saying he just needed the place for his hunting and fishing expeditions. Adonis and the men often brought a fishing boat, too. The old cottage had access leading right to the lake. It was perfect, Adonis assured Leroy, for what he needed.

But the most persuasive argument Adonis had used, Leroy thought grinning, was the unbelievable amount on that pretty check he'd offered. Leroy wouldn't have believed his eyes if not for the new-fangled glasses he'd finally gotten. Well, hell, he'd put some of that money back for his boy, Jenson. Couldn't hurt, Leroy had thought. That boy of his sure wasn't headed for a high-dollar career. Jenson would be lucky to get a J-O-B. Leroy shook his head.

So, once Leroy got over the shock and thought about it, he couldn't very well turn down that kind of money for that old rundown shack and a few acres of measly scrub. Hell, most of the property was overtaken with no-good weeds, anyway.

Leroy shook his head again. He barely recognized the old cottage now.

~ CatNaps ~

Chambers looked back at the receding figure and asked, "Adonis, what are we going to do if that old cracker or his son decides to show up and start asking questions?"

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it, Chambers," Adonis replied, "but I doubt that boy of his will be asking any questions of consequence."

"You're right, boss. The old guy's kid must be twenty, but he's still a few bricks short of a load, if you know what I mean."

"Yeah, true," Adonis answered, his mouth curling slightly. "Just don't make the mistake of underestimating his old man too much. Leroy may not be Harvard educated, but he's still sharp as a whip. He's quicker than many half his age by my estimation. So, don't you be getting careless and letting something slip."

"All right, you're the boss. Don't worry yerself. I'll be careful. I'll see to it that others know the drill, too."

"Good," Adonis said as he again twisted his neck. "Damn crick in my neck," he muttered. He braked to a bumpy stop. "Now, let's take

these women inside. We should get them settled before they wake up hissing and spitting. See that they're comfortable and secure before laying the booby traps."

"Ha, booby traps, I like it boss, you're definitely a funny man," Chambers said with a faint smirk.

"Let's just see to these two. Then I'll show you how funny I can be," Adonis growled. The implied threat was clear in his tone as Adonis lifted the still limp Lynx from the back of the van. Chambers said nothing as he hefted Felice's body up.

"Careful!" Adonis's warning was irritably sharp. Chambers straightened and managed to shift Felice's weight to get a better grip on her as they proceeded to the house ahead. Even though she was pert near light as a feather, she was still limp as a rag doll. As they neared the door, it swung open and three younger men swarmed out to help. Without much ceremony, Adonis led them to the back of the house. The bedroom had been prepared in advance for their guests. Chambers deposited Felice on the large bed. A second later, Adonis had laid out Lynx like a sack of flour beside her.

"Don't they look pretty, boss?" Chambers asked, nodding at the still sleeping pair. Somewhere between a growl and a purr, Adonis concurred. Chambers nearly smiled at the sound. He hadn't heard Adonis do anything but growl for quite some time.

While Chambers doubted Adonis would ever develop feelings, much less love for anyone again, it was nice to hear. When Adonis lost his beloved mate, Drea, Chambers had feared Adonis would never recover. He had watched Adonis grieve and plot his revenge. That day had finally come.

~ *CatConscious* ~

Beneath lidded eyes that looked to be closed, but weren't entirely, Felice struggled to gain awareness. She needed to read the situation she found herself in. It was a struggle. Just staying conscious was

proving difficult. She still felt dreadfully woozy. Even understanding what her captors said was difficult. Her effort to read them with her cat senses, well, that wasn't happening. At least not until the drugs wore off.

Instinctively, though, Felice still knew better than to indicate her growing awareness or wakefulness. No, it would be better to find out what she could. She needed to keep the advantage of surprise. If she ever even got to use it, she thought dismally.

The blackness blurring her vision began closing in again. *Damn, there goes surprising them.* It was Felice's last conscious thought. The cloaking wave of darkness enveloped her.

~ CatNip ~

Adonis and Chambers quickly and efficiently bound the two women's arms to the king-sized bed. The knots would hold, and the bed was sturdy. Lynx and Felice were both still out. On the ride over, he had injected a little drug called CatNip into their systems.

The little cocktail in their system now was potent. It should also keep them under control for a few more hours. That would be long enough for Adonis to make all the preparations he needed to. The interesting drug Crawley had cooked up would ensure their cooperation. Oh, yes, much more. CatNip would ensure their compliance at very least. He didn't need the getaway, everything he'd worked towards, fucked up by two energetic, pissed off female shifters.

He wasn't a fool. He fully expected sooner or later some surprise company could, and would, show up in hopes of rescuing the two females. Adonis had plans of his own to put into play before that happened. Nothing that difficult, but he still needed time. Two amped up hellcats, ready to scratch his eyes out, or worse, was not what he had in mind for the interim. Nope, he needed docile pussies for just a little while longer.

The men outside all had their orders. The traps were in place. The thought of his captives bound and waiting inside had Adonis itching to put the rest of his plan into motion. After all, the traps, which were electrified trip wires rigged to the cabin's alarm system, would alert them to any intruders that got too close. Problem was, Chambers hadn't yet returned or called to check in. It was troublesome. Adonis didn't need to have to worry about Chambers at a time like this, not when he was cocked up and ready to blow.

Shaking his head, Adonis called Snipes, his next best man for any job, and sent him out to locate Chambers. Adonis was amused now. He wouldn't want to be Chambers when Snipes did find him. Snipes, Adonis knew, didn't appreciate it when orders were changed like that mid-stream. Ah, well, back to the women.

Adonis needed, wanted a son. Without progeny, his legacy would die out. He was the last hope for their line. His father was dead and his brother was serving life in a maximum security hell-hole. But even if there were other saber-tooth tigers left, he was the last Cervantes man standing and able. Sure, his sister Medea was still alive, had even amazingly carried twin girls successfully. But, meanwhile, he was the only one left to carry on the Cervantes name.

~ *CatCuffs* ~

Leo, cursing, realized they still needed more gas. The men turned off at a forlorn exit, and Leo caught the faint scent of cat. It whispered to him as he scented the air.

"Follow me," Leo commanded.

It didn't take long for the men to follow the scent to a ramshackle shed and overpower an old man and Adonis's thug.

Adonis and his rogues had gotten sloppy, egotistical, or both, Leo noted. Otherwise, the thug wouldn't have stopped in alone at the old man's store. After some interrogation, he discovered the thug

answered to the name of Chambers, and the old man's name was Leroy.

Leo scowled at Chambers. "We've got you now, scumbag. Where did Adonis take our women?" He restrained his urge to rip the man apart, limb from limb. Daniel quickly cuffed Chambers to the iron railing.

Chambers flashed a toothy grin as he struggled, then spat on the ground, barely missing Leo's feet. "I don't think he's in the mood to talk to us Leo," Craig noted wryly.

"You're probably right, Craig," Leo concurred. "He could use some beauty sleep, don't you think?"

At Leo's suggestion, Roberto pulled a vial and syringe from the small satchel Colby and Drake had brought for him. "I've got just the thing. This should keep him out for a little while."

"First, let's see what we can find out from the old-timer here," Leo said, glancing over to where Daniel had his gun on Leroy.

"Who are you people?" Leroy croaked out, clearly terrified. Daniel and Craig both flashed their identification. That was all it took for Leroy to break down. "I've never broken a law in my whole life," Leroy near sobbed. "I'm just an old cracker out here in the swamp, trying to make an honest living."

Daniel didn't waste time. "If that's true, then we need your help finding this man's friend," he said, pointing to Chambers. "He's abducted two women. One is my sister and a federal agent too. Now, what can you tell us?"

As Leroy began to talk, Daniel said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, slow down so we can keep up. Okay, that's better. Now, tell us exactly where the house is located."

As Leroy blurted out the information and directions, they all listened intently until they'd gotten the important details. From the old-timer's description, Adonis had a pack of at least six men who supposedly worked for him and joined him for his hunting vacations.

“Go ahead and knock him out,” Leo said, pointing to Chambers. “We don’t want him causing any trouble.” Roberto quickly injected Chambers with the potent sedative. It would knock the big man out-temporarily, at least.

What they needed now was a plan of attack, Leo surmised as Chambers slumped against the rail-post. At least now, the odds for overtaking Adonis and his pack of men were getting better. However, they all understood the importance of being prepared for anything when it came to Adonis.

They couldn’t take chances of Adonis slipping off with Lynx and Felice again. If that happened, the women could disappear for good. It wasn’t a chance they could take. Failure was not an option.

Leo and the men prepared to approach the house tucked away at the far end of Leroy’s property. Cautiously, they decided to forgo any expected approach by land or road to get there. Their approach was less likely to be spotted if they took the circuitous route along the river inlet’s shore. From Leroy’s description, they were about three quarters of a mile down shore from the house Adonis was using. Once there, hopefully they could catch Adonis and his rogues by surprise.

Resolved and determined, the men set out with determined speed. Who knew when Chambers would be missed? Time was critical. They couldn’t afford to waste it.

Silently, Leo, Craig, Daniel, Roberto, Colby, and Drake made their way for the boat dock Leroy had told them about. The dock was closest to Leroy’s side of the property at the back of the old cracker’s unassuming home. Leroy had offered to guide them closer to Adonis’s property, but they declined his offer. It was simply too dangerous for a civilian. He willingly gave them directions to the Adonis’s cottage. He told them once they saw the lightning-scarred tree, they were getting close.

Leroy did seem relieved to stay, despite his offer to assist more. He was obviously anxious to help do the right thing. But he’d looked shocked when Daniel had explained that Adonis was a Cervantes.

Leo knew the old man wasn't lying. He knew nothing of drug cartels or crime families. Adonis had used Leroy's trusting nature to perpetuate his own evil plans.

Once at the dock, the men quickly untied the mid-sized craft and settled into their somewhat cramped positions. Roberto took the wheel.

Leo turned to Roberto. "See, your former experience working small fishing boats will be invaluable now."

They pushed off. With a sharp gun of the motor, the boat surged forward into the narrow channel. Cypress lined the swampy edges of it, with oaks and palms set farther back. Around each bend, danger lurked. The murky water beneath them teemed with alligators and water moccasins, but each man's face held a look of grim determination.

~ *CatScans* ~

Craig watched as the sun and shade dappled shores sped by, praying as they did that Lynx and Felice were okay and unharmed by the bastards who had taken them. Craig reflected silently on his feelings of utter helplessness and longing where Lynx was concerned. His concern was reflected on the faces of the other men, as well. Craig could sense that, with Leo, the feeling was mutual. He and Leo both needed Lynx back powerfully, with a soul-deep hunger.

This was what love felt like. It could hurt too, Craig knew. Kelly's death had hurt, but altogether differently. Craig knew the difference personally now. Craig's eyes continually roved the nearby banks for any sign of movement as he considered what he could lose if he lost Lynx. Anxiety, Craig understood, rode with them all until the women were rescued.

It would never do to be caught off guard out here in the near-open like this. The other men constantly scanned the surrounding forest, on the alert. They all realized the dangers of an ambush this close.

Roberto suddenly switched the motor from low to off after going around the bend where an old cypress stood, warped and wounded. At first glance, Craig could see that the tree looked almost normal. That is, until he rounded the bend to see the other side of it. There, lightning had ripped away its bark like skin peeled back from an orange. Scorch marks ran down the entire side of it. The scars were long and wicked, and only one living branch remained on that side.

But even that branch was likely a skeleton of its former glory. It was, like Leroy had told them, as if one half of the old tree continued to live on. But half of it had long since expired. Roberto's face paled, his hands were clenched tightly at his side. Leo's face blanched too as they passed it. The half-dead tree, Craig realized, looked how he'd feel if he lost Lynx.

Craig turned away from the sight of the scarred tree, if anything, only more resolute. Lynx would make it home unharmed, or goddess help the man who dared to hurt her.

Chapter 16

Adonis startled as his cell phone buzzed to life to the strains of Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries." Maybe it would be Chambers checking in. Adonis checked the ID box. No such luck. Scowling, Adonis lifted the phone to his ear. He pulled it back a bit as Snipes let loose with a few choice words about Chambers.

Snipes venting about Chambers might have been funny any other time, but not now. Adonis wasn't amused by Snipes's angry blast, "Has the ineffectual, missing son-of-a-pussy Chambers called you yet?"

Adonis struggled to keep his tone mild. There had been no word from Chambers. Not what he had hoped to hear. "Not yet," he replied.

Snipes barely gave him time to respond before he went off again, "When I find that man-eating pussy, I'm going to rearrange that ugly-ass mug of his. He's not doing a damn thing to help around here. The lazy bastard hasn't checked in yet, boss. When are you going to light a fire under that no-good, no-account excuse for a saber-tooth?" Snipes fumed.

Adonis had a brief image of Snipes breathing fire on the other end of the phone but didn't say so.

He didn't give a damn about whether or not Snipes rearranged Chambers's face and attitude at this point. Where the hell was Chambers, anyway? A faint bud of anxiety began to bloom in his chest. Adonis knew Chambers and Snipes were constantly at each other's throats. He wouldn't even be surprised if Chambers was avoiding Snipes for the moment. Chambers had certainly done so

before. He'd give Chambers another half hour to check in before getting paranoid. Chambers really hadn't been gone that long.

Sighing, Adonis let Snipes deliver a little more of his angry diatribe about Chambers before he finally broke in. "Enough, Snipes!"

It was clearly time to remind Snipes of *his* position and *his* duties. When Snipes piped down at last, Adonis began barking out orders. "Snipes, get over to old man Leroy's place, pronto. Find out if the old man has seen Chambers in the last hour or so. I expect to get a report back from you personally, even if you find Chambers. Afterwards, you are going to be in charge of keeping an eye on the less experienced guards. Obviously, Chambers isn't up for that challenge."

Adonis hung up, surprised by the twinge of guilt he felt for Chambers's sake. However, he sure as hell didn't need another of his men taking off goddess knows where. If he needed to humor Snipes a little right now, he would. He was, after all, the boss, he thought angrily. With an impatient snarl, Adonis turned towards the room where the females were being kept.

As he entered the room, for a second, he could have sworn his mate was lying there on that big bed. How well he remembered her honeyed hair, her thickly fringed eyes wide with desire and heat, her long legs that had wrapped around him like a blanket whenever they'd come together. Sure, the last months when she'd carried his child deep within her, had been full of changes. The small mound of her stomach had expanded, and her mouthwatering breasts had grown fuller by the day.

A stab of grief and sorrow, then rage, pierced Adonis as he looked at Lynx. Yes, his former mate was gone. But this bitch was really nothing like her, and neither was the other one.

But this pussy was here now, along with her delectable friend. He would mate her friend first, due to the heat already coursing through her. Adonis watched as the second, smaller female tossed and turned. Despite the fact she was sleeping and still under the influence of the

injected drug, her hips moved restlessly. She occasionally moaned incoherently. Yes, she would damn well suit his purposes.

~ CatStalkers ~

When the men thought they might be less than a mile from the cabin, they stowed the small boat in the next thick copse of trees they came to. The area was rife with scrub palms and irritating prickly weeds that snagged at their clothing.

Daniel had already disposed of one snake, Drake another. Leo gave the halt signal. Nobody in the group moved a muscle. Craig looked at him questioningly.

“Stay here, I thought I might have heard something. Roberto, you come with me. We’ll be back in five to ten minutes. If not, Drake check on us. The rest of you stay here,” Leo whispered tersely.

After fading out of sight in the heavy brush, Leo and Roberto shed their clothes and burst into their big cat form at a dead run. They sensed a rogue cat presence was just around the bend. Seconds later, they simultaneously leaped at the man leaning sideways against the large cypress tree. They surprised the unwary guard completely. He slumped to the hard ground under Leo’s weight.

Despite having his rifle at the ready, the guard had twisted around at the last moment, sensing something. It was too little, too late.

It was over before a warning could even leave the guard’s lips. Barely missing a beat, Leo and Roberto quickly dragged, and then hid, the guard’s body out of sight. Leo muzzled the urge to roar victoriously. They set off at a slightly slower pace to assess the situation ahead of them. The enemy camp was another man down, but how many to go? Leo and Roberto were about to find out.

“He was young and obviously green. It equaled easy to kill this time,” stated Roberto, using their accustomed link. The pause was understood. There was no way would it be that easy to take Adonis or

any experienced saber-tooth for that matter. *"If only it could be that simple from here on out."*

Leo couldn't help but agree with Roberto's assessments. *"I find it hard to believe anything will be simple when it comes to Adonis,"* Leo concurred, remembering Adonis's surprise ambush of Lynx and Felice at the crowded club.

"I wish I didn't agree with you this time," Roberto said simply.

They stalked closer to the perimeter of the property. This close to the targeted cabin, they couldn't afford any noise. Nothing could give them away. They moved with a calculated slow and careful silence through the woods. Abruptly, a small glint caught Leo's eyes. Instinct had him warning Roberto to be completely still. *"Don't move!"*

Carefully, Leo examined the wire they'd discovered stretched between the trees in the woods surrounding the cabin. *"Careful, Roberto, it's nearly impossible to see the wires. It's a trap, of course. It may even work to our advantage for the time being if Adonis thinks he will be warned before company arrives. Let's get back and warn the others. But be watching, just in case Adonis and his men have laid other wires we've missed."*

Stealthily, Leo and Roberto headed back in the direction they'd come from. They needed to shift back and return to apprise the others of what they'd found before their luck ran out.

~ Cat or Mouse ~

On the outer edge of the cabin, where the woods met, the strangled growth of the surrounding scrubs and trees provided cover. Leo, Craig, Daniel, Roberto, Colby, and Drake silently signaled one another of their intended route of attack. They could see the house was guarded at every corner. They couldn't be exactly sure if there were extra men in the house. Clearly, Adonis was inside with the women. He had not been sighted as yet.

Two of the men at the back of the house chatted, weapons in hand. They were leaning casually against the stone wall. Ghostlike, Craig and Daniel moved into position slowly until they found a spot where they could set the two guards in their sights. Leo and Roberto planned to take out the two guards in front, while Drake and Colby went to quietly investigate the surrounding area close to the cabin for hidden guards and for more of the hidden wires.

From where Craig and Daniel were hiding, they heard the agreed upon bird call, and with synchronized purpose they both fired their silencer-equipped weapons. The only sound was a small ping, ping, and then the low, heavy thump of the guards falling.

By the front of the house, the other two guards were disposed of with equal finesse at Leo and Roberto's hands. Before they could converge on the house, Colby came out of the clearing near the corner of the house. He signaled that he and Drake had found three more men evidently on guard duty down near the cabin's own small river dock. It was quickly signaled for Craig and Daniel to stay and keep an eye on the front and rear entrances to the cabin.

Leo and Roberto followed Colby back to where Drake waited, watching. The four made short work of eliminating the three guards by the dock. Stalking back quietly, the plan was to converge in force on the cabin and take out Adonis and his men inside.

Meanwhile, Daniel and Craig quietly waited out of view. Keeping in sight of the cabin's front and back doors, it wouldn't be long now, Craig thought. He gritted his teeth impatiently. He was supposed to wait for the others. Powerful instincts warred within him. He wanted nothing more than to explode through those doors and finish this deadly game of cat and mouse.

Chapter 17

Adonis, too, had grown weary of playing. His goal was within reach. He would have revenge for his beloved Drea and their unborn son. She had been a true innocent in the COBRA raid that had decimated the Cervantes family.

For her, it had been just another boring business function. Drea had never cared to be intimately involved in those, but this one had proved to be her demise. Now, he would never know his son. But vengeance would be his. Now he had two potential females to bare him a son. Even better, in a twist even he wouldn't have foreseen, the two beautiful shifters were connected to COBRA, the same hated group of federal operatives that had destroyed his entire family. Sometimes revenge turned out to be a true thing of beauty.

Adonis didn't believe for a second he could equal what had been lost that day. The day Drea had stepped in front of a stray, careless bullet, he had lost everything that was important to him. However, he could, and would, avenge his family and continue his family's lineage.

The time for fooling around had come to an end. Chambers or no Chambers, Adonis would wait no more.

Adonis walked into the bedroom, intent. When it was over, the first female lay wide-eyed and shivering. She was still largely immobile under the influence of the drug Crawley had invented. But she'd been bound for good measure.

Adonis had previously tested the effects of CatNip's paralytic sedative on other test subjects. He was satisfied it worked. But, he

wasn't taking chances. He sure as hell wasn't going to give two hellcats the ability to fight him off, or worse.

No, they were completely impotent, numbed by the potent drug. Even their cat senses had been paralyzed to an extent. They were truly powerless and under his control.

He would impregnate them both. The second female, Lynx, watched him warily as he moved towards her. Even though she looked frightened, he could see the hatred that blazed in her eyes.

Oh, well, she was next. She looked ready to kill, but he knew she was tied securely. She was drugged and disoriented, what could she do to him? Nothing, that's what, nothing at all.

She strained against the ropes as he reached and groped for her. Adonis let his voice go cold as ice. "You're next, puss," he growled ominously. "We're gonna have us some real fun." Suddenly, the sounds of a scuffle outside reached his ears.

Adonis leapt up, re-dressing hastily. He grabbed his weapon before giving a brief, regretful glance at the two trussed women. He hurried to the window and peaked out.

What he saw wasn't comforting in the least. By the front corner of the cabin, he could see that COBRA operatives had rounded up and cuffed two of his men. The youths were idiots, he thought. They must've been surprised or they would have shifted.

Even so, containing those two idiots, who were still struggling furiously against their bonds, might keep those COBRA bastards busy for just enough time. He needed to make a quick exit. *Idiots*. He shook his head at their stupidity before turning to go.

Adonis moved quickly to the rear of the cabin. He had no time to lose. He'd worry about the females later, once he was home free. Adonis was glad he'd thought to map out an escape route. He'd learned the value of an alternate contingency plan long before this. Having seen most of his family fall to COBRA at a time when the Cervantes Cartel had seemed invincible, a backup plan was only smart.

~ CatEscape ~

Five minutes later, near the back at old Leroy's place, Adonis found and finally freed Chambers from his restraints. He cursed, "You fucking moron. Saber-tooth, my ass! You're just a pussycat. Somebody should neuter you so you don't pass along the stupid gene."

Chambers winced as Adonis ranted. Despite his size and shifting abilities, Chambers knew he wasn't particularly talented. He had never demonstrated much extra sensory perception, despite his big cat nature. At the moment, however, it didn't take being psychic or a genius to see his boss wasn't happy with him. Groaning and rubbing the sore spot on the back of his head, Chambers followed Adonis to the other side of the woods where Adonis had hidden an extra vehicle for this very possibility.

Even as Adonis continued to spew colorful and humiliating invectives at him, Chambers couldn't help but admire Adonis's intelligent foresight as the Jeep's engine purred to life.

~ CatRescue ~

Back at the cabin, Leo and Daniel gave the go sign. The COBRA operatives burst into the cabin and began spreading through the rooms cautiously, weapons at the ready.

Craig was the first one to discover Lynx and Felice. The panic and distress on their faces was almost more than he could stand. Angry bile rose so strong, it practically scorched his throat. Despite the rage Craig could feel building at the thought of anyone hurting their women, his Lynx, Craig carefully wrapped a blanket over the both of them.

He tried to loosen their bonds, but before Craig could get both women untied, Leo and Roberto found them. Daniel, Colby, and Drake were right behind them.

The same shock tinged with sorrow was reflected in the faces of the men as they helped to remove the women's restraints. This accomplished, Colby and Drake immediately left to search the perimeters of the property for any more signs of Adonis. With the ropes and gags gone, Leo picked up the blanket-encased Lynx and held her to him.

Craig stood by, ready, should Lynx need him.

"Is Felice okay?" Lynx's tone was concerned, but her voice sounded weak to his ears. Craig clenched his hands, imagining Adonis's neck between them. He looked at Roberto.

Roberto was holding Felice. Felice was shivering violently, despite the blankets.

Colby and Drake walked in.

"Not a thing," Drake muttered. "We didn't get him."

Colby added, "But we will." Colby looked at Daniel. "We think there's a chance we could still catch up to him if we head out now. What do you think Daniel, would you like to go with us?"

Daniel walked over by where Leo sat holding Lynx. Craig moved back a few steps and watched as Daniel reached over to kiss Lynx on her forehead gently.

"Lynx," Daniel said, "I've got to go after the bastard. Colby and Drake don't want to lose any ground by waiting longer, and I agree. Will you be okay? I won't go with them if you don't want me to." Daniel looked at Lynx questioningly. "Go," Lynx whispered hoarsely. "Get the bastard. Just be careful, Daniel," she added.

Craig looked around as Daniel hugged Lynx goodbye. From the set of the other men's faces, they unanimously agreed on that point.

Lynx coughed. Leo stroked her hair, concerned. "Are you okay, kitten?" he asked.

Lynx's voice came out as a near-whisper. "I could use some water, though. But don't worry about me. I will feel much better when we get home." Lynx looked over at Felice.

Leo followed her gaze. Felice had her face on Roberto's shoulder, but he could see her tears falling. Thank the goddess Lynx was okay, but he knew she was worried for Felice. Hell, so was he. He needed to get them home, safe and sound.

"Lynx," he said, "I've got some bottled water in the car, kitten. We need to get you both home, where it will be safer. I'll call Doctor Trey to come check on Felice," he added, looking over at Roberto who still held his silently weeping wife.

"Let's go then. I'll drive," Craig said.

He nodded. "Good, let's go," Leo concurred. He eased off the bed. Lynx's arms went around his neck. "I'm taking you home now, kitten," he whispered.

Felice, Leo knew, needed medical attention soon. Obviously, he and Roberto weren't leaving the women's sides. It was pretty plain to see Craig didn't plan to leave Lynx's side, either.

Craig took the wheel. Leo placed Lynx in the front and tucked the blanket around her. She still shivered, despite the heat of the day. Leo settled in beside Roberto and Felice.

As Craig pulled out onto the highway, Leo dialed the familiar number. Dr. Trey Lockheed was a respected friend and well known to shifters in the area. The good doctor's mother had been Imatu, one of them. Trey, to Leo's knowledge, had not inherited the ability to shift. However, Trey used his abnormally acute cat-senses and instincts with his training. His gifts as an Imatu invariably enhanced his medical skills. Naturally, due to his own heritage, Trey innately understood the Imatu physiology better.

Once home, Leo leapt out and got Lynx out, as Roberto gently carried Felice towards the door. Demar followed, looking concerned. Craig was right behind them when Trey's silver Escalade pulled up.

"You sure didn't waste any time, my friend. Thank you." Leo grabbed Trey's hand as he walked up. Leo pulled Trey into a quick embrace. "Let's get the ladies inside and settled first. Then I'll introduce you to Lynx and Craig."

"Sure thing, Leo. Need me to grab anything from the car?" The concern on the Trey's face was plain to see.

"Nah, you coming out so quickly and seeing to Felice and Lynx is all I can ask for. It's more than enough," Leo said.

"Well, let's get them inside, and I'll see what I can do."

It didn't take long to get Lynx and Felice inside. Roberto carried Felice to the large sofa, laid her down gently. Demar hovered nearby. Leo was about to carry Lynx up the stairs when she croaked, "I need to go to the kitchen. I can walk now," she insisted. "I'm still thirsty," she admitted. Leo set Lynx on her feet. He watched uncertainly as she weaved her way forward.

Craig took one elbow, and Leo took the other, steadying her. Once there, Lynx grabbed two vitamin waters from the fridge.

Roberto walked into the kitchen and pulled Leo aside.

"I'd like to stay with Felice in the other guest bedroom, if it's okay with you, Leo?"

"Why, of course you should stay there," Leo replied. "You go ahead. I'm going to take Lynx upstairs and get her settled in. I'll be down afterwards to check in with you and Trey."

"Thanks, Leo. I appreciate it," Roberto answered quietly. "I'm going to go do the same with Felice. I'll see you then."

~ *CatComfort* ~

Up in Leo and Lynx's room, Craig cradled Lynx to his chest. Leo hadn't said a word when he'd left Craig there with her, shivering in

his arms. Craig understood Leo needed to be there for Roberto and Felice, too. His and Leo's friends had been through the wringer today. Craig was more than content to stay with and comfort Lynx while Leo helped out below.

Back at Adonis's cabin, an understanding had passed between him and Leo. Leo had walked in to find him with tears in his eyes and hands shaking as he tried to untie Lynx. Leo began to help loosen the ropes. Craig easily remembered what Leo had thought to him. Leo had said, "I know you love her." But, it was the look Leo gave him that Craig vividly remembered best. He knew that look. It had been one of reassurance, the same look he'd given Leo years before when Leo had wanted to know if Craig was fine sharing Kelly with him.

Lynx stirred in his arms. She was dozing off again. Craig wasn't sure if she had seen or heard his and Leo's silent exchange. Lynx was too tired and still had drugs in her system. He was glad to have her back at the ranch again, where she could rest.

He couldn't seem to stop caressing her. Her beautiful face, the slender column of her throat, and the curve of her shoulder were so alluring. They were tactile wonders to him. He felt at peace just touching her. His whole world had tilted right side up, finally.

Her abduction had scared him absolutely witless. His universe had dropped right out from under his feet. He had experienced pure fear knowing Adonis had her. It had been hell. Now, despite all she'd been through, she was safe in his arms.

Lynx in his arms, where she belonged, was heaven on earth. As he looked down at her curled there in his arms, he realized he truly was a goner. He was lost without her. Craig swore silently he was never going to lose Lynx again.

Lynx burrowed closer to him and began to purr.

Chapter 18

Trey slipped on the latex gloves. This wasn't going to be the easiest exam he'd ever given. Felice was a friend. She was, quite naturally, still traumatized by the whole tragic ordeal. Roberto had wanted to let Felice bathe upon reaching the room, however, Leo and Trey had convinced Roberto that before doing that, they needed to collect evidence of the rape.

Roberto had agreed, somewhat reluctantly. Trey waited while Felice drank some of the water Roberto had brought back. When Felice was finished, she handed the bottle to Roberto. He set it down on the end-table.

Leo's voice broke the silence. "Well, if either of you need me, just let me know. I'll be waiting in the kitchen with Demar. I won't go far."

Roberto said, "Thanks, Leo." Leo slipped out the door. It closed with a soft click.

"Okay, I guess you should just get this over with," Roberto said with a grimace. Roberto held Felice's hands and stroked them.

Trey set the rape kit beside him on the bed and directed Felice into position, knees bent, legs slightly open.

Both Roberto and Leo had felt Felice's examination should take place at the ranch. Trey had agreed. This soon after the assault, Felice didn't need exposure to the public. She just needed to rest. Unfortunately, he still needed to examine her.

"Felice, this might be a little bit cold," he said soothingly. "Afterwards, I need to insert this speculum briefly to assess if there's

damage and collect a specimen for evidence. I'll be as gentle as I can," he promised.

"I know you will, Trey," Felice answered softly.

Trey inserted the speculum. He carefully examined the inner walls of Felice's vagina, looking for abrasions and checking for tenderness and swelling. He gathered the necessary samples and secured them. The process didn't take too long, but he realized it probably seemed like an eternity to Felice. As soon as he could, he withdrew the intrusive instrument and smoothed down Felice's nightgown. Roberto quickly helped Felice under the covers.

Felice's grunt of pain at both the insertion and removal concerned Trey. Felice had multiple contusions, plus she had numerous bite marks at her throat and shoulders. Although those, he knew with a grimace of recognition, were just as likely to be found on any shifter's neck of the age to mate. They were just not usually so severe, nor numerous.

"Roberto, could I talk to you in the living room when you're done here?" Trey would've loved to delay the talk he needed to have with Roberto. But this conversation needed to take place sooner, as opposed to later.

Roberto looked loathe to leave Felice, but he nodded. Roberto bent and kissed Felice on the forehead. "I'll be back soon, and I'll send Demar in to sit with you," he promised her. He followed Trey into the hall.

They stepped into the kitchen. Roberto quickly dispatched Demar to go back and sit with Felice. It was obvious from the way the big man was pacing that Demar was eager to be of help.

"Do you mind if we go talk in the den?" Trey asked casually. He didn't want Felice accidentally overhearing his talk with Roberto. Aside from his report on her condition and treatment, he needed to ask Roberto some very personal questions.

"Sure, Doc," Roberto answered. "Lead the way."

Roberto, Trey realized, might also need a good stiff drink for this conversation. The den's bar was always stocked, Trey knew. Leo kept his top-shelf liquor out there.

Once in the den, Trey made his way over to the bar. Roberto followed him and sank down into one of the custom stools that lined the bar.

"Mind if I pour myself a Scotch first?" Trey asked.

"Go ahead," Roberto answered wearily.

"You look like you could use one too," Trey murmured. "I can make you a Scotch, too, if you'd like."

"That would be great. Thank you, Trey. Sounds like just what I need."

Trey hand Roberto the Scotch. Fatigue and worry radiated from Roberto's eyes. Trey could see from his demeanor that Felice's abduction and rape had surely taken their toll on Roberto, too.

He hesitated briefly, but he knew he had to get on with it. Rape's aftermath was never easy. In fact, the aftermath for rape victims could be damn near as difficult as the violation of the rape itself.

Trey took a fortifying sip of his scotch. He would begin with the basic facts first.

"Roberto, Felice has multiple contusions. Those should heal very quickly, though. That's one advantage to her being Imatu, of course."

Roberto nodded wearily, listening.

"Roberto, I highly recommend that Felice get some counseling as soon as she feels up to it. The psychological trauma of rape is usually more damaging and lasts far longer than the physical evidence of the rape itself. Felice's physical wounds aren't what worry me here, so rest your mind on that." Trey hesitated.

Now came the hard part.

Concluding the best way was just to get it out and over with, Trey took another drink of his scotch. The fierce burn in his throat actually helped. He called it liquid courage.

One more, and Trey was ready to begin. “Roberto, I know you more than likely realize that Felice is in the middle of her heat cycle. My exam of her confirms this fact.”

“Yes,” Roberto admitted, “I know.”

Roberto’s eyes betrayed only a tired acknowledgement at Trey’s statement.

Roberto must still be in a bit of shock himself. He wasn’t processing yet where Trey’s conversation could only lead.

“Felice is in heat, Roberto, and she was raped,” Trey repeated quietly. He hoped Roberto would understand what he was trying to say.

“Oh, hell, damn it to hell,” Roberto groaned and shook his head.

His underlying point had finally sunk in. Trey reached over and laid his hand on Roberto’s shoulder comfortingly.

Roberto just buried his head in his hands. Trey knew it must be hard to bear the disturbing implications. So, he waited.

Long experience had taught him the value of letting a patient gather his wits after disturbing news. Roberto was his friend. Trey hated what this was doing to him.

Finally, Roberto lifted his head. He furtively dabbed at his eyes with the back of his hand before looking over at Trey, beseechingly. “What does this mean, Doc? Is there any way of knowing yet? Is Felice already, I mean could she be...?”

Roberto had a right to know. Trey answered carefully and with as much empathy as he could convey. “No, we can’t know for sure yet, Roberto. However, yes, Felice could well be pregnant. I’ll be sending off the blood work for that and to hopefully rule out any other problems.

He paused. Trey knew he had to say the rest, but it was still a delicate thing to bring up.

“Roberto, if you and Felice are positive you don’t want to take any chances of a pregnancy resulting from the rape, then we need to take precautions immediately. The rape could still result in a

pregnancy. But chances are, if Felice gets a hormone pill now, it wouldn't. Most likely, no pregnancy would result then.

He watched the changeable emotions see-saw across Roberto's face. Anger, pain, and hope played out there. Roberto finally cleared his throat to speak.

Trey had a feeling he knew what Roberto might say. He was Roberto and Felice's physician, after all. He had been seeing the couple regularly now for years.

As their doctor, he knew the struggles Roberto and Felice had faced with their seeming infertility. It was a struggle that many shifters faced. It seemed the heat cycles the female shifters went through were one more way nature tried to help stack the odds in the Imatu's favor. But Trey knew that, regrettably, many Imatu couples remained childless for some reason yet unknown. Trey understood the double dilemma Roberto was faced with now.

Roberto and Felice had longed for a baby of their own for many years. They had recently begun trying fertility treatments. It was still unproven how effectively those were for the Imatu, but they had wanted to give the treatments a try. To top it off, the pill Felice would need to take to stave off a possible pregnancy from the rape could interact differently, given that Felice's hormones had been manipulated already.

Trey had to advise patients every day of the pill's advantages and of its side effects. For six months after taking the pill that helped prevent a pregnancy, patients were cautioned to avoid trying to get pregnant.

He would have to recommend that Roberto and Felice wait on their dream of having a child if they chose to avoid a possible pregnancy now. Their hopes would need to be put on hold for the near future.

As it was, Roberto spoke up first.

"Doc, I can't see ending it. If, by chance, Felice is pregnant, even considering the circumstances, I don't think we should. Not when all

she's wanted for years has been a child. Besides," Roberto continued, "if a pregnancy results from what happened to her, it wouldn't be the kid's fault, now would it? I mean, sure, it was rape. But that blame falls on Adonis, the bastard who raped her. Kids don't get a choice as to who their parents are." Roberto paused and took a big sip of Scotch before he went on.

"I know I didn't, and Felice sure as hell didn't. She never even knew who her parents were, being raised in an orphanage and adopted like she was. No, Doc, I couldn't do that to her and take away the possibility for her. Waiting for six months to try again would be too many lost opportunities. I just have the feeling that after what she's been through, Felice doesn't need to face any more losses."

Roberto leaned back and took another swallow.

Trey smiled. "I'm glad you feel that way, Roberto. I agree. I happen to think the worst thing at this point would be for Felice to believe you were overly anxious about this subject instead of being concerned primarily about her welfare. If she thought you were upset about a possible pregnancy, she could perceive that you blamed her for the rape.

"Of course, this will be Felicia's choice too. But I know you're a good man, Roberto, one with a wise and loving heart."

Roberto glanced away. He looked slightly abashed. Then Roberto spoke again. "Doc, I'm not going to lie here. I'm scared as scared can be. If Felice should turn up pregnant, and odds are she might not, but *if* she does, it's not going to be easy. I mean, I'm going to have a hell of a time with it in many ways, but for Felice's sake, I'm willing to deal with it. You know I love her, Doc, you know I do. I'd do anything for Felice."

Roberto turned his face away, furtively rubbing his eyes again. Trey felt humbled. He recognized the truth and beauty of what he had just witnessed. For one of the first times in his life, without question or doubt, he'd been witness to one of the myriad faces of a very real,

lasting love. Trey only hoped and prayed fervently one day, he too would have the mate of his heart.

Chapter 19

Back on the road, Colby, Drake, and Daniel were hot on the trail of Adonis and Chambers. They'd discovered poor old Leroy and his son Jenson back behind the cracker's old cabin, tied to the post of his ramshackle porch. Leroy had sustained a fairly large goose egg of a knot on the back of his noggin. However, aside from the unfortunate injury, the old codger seemed in fair condition. Jenson was wide-eyed, but unhurt. Leroy was more eager than ever to help in the law's apprehension of Adonis.

Excitedly, Leroy told them how he'd discovered Adonis's get-away Jeep back in the woods. "My boy Jenson showed up this morning, babbling about wanting a car again. I thought I'd convinced him the other day to forget it for a while. I worry, you know, about him getting his self killed. Anyway, Jenson wanted to show me this car he'd found, said it was off the road back there a little ways. So, we get back there and, sure 'nuff, there it was, all muddy and half-hid back behind some trees and scrub palms." Leroy stopped to catch his breath.

"So, what happened then?" Daniel prompted Leroy.

"I'm not rightly sure," Leroy admitted, sounding sheepish. "When I woke up, Jenson and I were already tied up. Finding that muddy white Jeep was the last thing I remember."

"That's okay, Leroy. At least we know what kind of car to look for," Daniel said.

"Well, guess it could've always been worse," Leroy blurted out. Turning to Daniel, Colby, and Drake, Leroy explained, "I reckon that given the no-goods had themselves criminal records, I was plain lucky

in a way. They could've kilt me and then my poor boy Jenson would've been up the crick with no paddle, if you catch my drift."

Standing to the side of Leroy, Daniel had to cough back a laugh. He could see Colby and Drake were not trying quite as hard to stifle their laughter. Hell, the old cracker did have a humorous way of putting things.

Daniel, seeing the brothers' reactions, answered Leroy. "You're right, Leroy. Things could've been worse. You've got the right attitude there. We all," Daniel emphasized the word *all* and shooting Colby and Drake a cut-it-out-you-guys look, "greatly appreciate your cooperation. You've been a big help to us. We hate to run, but we need to get going if we're ever going to apprehend the no-goods, as you so aptly put it."

After saying goodbye to Leroy and Jenson, Daniel and the twins headed to their vehicle.

Once Colby and Drake stopped laughing enough to agree on who would drive this time, they headed back onto the highway. Daniel pulled out his phone to report in to Captain Slater. "Captain, we've got a description of the vehicle that Adonis used to escape. Unfortunately, we can't give you a tag number, as the Jeep was covered in mud by Leroy's account. Yes, sir, our informant saw a muddy white Jeep shortly before he was knocked unconscious by either Adonis or his sidekick, a man called Chambers. Yes, sir, I agree, sir. Adonis could always switch vehicles again. Sir, we'll do the best we can not to let that happen."

He was about to hang up when Slater added, "I'm sending Ethan and Javier your way to help with the search. I'll also apprise Captain Donavon that COBRA's dealing with a Cervantes again. As you know, he hates that name, too. I'm sure Donavon will ensure some of his teams are on standby, in case more operatives are needed."

"Thank you, sir." He hung up and then quickly dialed Leo. "Leo, I just wanted to quickly update you on the situation here, and check to see how my sister and Felice are doing."

When Daniel had exhausted his information, Leo filled him in.

“Felice is, very naturally, a mess at the moment. But Dr. Trey has been here to see her. She’s doing okay physically, no serious injuries from what I understand. Lynx definitely fared better, thank the goddess. I think she’ll be back to herself once the shock and drugs wear off, at least for most part.”

“I hate what happened to Felicia,” Daniel acknowledged heatedly, “but I’m relieved Lynx didn’t suffer the same abuse. I want to strangle the bastard as it is.”

Leo growled his agreement. “I hope you catch that bastard and get the opportunity. I’m glad to hear that Captain Slater and Captain Donovan are adding to the manpower on this. Adonis is a slippery son-of-a-bitch. I want Adonis to get what he deserves. He will pay for what he’s done to Felice and for what he nearly did to Lynx. Have no doubt of that, Daniel.”

“I don’t, Leo. I’ll keep you updated then. Give my love to Lynx.” Daniel could hear the approaching *whomp whomp* of a helicopter. “I think I hear Ethan and Javier flying over us now.”

“Well, I’ll let you go then,” Leo said. “Don’t worry about your sister. We won’t let her out of our sight.”

“Thanks again. Talk at you later, Leo.” Daniel hung up the phone. *Interesting, Leo had said we and our, versus I and my.*

Daniel was distracted almost immediately when the familiar helicopter that COBRA often flew swooped by and hovered above them for a brief moment before heading off. Daniel knew Ethan and Javier would be scouring the area for Cervantes and Chambers. Adonis could play it smart and stay out of sight for the time being, but Daniel’s confidence was buoyed at the sight of his COBRA comrades aiding in their search. Now, with a little luck...Daniel crossed his fingers.

Colby and Drake had been strangely silent for a few minutes. Daniel had noticed the close camaraderie the twins exhibited. At first, Daniel assumed it was just the whole twin thing. Lately, he had begun

to intuit what they were about to say more than a few times. Why did he feel so oddly tuned in to their connection?

Daniel shook off the notion. Just the situation, he told himself. It was probably a good thing they all understood each other. After all, if they couldn't communicate well, it would be a problem in the search or showdown with Adonis and his men.

Daniel had the ominous feeling the next showdown with Adonis would not be nearly as easy as their last one. They were going to need whatever edge they could get if, and when, they did manage to back Adonis into the proverbial corner.

Chapter 20

Trey had said his goodbyes. He'd left Roberto with the meds Felice might need. He had even helped Roberto settle Felice back into their small bungalow at the rear of the main house. Felice wanted to soak in her own tub and rest in her own bed. Roberto thanked Trey and watched as he pulled out of the driveway.

Finally, Roberto felt he could go and just be with Felice. Roberto knew she would possibly be sleeping on and off for the next few days, especially given that Trey had prescribed a light pain medication and another very mild sedative. Roberto was just so relieved to have her home. He really didn't want to leave Felice's side.

When he got back to Felice, Roberto wasn't at all surprised to find she had already nodded off.

Felice was curled up into herself. Her damp, dark hair fell lightly across her beautiful olive-tinted face. Her arm rested against the half-moon of her bruised right breast. He drank in the sight of her. Lying there, she looked so vulnerable and, goddess help him, so alluring and beautiful. He swallowed the lump of gratitude in his throat and climbed into bed quietly beside her.

In her sleep, Felice just sighed and settled against him. As the sun slowly began to sink and shadows fell, Roberto cradled his wounded love closer to him.

~ *TresCats* ~

Trey had also checked Lynx before he left. Other than chafed wrists, Trey had said Lynx was fine physically. Leo had spent the last

hour consulting with Trey. Now, he was ready to see for himself how Lynx was doing.

When Leo stepped back into the room, the sight that met his eyes brought a mixture of feelings. He wasn't sure he'd ever before felt so many emotions at one and the same time. There, in his huge bed, lay the woman he loved, sleeping. She lay in his friend and former partner's arms. His throat constricted. They looked incredible together.

His chest squeezed tight for a heartbeat. He felt arousal vying with tenderness. If there was a momentary flash of jealousy, it dissipated as abruptly as his dick hardened. Standing there quietly, Leo's breathing hitched when Craig began to move on Lynx. Craig must still be dreaming. Craig had an arm over Lynx's shoulders and his hand on her breast. His long fingers stroked Lynx's barely covered breast lazily. Craig's leg was haphazardly thrown over Lynx's.

When Craig nuzzled at Lynx's neck, all the blood drained to Leo's cock. He watched, mesmerized as Craig licked towards the shell of Lynx's delicate ear in sensual, dreamlike motions. Leo was unable to look away from the sleepy byplay. Craig's large hand cupped a perfect breast. Leo caught his breath as Lynx's rosy nipple swelled tautly between Craig's fingers and the lace.

His mouth watered. Trey had checked out Lynx before he left. Other than chafed wrists, physically, she was fine. Still sleeping, Craig's touch had obviously roused Lynx's body to a degree. She moaned. The next sound came out in a rumbling purr. Lynx moved restlessly.

Leo's hand drifted to his dick.

~ *Cat of My Dreams* ~

Lynx's responses were enough to rouse Craig, too. Lynx had needed comfort. His tiredness had briefly lulled him into a light sleep beside her. The sound of her moans when she stirred were enough to

wake him. Well, that, and his cock stiffening against her buttocks and back. He'd climbed into bed besides her wearing just an extra large, long tee shirt. He'd left his less comfortable jeans on a chair.

Lynx had been sound asleep. Tired as he was, he had passed right out, too. But now, the silky material of Lynx's nightgown tortured him. It rubbed him in all the right ways. It was a delicious friction. Was that what woke him?

Lynx moaned softly again. Craig realized Lynx's breast was cupped in his hand. His fingers played over it. He had been unconsciously stroking and petting Lynx's jutting nipple between the pads of his fingers. Flames licked up his balls, and his cock jerked harder. Just more torture.

Still half-in, half-out of his surreal, dream-like euphoria, Craig's eyes met Leo's. Craig froze for an instant. Did Leo remember? Was he okay with this?

Leo's look pierced him. The lack of censure and pure arousal Craig saw there held him captive until Leo's hand fell to the obvious bulge in his jeans. Craig could see the outline of an impressive erection even through the heavy material.

Leo stroked himself for a moment. Craig could almost feel the sizzle of sensations slide up his own cock at Leo's movements. The sight should not be a turn-on, but what the hell? If he'd walked in on that with Leo touching Lynx, he knew he'd be turned on, too.

Craig leaned back, relaxing. He returned his attention to the shell of Lynx's earlobe. Circling it, he licked, and earned another small moan from Lynx. At the same time, he plucked one of Lynx's pebbled nipples between his fingers. He looked over to where Leo stood.

Leo slowly unzipped his Levi's and deftly stepped out of them, dropping them to the floor. Leo's heavy dick sprang free. Leo slowly fistfisted it and began to stroke. His amber eyes were dark and heavy-lidded as he watched. Craig slowly lowered the sheet farther down the bed, baring the sight of Lynx's lower body and his own to Leo's view.

Craig slid his hand up along the curves of Lynx's long legs until it came to rest lightly on the small perfect V of silky curls between her thighs. Slowly, sensuously, Craig lightly stroked the taut wedge of pink that nestled there. Then he lowered his mouth to the erect point of her left nipple through the lace of her trimmed nightshirt. Lynx restlessly turned her head slightly and moaned again. This time, the sound came from low and deep in her throat.

A fresh ache bloomed in him, and Craig felt his cock swelling even more. He lowered his mouth to cover Lynx's nipple as he continued to stroke the gently swollen nub of Lynx's clit. Leo just leaned against the wall, plainly aroused. He was watching the erotic interlude intently. Leo's cock bulged each time Craig touched Lynx.

Leo's hand slid up and down his large cock until the thick, mushroom-shaped head of it was purple and weeping. Craig knew firsthand the thrill of playing voyeur to his lover with another. It was damn erotic. Joining in was even better.

Craig trailed a finger down Lynx's body, finding the silky slit beneath Lynx's slick, swollen nub. The heated moisture pooling between her legs took his breath away momentarily. He lazily stroked back and forth over Lynx's trembling mound and through the creamy center between.

Lynx's breathing hitched.

His finger was coated in her cream. He couldn't resist. He raised his finger to his lips and tasted. Sweet, homemade honey clung there. It was addictive. Hell, she was addictive. Craig knew he'd never get enough.

Leo groaned. Craig sucked his finger clean and returned for more of the hot sweetness. Slipping through the tight, creamy channel, Craig rasped against Lynx's swollen welt of flesh as he did. The rosebud of her clit pulsed at his touch.

Lynx's hips shifted restlessly, her head thrashing side to side. Leo's fisting of his cock grew tighter and faster.

He couldn't stand it anymore. Craig lowered his head to Lynx, replacing his fingers with his mouth. Sweet flesh pulsed against his tongue. One slick swipe, just one lick, and the addictive honeyed taste of Lynx hit his taste buds again. Heat flared all the way to his dick. He groaned gutturally against Lynx's mound.

Leo's groan echoed his. Craig looked over and smiled. Leo stilled. He was apparently resisting the urge to come.

Craig slowed. He, too, found he was riding out the urge, too. With every movement, his cock would hit Lynx's leg and just the taste of Lynx had his blood roaring. He looked over at Leo.

He could see Leo was lost in the visual. Craig remembered Leo had stopped more than once just to watch him and Kelly as the three of them made love.

With his hands, Craig gently parted Lynx, giving Leo a better view of her pink, glistening slit and swollen little clit. In a low voice he said, "Do you want to taste Lynx now, before I finish her, Leo?"

Craig heard the "Mmm hmm..." and then a distinctive humming purr in his head. In unspoken agreement, Leo walked to the bed and positioned himself. Leo lowered his head to Lynx's quivering, wet clit. Lynx's legs started to tremble. Craig motioned for Leo to join them on the bed.

Craig watched as Leo spread Lynx.

Leo lightly nipped at the hard little bud of Lynx's clitoris, and lapped at the dew gathering there. Leo's tongue penetrated the creamy slit below. The sight of Lynx being speared by Leo's tongue had Craig gripping his own painful erection. Damn, his dick would break off if it got any harder. His hand slid up and down his slippery shaft in time to Leo's tongue slipping in and out of Lynx.

Still stroking his shaft, Craig positioned himself at Lynx's breast. Now he had a better view of Leo's mouth on Lynx. Tempted by her ripe, hard nipples, Craig leaned forward and sucked one into his mouth. Simultaneously, Leo thrust two fingers inside Lynx with a barely restrained growl.

With a small, keening cry, Lynx's hips came off the bed. Beneath their hands and tongues, Lynx began to climax in long, rippling shudders, her body jerking spasmodically. Craig felt her shudders all the way to his satisfied soul.

~ *CatWorship* ~

It was a very good dream, but Lynx only felt the rush of heat unfurling. It slid through her senses and pooled in her veins. She was lost in white-hot pleasure. Someone suckled the distended ridge of her clit to his tongue. Whether it was Leo or Craig she didn't know and didn't care, just as long as they didn't stop.

One began what the other would finish. Someone slid a finger as far as it would go inside her. Somebody else's tongue destroyed her. One tongue was mercilessly feeding at her breast, and another tongue ravaged her throbbing clit. Her body knew their touch, ached for it, came alive under it.

She awoke on a scream of pleasure. Her hips arched and bowed. The contractions shook her. She could feel her juices spilling and the velvet rasp of a tongue against her sex. She heard Leo's groan of appreciation. A moan slipped from her throat as the incredible pulses continued to wash over her. She gripped the head at her breast closer, feeding herself to Craig. Dark hair tangled between her fingers.

It took Lynx a few seconds before realization dawned. Craig and Leo were both really there. Never had a dream been so real.

Craig continued suckling at her breast before he gently let her breast free of his mouth. He stroked himself over her, looking down. With his free hand, he caressed the breast he'd just liberated.

Lynx shivered as Leo lapped a last bit of cream from her while her spasms slowed. Then, with a look of pure male satisfaction, Leo moved into position on the other side of Craig. It felt surreal, as if it were still all a dream. On her right, Leo loomed over her, his slick and heavy cock in hand. Over her left breast, Craig stroked his long, hard

shaft. Leo's golden-amber eyes met hers, and then Craig's slate-blue ones. Love and more filled their gazes.

"Wanna lick it, kitten?" Leo asked. He groaned as he stroked.

"And what if I do?" Lynx returned his question. She reached over and flicked the flat disc of Leo's nipple. His nipple immediately hardened and pre-cum beaded on his cock. Leo's body responded to her teasing touch, too.

This time Leo growled. He pulled her forward. His hands encircling her head, he brought her to him.

"Suck it, I said," he ordered.

"I thought you said lick it?" Lynx asked, keeping her voice innocent.

She uncurled her tongue and gave it a long teasing lick, lingering on the bulbous head. She was rewarded with a Leo's deep groan. She slowly sucked his cock into her mouth.

Leo's hands automatically came to tangle around her head and in her hair, his fingers massaged her scalp as he pulled her to him. He slid deep down her throat.

~ CockyCats ~

Craig let out a strangled groan at the sight. He watched Lynx's cheeks hollow, her mouth stretch wide around Leo. When she took Leo to the back of her throat, he forced himself to stop stroking his own cock.

Clearly unable to hold out anymore, Leo began to thrust. Soon, Leo rocked to Lynx's mouth to his cock with pounding thrusts that left Craig's own head spinning. The visual was erotic, his ultimate fantasy. He could become addicted to watching Lynx give head.

With every pump, Leo groaned, a sound of pleasure that Craig couldn't help but envy. Damned if he didn't want to be swallowed by the little minx, too. But watching this, he sure as hell wasn't going to last much longer.

With a roar, Leo began to come as he thrust fast and furious. Lynx's eyes widened, but still Leo kept pumping. With a groan, Leo finally withdrew from her mouth. A blast of fluid shot from Leo and landed somewhere between Lynx's cheek and curtain of silky hair. Leo slowly let out a groan and sank back on the bed.

Lynx, satiated, was sexier than anything Craig had ever seen. Lynx looked up at them, a blissful look in her eyes. She radiated sensuality. She was sharing her body with him and Leo. But more importantly, she had given them both her unadulterated love and trust.

But it was the sight of Lynx with Leo's cum on her face that proved too much for Craig.

Groaning, he began to pump his cock harder and faster. In a matter of seconds, he could feel his own cum boiling out of his balls, up through the shaft. Craig's roar of pleasure filled the room as the heated spurts and jets of cream erupted over Lynx. Another offering and Lynx's pink little tongue licked her lips clean. Her eyes flashed anticipation this time.

Craig telecast his thoughts before he even realized he had.

"Good, she does like my taste."

"Mmm hmm. I sure do," Lynx purred.

Then as if to prove it, she rose slightly to wrap her lips around him, licking him like a cat after more cream. Craig didn't protest. More of him spilled more down her throat in a few quick thrusts.

The look on Leo's face now was one of pure hunger, predatory, even. Craig could see that Leo's shaft had grown larger, harder again. But as Leo made a move towards Lynx, Lynx only laughed. Then, to Craig's vast amusement, she said, "Un huh, boys. Give me a bath and food first. Then and only then, you *might* get seconds."

Leo gave his cock a quick stroke for emphasis. He winked devilishly, grinned, and then said amicably, "But kitten, we've already showered and fed you."

Lynx sputtered, but he laughed. She hurled a pillow at Leo, and then lobbed one at Craig before she dissolved into laughter herself. The sound was music to Craig's ears.

Chapter 21

Adonis had been busy making calls. At the same time, he was busy avoiding the higher traffic of the highway by using the lesser traversed back roads. Contrary to expectations, Adonis and Chambers had doubled back, but they hadn't doubled back to Adonis's cabin. No, they were headed right for Lascaux Ranch, Leo's place.

Still, they weren't taking chances. The pair had taken alternate routes to get where they were going. So, Chambers drove while Adonis made his calls. Chambers listened as Adonis dialed up some of his key men. Chambers had to chuckle to himself. Adonis sure wasn't fooling around anymore. None of these guys were young or stupid. Samuels was one badass saber-tooth if ever there was one. Samuels was also Adonis's uncle and biggest partner in crime.

Samuels ran the drugs and slavery ring part of the business. That way, Adonis could concentrate on finding the rare youthful shifters, willing or unwilling, to bring in to their circle. The female shifters were always prized. A young female shifter was the *crème de la crème*.

Yeah, Samuels would definitely level the playing field and be there for them. After all, Samuels had been the beneficiary last time when Adonis had given Samuels a prize young female named Minx. And Minx could very well be Samuel's final chance for his own heir. Chambers knew the sacrifice Adonis had made for his uncle. Just by giving him Minx instead of claiming her as his own, Adonis had sacrificed. Samuels knew it, too. Yes, Chambers imagined Samuels would do whatever it took to protect and repay his nephew. Samuels

also despised what the COBRA agents had done to their family business, reputation, and name.

Chambers listened as Adonis outlined his plans to Samuels. Finally, Adonis grunted out, “Get together your best men. We’ll rendezvous at noon the day after tomorrow at the deserted packing warehouse outside of town. And Samuels, I owe you one. I know you’ve got plans for Minx that have already been put off due to business. I know those plans will have to wait again. Thanks. I really do appreciate your help. Sure, I know, I know. Okay then, see you noon on Friday.”

After Adonis had clicked off, Chambers chuckled. “You’re good, boss. It sure can’t hurt to remind him of the favor you did for him by handing him Minx on a silver platter.”

Adonis nodded. “Yeah, well, we need Samuels now more than ever to run this business. The damnable COBRA agents backed off for a while after taking down my father and brother. Now they’re going to be back on the trail. This time, they’ll be hotter for us than ever. We’re going to need every trick in our book to stay ahead of them.”

Sounding aggravated, Adonis continued, “After all, we forfeited some of our best traffickers’ last go round to them. Not to mention the fact that the buyers have become more wary since their raids. Oh, they’re still there. They still want the fucking merchandise, but now all these exacting precautions have to be taken. Well, screw ’em. It isn’t easy getting what they want. At least the profits are still considerable.”

Adonis ran his hands through his hair and against his jaw, now prickly with stubble from not being able to shave the last two days. In the moon’s eerie light, Chambers could see the Spanish moss swaying ghostly in the trees they passed. Within the hour, they would switch vehicles again.

If COBRA thought they were going to make it easy for them, they had another thing coming. Before it was over, he would help Adonis

get his revenge, and then some. Adonis settled back, and Chambers drove, listening to the music. Somehow it only seemed appropriate that the radio pumped out one of his favorite rock 'n roll tunes, AC/DC's "Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap."

~ *CatOmens* ~

Daniel was frustrated. He, Colby, and Drake had yet to see any sign of Adonis or the getaway Jeep. Drake pulled off the exit and headed for a rest stop to get gas. The thought suddenly occurred to Daniel that maybe they were mistaken. Perhaps Adonis hadn't done the expected thing and tried to flee in the opposite direction.

Daniel pulled his phone back out of his pocket and quickly dialed Captain Slater. "Just checking in, Captain. We've seen no sign of Adonis from the ground. Has Ethan or Javier spotted any sign from the air yet?"

"There's been no reported sightings of them so far," Slater replied.

"I was afraid of that, sir," Daniel said. "My gut's telling me there won't be any sightings of Adonis, at least not from the direction we're all headed."

"What do you mean?" Slater asked. "Do you have any idea where they might be headed?"

"Yes, sir, I think I just might. My instinct tells me that Adonis is headed back towards the ranch. That he knew we'd think he'd flee in the opposite direction, and so he's doubled back."

"That could be," Slater said thoughtfully. "I'll send Ethan and Javier to check out the area airports, just in case. If they don't find Adonis at that point, I'll send the men back to the ranch to keep an eye out for trouble."

"Thank you, sir. I'll notify you if anything changes."

Daniel shoved the phone back in his pocket as they turned into the Quickie Gas-Mart. Before going in, Drake and Colby both turned

around to Daniel simultaneously and gave him a look of serious speculation. “So we’re going back to the ranch to meet up with your friends?” Drake asked.

Daniel didn’t even hesitate. His senses screamed that they should get back as soon as possible. He nodded. “I believe we should. My gut says Adonis and Chambers will head back there, foolish as it might sound.”

This time it was Colby who spoke up with a lazy drawl. “Well, to be honest, my gut agrees with you. I’ve had the feeling we were only chasing our tails the farther we got away from home.”

Daniel knew without being told that if Colby felt that way, Drake wouldn’t disagree. He’d never seen them actually at odds over anything. The brothers might goof and they might even fight occasionally, but they never seemed to truly argue.

Drake opened his door and said, “One of you go pay and pick me up some bottled water for the drive back, then. I’ll be pumping the gas so we can get back on the road.”

They were back on the highway less than ten minutes later. The car was tanked and ready. Colby had managed to grab them all some sandwiches and drinks. Now all they needed was easy traffic and they would be back at the ranch before the sun ever came up. Drake was still taking his turn driving, so Colby flipped on the radio to the righteous sounds of “Thunderstruck” by AC/DC and left it there.

Before the song was even over, Daniel heard the first rumbles of an oncoming storm. Shortly after the song ended, the radio weather guy came on, announcing the approaching storm. They were due some bad weather, he knew. Daniel only hoped it wasn’t some kind of bad omen. The ominous crackle of lightning in the distance did nothing to reassure him.

~ *Cats and Water Do Mix* ~

Roberto and Felice had long since retired to their bungalow. Leo checked in with Demar to make sure security was still tight. Then he returned to the bed where Craig and Lynx lay twined together. Craig softly stroked Lynx's hair. Lynx looked contented and drowsy. She looked to be right on the verge of falling asleep again.

Leo hoped a shower and some food might revive her. He went to the large master bathroom and adjusted the shower to the perfect temperature. Then he went back to the bed. "Shower time, baby," he said as he bent down to kiss Lynx on her soft cheek. It was the same cheek he'd tenderly wiped clean earlier, after the laughter had died down.

"Craig, help me get her up. I'll help her to the shower before she conks out on us."

"No problem." Wrapping his arms around Lynx, Craig helped her sit up. Leo could see Craig was being careful of Lynx's sore wrists where the rope burns were still evident. Seeing the marks at Lynx's wrists sent rage washing over him. Leo clenched his teeth to hold back his snarl of anger. No use upsetting Lynx, Now just wasn't the time. He carefully took Lynx from Craig.

Leo stepped into the large shower and guided Lynx under the spray of heated warmth. Holding Lynx close against his chest, Leo squirted enough of Lynx's special shampoo onto her hair to get up a good lather. Then he began gently massaging Lynx's scalp.

"Ooooh...that feels heavenly," Lynx murmured, laying her head on Leo's shoulder and snuggling closer.

"I'll tell you what feels heavenly, baby. You, wet and naked, it's your perfect breasts pressing against me while the suds wash between your silky long legs. Exactly the way I want to."

"Oh," Lynx said. Even to her ears, it came out sounding more like a moan.

Leo finished rinsing her hair. He took a loofah and generously soaped it up with her favorite lavender body wash. Then he began to

torture her slowly. Leo began washing in tiny circular motions, starting with the delicate hollow in Lynx's throat.

"Close your eyes," he directed softly. He gently washed Lynx's face again, remembering where they had both lovingly marked her earlier.

~ *CatPlay* ~

The bathroom door opened. Craig walked back in and stepped into the shower behind Lynx. "Had to take a call from Daniel and the twins," he explained. "They should be here before sunrise. Did I miss much here, Leo? You know I want to help give her a bath...it's more fun that way. I mean to get her dirty again later," he teased.

Lynx sucked in a breath. She was more than a little wet already. Leo shot Craig a look of amusement.

Behind her, Craig had started soaping her back and shoulders. Leo, meanwhile, took the loofah and began at her breasts. By the time Leo had circled one breast, her nipple seemed directly attached to her clit. Electric flares of heat pulsed straight to the highly aroused flesh that throbbed between her legs..

Their combined touch burned. She burned. She was anchored between their muscular bodies. Their hands roved over her, relentless. Neither man was merciful.

Leo moved to the other breast, sudsing the highly sensitized nipple. Her nipple bloomed. It was aroused and taut. It ached under his tongue. Leo continued the lazy movement as he bent to suckle its twin into his mouth. Leo's teeth scraped over the knot of flesh, sending shocks of pleasure zinging straight to her pussy.

At her back, Craig made his erotic, soapy journey. He soaped his way down to the swell of her ass. It was slippery now. The spray wasn't directly hitting her back, and the suds ran in rivulets down the aperture between her cheeks, warm and slick. She moaned,

anticipation warring with sensation after sensation. Lynx bit her lower lip as Craig separated her cheeks.

~ Cheeky*Cat* ~

Craig couldn't help but notice the erotic way the bubbles popped and slid on their way down that already slippery trail. And he couldn't seem to help himself, either. He bent to cup the firm, glistening globes in his hands. He separated them and watched as the suds kissed Lynx's body in all the spots he aimed to kiss-and plunder.

With his hands and mouth Craig explored. He followed the water that sluiced a deep rivulet through the globes of her ass. His tongue rimmed the little, puckered entrance, breached it. Goddess, it was tight.

Craig retrieved the soap again and put it to use. Her cheeks looked pretty covered in suds. His slid a soapy finger in, and his cock throbbed in anticipation. Resistance met his finger as he invaded Lynx's tiny bud in slow deliberate strokes, but his finger arrowed his thoughts, sliding in and back out again. He felt the clench of Lynx's inner muscles. Lynx made a sweet keening cry. "Close, so close, just a little more," she pleaded. Well, she asked for it. How could he say no?

~ *Cat*Treat ~

Leo's shaft thickened with every sound Lynx made. He needed to taste more of her. He wanted to drive into her, over and over until she screamed in satisfaction. Leo left her nipple to work his way down the curve of her navel and abdomen instead, making her stomach muscles shiver and jerk.

Lynx grabbed the back of his head on the way down and pushed his face to her swollen pussy.

Leo growled. That was so damn erotic. He loved to feel her hands in his hair and her need for him. He loved the way she took what she wanted. Even through the water that showered their bodies, Lynx spilled honey on his tongue. Raw honey dripped. He wanted to devour every drop.

Lynx leaned forward, panting, little moans escaping from her throat. He stole them. He loved the way her eyes glazed over with that hazy, sexy, I-wanna-come-soon, I'm-gonna-come-soon look. It made him crazy to love her.

He knew what Craig was about to do to Lynx. Hell, if he were behind her, that's exactly what he'd be doing.

Lynx went shaky, trembling against him. Leo kissed the quiver all the way down the nape of her neck to the swell of her shoulder. He nipped there, teasing. Goose bumps swelled, but he kept going until he caught the hard point of a nipple between his teeth again. He swirled his tongue around its cherry hard tip. He plucked it and groaned. Now, drizzle some honey across his taste buds and his cock, and he'd come a happy man. Leo went to his knees for more.

~ *CatCream* ~

Craig's breathing grew ragged, harsh. Kryptonite for his cock, that's what it was. That ass of her would destroy him. Just finger-fucking her there, he was harder than steel. He was Superman, and damn, if he didn't get inside her now, he was going to come on the shower floor. He let his finger slide in one long, last slow time before withdrawing and soaping his hands again.

He kept one hand clasped around her stomach and waist because she was slippery wet. He massaged his way past the parted cheeks until the head of his cock bumped the little hole.

Lynx moaned. Her moan was low, ragged, and harsh. The little sound she made only made him harder. Craig aimed for another slick entry instead and gasped as he slid in deep on a single hard thrust. The

impact pushed Lynx against Leo. She screamed, and Craig felt the instant flutters of her oncoming orgasm against his cock.

He fought the urge to come. He nearly withdrew from surprise when two larger hands grasped the side of his thighs, steadying him as he plunged into Lynx. She rippled around him. It was torture. It was heaven.

He groaned. Cream, warm, wet, and lubricating, drenched his cock. Those vibrations of her pussy would undo him yet. He went still, trying to picture anything but shooting off yet. He eased his cock out, quelling the urge to slam into her and finish it. He wanted her ass this time.

He rubbed the hidden spot deep between her cheeks.

“Ready for me, little Minx,” Craig whispered. “How about I take you here?” Lynx groaned in response.

Leo stood up and handed Craig the lubricant from the shower’s cubby. “Here,” was all Leo said. Leo bent back to Lynx’s neck.

Craig smoothed some over his shaft and then concentrated on generously lubricating Lynx. He worked his fingers over the puckered little entrance.

~ *CatCombo* ~

Lynx’s eyes flew open and her heartbeat accelerated. She felt Craig preparing her. Leo’s lips burned at her neck, and then he was kissing her face. She opened her lips to Leo as he invaded her mouth. He demanded access with his tongue. Leo’s provocative words slid across her like lava. “Can we fuck you, kitten? Need to fuck you now.” In his half-groan, half-growl at her throat, Lynx could hear the need.

But her answer was swallowed as Leo’s mouth came down on hers again. She was captive between them both. Her body clenched, anticipating, as she felt Craig working the head of his cock against her rear.

She moaned as she felt the thick head of Craig's cock slip past the opening. She tensed momentarily, but Leo's hand was at her mound. He thumbed her clit for a second. Sensation piled on top of sensation.

Leo's jutting cock took the place of his hand, and he thrust suddenly, going deep on a single stroke. The force of his frontal entry ground Lynx back against Craig, catching her off guard with its suddenness. Craig's grunt of pleasure mingled with her little scream of surprise as Craig's cock penetrated on a long, burning slide.

All in, Craig went still, gasping. His hands were anchored at her hips, his lips at the back of her neck. She could feel his breath, hot and harsh against her skin. But his cock stretched her, and she could feel it everywhere.

She quivered, moaned against Leo's throat, impaled between them. Leo, too, had slowed to a stop as he cradled her closer to his chest. He kissed her.

"Are you okay, kitten?" Leo gritted out. "You suck me in so sweet, but I never want to hurt you."

"I don't know yet," she panted.

She squirmed, somewhere between pain and pleasure. She shouldn't move yet, but...oh, fuck, it was impossible not to. She was too full. The duel sensations were indescribable. Desperate, Lynx managed to get her words out between her gasps for breath. "Don't stop now, please, both of you. Fuck me. Move, damn it."

She tried to move between them, but she was held in suspension between their hard bodies and harder cocks. She was close to sobbing, her emotions as intense as the position she found herself in.

Being fucked, hell, being thoroughly loved by the two of them felt incredible, damn near overwhelming. They fulfilled her and the dark needs she'd never known she had. Yet, the love and trust she could feel coalescing with them was even more vibrant.

All coherent thought vanished for Lynx as Craig began the long slow slide in and out. And then Leo would thrust. Their rhythm was easy at first, a slow tango. Each time Craig pushed past her resistance,

Lynx rocked near the edge. The burn of each entry as singing as the first, but now, a new heat bloomed with it.

Leo was hitting the swollen button of her clit each time he slid in. Lynx moaned in appreciation.

The rhythm changed. Craig began to fuck in and out a little faster. Lynx felt every nuance, reassured her as he powered into her. Craig's voice at her ear sent shivers up and down her spine as he nipped at, and then groaned into her ear.

"You're squeezing my cock like a velvet vice, baby. It's the hottest fist of pleasure I've ever known. You're so tight, little minx, it's pure arson around my cock. I'm going to explode soon."

Lynx heard him gasp with pleasure on the next stroke in.

She knew Leo could hear every word Craig said, too. His shaft had swelled. His strokes had grown faster, too. Leo groaned, and she felt more cream gush from her pussy. Leo's next thrust had her biting back whimpers of need.

Craig crooned, "Baby, I can't hold back much longer, but I don't know that I can control this much longer, little minx." His breathing grew ragged, his thrusts harder.

Even in the shower, she could smell the tang of Craig's earthy, lusty scent. Craig was sweat-slick. He slid Lynx's hair away from her ear again. His voice was rougher, and need bled through it. "I don't want to hurt you, but I want to fuck you harder. Will you be okay, kitten? Tell me now. I never want to hurt you, Lynx. I love you."

Craig's admission tore from his throat, his breathing was harsh. Lynx knew he meant every word. Emotions threatened to avalanche her. She felt a shiver rush down her spine straight to the sweet, dark spot Craig was buried in. He had slowed again, waiting for her to answer. He was deliberately trying to hold back for her.

Love coursed through her and then settled deep inside her. She moved back against Craig, felt him slide deeper inside her. She moaned appreciatively, then whispered saucily, "I love you too, Marozi. Now, damn it, make me come."

Lynx moaned as she felt Craig instantly swell, stretching her farther. His hands trembled at her hips for a split-second before he began powering into her with punishing thrusts that left her whimpering.

Leo nipped at her other ear, whispering huskily, “I love you, kitten. Are you going to come, baby? I want you to come for us again. I love to watch you come apart.”

Leo’s hands cradled her head as he bent to kiss her. His tongue owned her mouth, but his lips were tender. Lynx cried out as Craig powered forward again.

Craig and Leo gained rhythm, rocked into her in unison. She could barely breathe feeling the slide of one against the other. She wondered, for the barest of seconds, if they felt what she could.

Then, the fullness, the sensuous burn of Craig shafting over hidden nerve endings became Lynx’s focus. Sensations collided. Leo shafted deep, touching her womb. She sobbed, nearly screamed from the sensory overload. Her orgasm hit her like a super-nova. Spots blinded her vision.

Craig let out a harsh roar and began pistoning in and out like a sledgehammer. His cock jerked, spewing spurt after spurt of the hot fluid of his release deep inside her.

Seconds later, Leo let out a roar as he, too, began to come. The sound could have made her hair stand on end, but Lynx had never heard anything so erotic.

Then, Leo pushed her wet hair aside. He found the nape of her neck. His teeth sank in.

Lynx heard Craig catch his breath as she convulsed between them. Craig lifted her hair and buried his face at the other side of her nape. She felt the scrape of his teeth an instant before Craig’s cock surged in forcefully again. At the second piercing bite, she screamed as another climax hit. It barreled over her, as strong as the first one.

Shockwaves surged through her in bolts of exquisite sensation that seemed to have no end. Pleasure pulsed in waves, and she cried out, surrendered to it.

She fell over the edge and into a storm of mindless ecstasy.

Afterwards, Lynx lay satisfied in their arms. Leo and Craig had fully marked their possession of her. She felt safe, pleased, and completely content. They were hers. She belonged to them. She was home.

Leo and Craig dried her off. Satiated, they collapsed on the bed. As they lay tangled together, replete, theirs was one lazy, barely distinguishable mass on the big bed. Content, Lynx lay tucked tightly in Leo's arms. Craig was spooned against her back. He had one leg lightly thrown over hers as he nuzzled against her neck. Craig's tongue soothed the small mark he'd left there.

She felt completely surrounded, protected, loved. Craig's and Leo's husky murmurs were at her ear, full of love and adoration. Feeling their possessive hands and gentle touches, Lynx wanted the night to last forever. But, she could feel the insistent, dark tug of sleep. Her eyelids kept drifting shut of their own accord.

Right before she succumbed to the dark velvet pull of dreams in their arms, Lynx mumbled, "Can't stay awake...love you...both." The words barely left her lips before she fell fast asleep.

~ Purr~Fect ~

Craig gazed across the delicate ridge of Lynx's arm and shoulder to where Leo looked down at Lynx. He could see the undeniable tenderness on Leo's face. The soft expression belied Leo's normally fierce appearance. He looked up at Craig.

Craig could see acceptance there. Leo acknowledged it, saying, "Relax, don't worry, bro, just try and get some sleep. We're going to need our rest come tomorrow if Daniel and the twins are right."

Leo nudged closer to the sleeping Lynx. His lower leg brushed Craig's as he did.

The accidental touch would have caused discomfort, even revulsion once upon a time. Now, because of their intimacy with Lynx, their sheltering of her between them felt natural. It was oddly comforting and right.

He followed Leo's advice. It wasn't that difficult when the gentle rumble of purrs at his ears sounded perfect, beyond words. As Craig drifted off, the faint vibration of his own soft rumble joined theirs. This was their haven from the storm.

~ *CatPause* ~

Thunder rolled and lightning split the sky.

Muttering expletives under his breath, Drake pulled off the exit and into the nearest rest stop. "Damn weather," he grumbled. "Haven't seen a lightning storm with rain like this for ages."

"Well," Daniel reassured him with a contemplative look, "we won't be doing anybody any good if we end up in an emergency room somewhere, or worse."

"Yeah," Colby agreed, "he's right, Drake, and you know it. Don't get too bent about the slow down, though. Hopefully, this same weather has slowed Adonis's plans, too."

"Yeah," Daniel chimed in with the barely restrained anger he knew they all felt. "Maybe we'll get lucky and lightning will strike the bastard."

"Wouldn't get your hopes up just yet," Drake replied, sounding grim. "Chances are Adonis got a decent head start on us. Worse, we probably gave it to him by going the opposite direction."

"Hey, it's not going to help anything if we beat ourselves up here," Daniel said dryly, "but yeah, I do wish the weather would cooperate with us better. I guess I feel like we got a little bit lucky finding Lynx and Felice as quickly as we did."

“But what if our luck doesn’t hold out? I’ve been through some tough missions and undercover operations in my time. I know luck plays its part, however small, in who comes out ahead or even alive on the missions. I just can’t shake the feeling that we’re going to need some extra good luck to put away this slime ball.”

Their conversation ceased as another eerie bolt of lightning lit up the sky. The sky dazzled in a brilliant spider’s web of light and crackling energy. Daniel watched as the blinding rain continued to fall. *Aw, hell, we’re going to be here for a little while.*

~ When Cats Converge ~

Adonis and Chambers pulled up to the deserted warehouse on the outskirts of Auburndale shortly after the storm hit. Adonis didn’t mind the storm. On the contrary, in this kind of weather, they didn’t need to worry so much about being seen. Adonis handed the ring of keys to Chambers and watched as he made a mad dash through the downpour to the warehouse door. A minute later, Adonis pulled into the building’s wide entrance. He parked and turned off the engine.

Jumping out of the silver Honda Pilot, he and Chambers had hot-wired shortly after dumping the Jeep, Adonis flipped on his flashlight. He handed the other flashlight to Chambers. “Here, you’ll need this in here. We shouldn’t use the power out here too much. We don’t want to arouse unnecessary suspicion. If someone who believes the place is deserted should drive by and notice the lights, we could find ourselves staring at some overeager police company.”

Chambers took the flashlight, flipped it on, and let out a slow, “Whewie, would you take a look at this place, boss? You could fit Samuel’s chopper in here!”

Adonis nodded. “Sure you can, and that’s exactly what’ll be here come tomorrow. Samuels will fly in, no doubt. He hates traffic with a passion, avoids it, really, unless there’s no other way.”

“Jeez, boss, I’m starved, ready for those burgers we picked up earlier yet?”

Adonis sighed. Chambers was always hungry. Oh, well, best to get that out of the way before he tried calling Samuels again. Besides, no use bothering Samuels with the storm raging right now. Samuels could wait to hear they were fine and securely situated. They had reached the rendezvous point now, might as well let Chambers eat. With another sigh, Adonis handed Chambers the takeout bag.

Chapter 22

Samuels hung up the phone at his warehouse in Vero Beach, smiling. Good, he thought, the calls to Pasqual and Ahmed were taken care of. Samuels knew they'd waste no time. Those two loved nothing more than a good fight, he recalled, chuckling. He barely had time to finish telling them where to meet him before they decided to take off. That's how eager they were.

Of course, Pasqual and Ahmed's profits as investors were at stake, too. But it didn't matter. Those boys still loved a good rumble, no matter the reason. Still chuckling, Samuels picked up the phone again. *Better tell Matthews to run a quick mechanical check of the chopper and fill her up.* As much as he enjoyed this area, life at the beach had been kind of boring lately.

Leave it to Adonis, though, to sweeten the pot and provide some much needed action of a different sort. He would just have to delay his plan to tame Minx. But he was very curious to see just how closely Lynx resembled her. Hell, if Adonis couldn't manage to get to Lynx back, Samuels figured he had enough contacts to help pull it off. His nephew could learn a thing or two from him. Who knows, maybe once the wildcats were both tamed, they'd all hang out together, him and Minx, Adonis and Lynx. Now wouldn't that just be sweet? Maybe even raise their kids together one day, with or without their mothers, depending on how things went.

~ CatColors ~

A few hours later, the storm finally subsided. Colby took the wheel this time. Dawn broke slowly over the horizon. The brilliant orange of the rising sun cast a hazy glow. As they entered the highway, Daniel looked up and saw the fading outline of a double rainbow shimmering in an arc ahead. A sense of hope flooded him at the beautiful sight. Maybe things would turn out all right. With a measure of peace restored, Daniel listened as Colby and Drake did their usual bantering up front. He was just relieved to be back on the road. But the sooner they made it back to the ranch, the better he knew he'd feel.

Chapter 23

She was cradled in Roberto's arms. It felt soothing, considering. Felice blinked, gradually becoming aware that she was home again. Her dream had been just a nightmare after all. Roberto was the one holding her.

Adonis had been there, in her dreams, her worst nightmare. Despite the fact that she consciously remembered how he'd drugged her, and she knew her reactions had been a result of that, the lingering feelings of guilt remained. Being bound and used by a man she didn't even know-had hated, even-was sickening.

Felice turned her head away from Roberto's compassionate gaze. How could he still be looking at her like that? He was so full of love and understanding. Why did he want to protect her still? Was she even worth it?

Roberto took her chin in his hand and ever so gently turned her face to his. "Sweetie, what's wrong? Why won't you look at me?"

Felice gulped back another sob. "You would hate me, Roberto, if you knew."

"Knew what, sweetheart? Don't you understand how much I love you? Don't you know that I could never, ever hate you?" His voice slid over her like a soothing balm, but the waves of guilt would not abate. Felice lowered her eyes, still unwilling to look into his.

"Roberto, the things he did..." She paused. Her voice trembled when she continued. "The things Adonis did to me there...I hated it. You have to know that. But," and she paused again, her voice sinking to a whisper, "I couldn't help it, I...I-I just couldn't. He gave me no choice."

“You know I would have fought if I’d been able. I wasn’t able, Roberto.” Felice’s eyelashes fluttered against her cheeks as the tears started pooling before streaking down to her jaw line. They fell in earnest as the sobs racked her body.

Roberto just held her even tighter in his embrace. His touch conveyed love without his needing to say a word. What could he say, anyway? Her mind warred with conflicting emotions. Anger and guilt were primary. But he looked angry and sad. In some ways that made her feel worse.

Felice knew Roberto wanted to strangle that son-of-a-bitch Adonis. But not half as bad as she did, she wanted to tear the sick bastard apart limb from limb.

Roberto leaned to kiss the top of her head and said the only thing he could have to soothe her. “I love you, Felice, I could never hate you. You were drugged, baby, tied up. I understand that. I just want you to remember that, despite the horror of what Adonis did to you, some good will still come of this. They should be able to analyze the drug Adonis used by testing the blood sample Trey took from you earlier. Baby, I know you’re in pain, but eventually, it could even help others.”

Felice leaned on Roberto and sobbed into the safety of his comforting shoulder. She cried until she couldn’t cry anymore. Tiredness eventually won as the last tear trickled down her cheek.

~ Guard My *Pussy* ~

She’d fallen asleep in his arms. Roberto quietly arranged the pillows around Felice and gently laid her down and covered her. The he rose and stretched out the kinks. Quietly, he left the room and went outside.

He just so happened to catch Demar in the middle of making a patrol. Roberto gratefully accepted the cigarette Demar proffered, lit

it, and inhaled deeply. “Thanks, Demar, you know I don’t have one often, but I really needed one today.”

He took another deep inhale. “Would you mind keeping a very close eye on the place for the next little bit, Demar? I need to go speak with Leo, and I don’t want Felice waking up alone. She could easily be frightened if no one’s around when she wakes up. I think she had a nightmare earlier.”

“Sure, man, that’s cool. Don’t you worry about Felice. I’ll stay right here. Could you do me a favor, though, too?” Demar paused.

“No problem, what do you need, Demar?”

“Just tell Leo that I seen old Mort out by the property line earlier. He’s back in town and just as talkative as ever.” Roberto held back a tight smile at Demar’s grimace.

“He was out checking for damage this morning. Said to tell Leo the big oak he loved was hit by lightning last night, split a huge branch right off it. Also said to tell Leo to come by and see him sometime. Mort said he always enjoys talking to him.”

The last was said with another wry smile from Demar.

Everyone at the ranch knew how much old man Mort liked to talk if he liked you. But Mort’s acerbic tongue had also been known to damn near saw through polluters, arsonists, and poachers who dared damage the sacred trust he kept, his stretch of forest and wetland.

Roberto nodded. “Yeah, I’ll tell him that. I’m sure Leo will be interested to know Mort is back from vacation. Although, I get the feeling Leo was kind of glad Mort was gone before. I know Leo didn’t want Mort tangling with the likes of Adonis. Mort may have a sharp tongue and even pack some firepower, but that still wouldn’t equip him to handle Adonis or someone like him.”

Roberto stubbed out the remainder of his cigarette. “Demar, thanks again for keeping a close eye on Felice. I’ll be back shortly. Call me if she wakes up.”

Demar fidgeted. “Will do, will do,” he murmured. “Nobody’s gonna hurt Felice ever again. You can bet on that.”

From the determined look on Demar's face, Roberto didn't doubt the big man meant every word he said.

~ More *Pussy* Please ~

Lynx came awake, stretching luxuriously and kicking off the hot covers. Grey-blue eyes twinkled, appraising her. Craig looked bright-eyed and alert. She just struggled to keep her eyes open. "Up and at 'em, sleepyhead," he drawled. "It's 7:30 in the morning. You ready for your coffee with cream and sugar yet, little minx?"

He put heavy emphasis on the words cream and sugar, letting them slide off his tongue with a thoroughly suggestive sound.

Lynx rolled over, pulling the pillows over her head. Her only answer was a heavily muffled, "Sleepy, need more sleep." A sharp thwack sounded as his hand landed on her rear. She'd kicked the blankets off earlier.

She bit out an expletive. But it was still heavily muffled. Lynx managed to throw one of the pillows at him just the same. Sitting up, Lynx turned to glare at him. "What the hell did you do that for, Marozi?"

Craig just grinned, seeming unabashed. Then he said on a murmur, "You're pretty when you blush." He yanked her to him, his lips insistent. By the time he managed to suck her breath away, her hands were tangled in his hair, and she pulled him to her.

How did he manage to taste so fine in the morning? His flavor was wild, a thunderstorm in the desert. All of a sudden, she was parched for it.

He trailed kisses down her throat, pausing in the hollow of it. Her pulse beat against his tongue before he slipped past her collarbone to the mound of one breast. He cupped it. Then he circled the swell of her nipple. It peaked under his touch. She needed again.

Lynx moaned low in her throat when Craig dipped his head to her, lazily tracing a path around the aching nub. He was such a tease. He licked and laved around the areola until Lynx grasped him to her.

He stopped teasing then, suckling the peak tautly into his mouth like he would starve without her to feed him. Moving over her, Craig nudged at her pussy with the demanding, hard length of his cock.

The warm pull of Craig's mouth eating at her breast, then his hard shaft sliding smooth as silk through the heated depth of her pussy sent her into an orgasm she hadn't been expecting so soon. Lynx cried out with pleasure and went wild under him.

~ Cats Will Cum ~

In the kitchen again, Demar and Leo paused in their discussion, momentarily distracted by the sounds from above. Demar looked questioningly at Leo, as if to ask, "Okay by you?" Leo took a quick swig of coffee, slapped him on the arm, and just said, "Hey, I think we've pretty much got it handled. I'll be back down in a bit. If Daniel and the twins show up before then, just tell them what I said. See you then." Leo gave him a wink suggestive of just enough, then, whistling softly, he bounded up the stairs two at a time.

Demar just looked after him. Part surprise and barely contained amusement contorted his face. "Well, I'll be damned," he finally managed to say. But by then, Leo had already disappeared up the stairs.

Demar looked at the recipe in front of him. He meant to try it out later, but now, he couldn't remember specifically what ingredients he was out of. Slowly, he reread it.

What a distraction! But Demar couldn't help but smile at the interesting turn of events.

~ CatControl ~

Craig slowed in his thrusts, struggling to hold back as Lynx contracted and tightened around him like a hot, wet fist. *Ahh, goddess. The torture.* Unable to resist, Craig thrust deep again. Ripples of new pleasure rolled over him. Damn! It was definitely time to change up or lose it.

If Lynx's fresh moans were any indication, she wasn't done yet. He rolled her over on top of him, grasping her ass cheeks for leverage as he did. Craig then decided this position was probably a mistake, too. The sight of her luscious breasts and cherry red nipples swinging over his face came into full view. Well, hell, he needed to distract himself any way he could.

Then Lynx rose and sank down, infinitely slow and torturous. A groan escaped him. This was no good. The little minx was about to make him lose it. He needed to show her who was boss here. Then he looked over and saw Leo in the doorway. He stifled his grin. Perfect.

Lynx continued her slow grind up and down. She rode him like a pro bull rider, only better. Craig ground his teeth together, concentrating so he wouldn't lose it. He reached up and pulled her down to his chest for a long, slow kiss. He grabbed her ass, partly to stop her writhing. She was making it damn hard not to come.

Craig knew Leo could see the byplay. He slowly spread Lynx's cheeks, affording Leo a better view of her pussy as he speared it. Lynx's eyes were closed, her lips parted as she ground down again. As Lynx sank, taking Craig deep, he slid a finger across the indented seam between her ass-cheeks. Craig heard her gasp as on the next stroke down, he pushed the digit of his finger in, slow and easy. Her gasp became a moan.

Lynx would soon get a not-so-little surprise. Leo tossed his shirt, removed his belt, and just as quietly slid his jeans off. Lynx was still unaware of his presence. Leo looked ready to join them, judging by the rock-hard erection he already sported. And there was a predatory gleam in Leo's eye that Craig recognized.

Craig could feel the flutters around his cock. Lynx was about to come again. He tried to slow her pace. He could tell she teetered on the edge of climax. Craig shuddered as Lynx moaned. More flutters, hot damn ! Much more of this, and his cock would surely burst.

Through heavy-lidded eyes, he could see Leo had grabbed the lube and was almost ready to join them.

Craig grabbed Lynx's hips, held them taut and rammed upwards. His eyes almost rolled back in his head it felt so damn good. He heard her gasp.

Again, he repeated the maneuver, thrusting up quick and hard. His lips found hers and his tongue stroked in as he thrust again. Craig held Lynx as she rode him, and his hands caressed at her hips, exploring and kneading.

Leo had quietly moved into place behind Lynx.

As Craig surged up again, he heard Lynx's startled gasp. Oh, yeah, she knew Leo was behind her now.

"I could hear you all the way downstairs, kitten," Leo growled at Lynx's ear. "You don't mind if I join you, do you?"

Lynx whimpered, approval in her moan. Craig felt the quiver and vibration at her throat as he kissed there. He gripped the firm globes of Lynx's hips, aiding Leo.

A second later, Leo was partially in, if Lynx's whimper meant anything. Craig tried to kiss her and swallow the sounds, but the climax Craig only been teasing Lynx with, until now, exploded.

Lynx rocked between them, bucking and thrashing. What she said came out on a garbled scream, but best as Craig could make out, it was somewhere between, "Oh, fuck" and "uncle."

He was going to ask her about that one later.

But the sight of Leo with a handful of Lynx's hair, riding her was just too damn much. Plus, Leo's every thrust made Lynx's pussy tighten convulsively around him. Hot and wet, the contractions squeezed his cock to the breaking point.

“Does that feel good to you, little minx?” he asked. “It sure feels good to me. Goddess, you’re so fucking tight,” he gritted out against her neck as his orgasm body-slammed him.

Lynx kissed him breathlessly, her pussy still mercilessly clamping his dick. She laughed weakly, and then groused back to Leo, “I said uncle, didn’t I?”

“Lynx!” He shouted her name as his cock exploded. Craig pumped furiously, in sync with Leo’s well-timed, answering thrust behind her. Instinctively, his body surged, seeking the connecting pleasure and heat of Lynx’s body above him. Craig’s teeth extended to claim the neck she bared for him.

Behind her, Leo began driving in, spearing Lynx’s cheeks apart with increasing speed. Leo erupted on a roar.

Lynx wailed, this time higher, more piercing. Craig felt the hot clench of her pussy around him. He groaned, already at the verge of losing it again. He could feel Leo’s every thrust through the rippling walls of Lynx’s pussy. The sensation was not unwelcome, although he was still getting used to it.

Craig drove up as another climax ripped through him. His heart pounding, his cock just exploded into a fireball of pleasure.

His cock only grew larger inside Lynx, and the head of his shaft more sensitive. Ecstasy overtook him as he felt it connect, hook deep inside her. Hot jets of his seed poured in spurts. Craig’s breath was torn from him in mindless gasps of pleasure. His mind was blown, and that was all there was to it.

Leo collapsed against Lynx a heartbeat later, with a weighty groan. “Uncle,” Leo croaked out at last, with a satisfied grin. He managed to turn Lynx to her side so he could take his weight off of her, off them.

The heavy breathing finally slowed. Leo was stroking Lynx’s hair. Craig nuzzled at the mark he’d left on Lynx’s delicate throat, enjoying the soft pulses of pleasure still washing over him.

“Mmmm...so good, baby, so good,” he murmured. He licked the salty column of Lynx’s throat one more time as Leo slipped out of her, patting her as he did.

Craig kissed Lynx’s brow, the tip of her nose, and slid out slowly, too. He held out his hand to her and helped her up into Leo’s arms. Lynx snuggled into Leo’s chest. Craig could see her legs were weak, trembling. He went to the bathroom and turned the water on warm. He stepped under the spray and waited as Leo helped Lynx in.

“Time to clean you up, little Minx,” he said, drawing her against him.

Lynx palmed his chest sending a shiver through him. “Oh, is that what time it is, Craig?” she asked, sounding so very innocent. “I just thought it was time to get wet again.” The hard tips of her nipples pressed brushed his chest. She licked her parted lips and gave him a look that sent blood rushing straight back to his cock.

Craig groaned. “Shower time it is,” he said gutturally.

~ *CatThroat* ~

Leo’s smack to her butt was a light one, his tone appreciative. “You’re a very naughty kitten, aren’t you? You’ve made him, and me,” he added, “hard all over again.”

Craig’s hands were working their magic, massaging her scalp as his mouth descended to hers. She could feel Leo working a soapy down her back. Craig’s tongue parted her lips and invaded. She felt the cloth part the seam of her cheeks as Leo caressed and washed her behind.

As Craig bent to her nearly denuded pussy, a hiss escaped Lynx. Craig soaped his cloth and began to stroke.

“Spread ‘em for me, little minx,” Craig said, his voice grown husky.

She did what she was told. She moaned as Craig gently but thoroughly cleaned her. He took the hand-held shower jet and rinsed her.

Lynx threw back her head, pleasure coursing through her.

Craig dropped the cloth. He cupped her with his bare hand, rubbing and rolling her clit between his fingers.

At her back, Leo stood up and whispered in her ear, “Does that make you wet, kitten? You know I love it when you get wet.”

More juice spilled over Craig’s fingers at Leo’s words. Leo nipped at her ear.

Then, Craig’s voice and tongue vibrated against the tender hood of her clit. “I’ll never get enough of this pussy,” Craig hummed. His tongue circled and dipped in teasingly.

She was dripping honey and aroused beyond caring. That was just not acceptable.

“Have mercy,” she growled, gripping Craig’s head, pulling his mouth to her. Craig’s groan as his mouth found her clit had Lynx clenching her hands in his hair.

Behind her, Leo caressed both of her breasts in lazy, disorienting circles.

“Are you going to come again, baby?” Leo purred against her ear. He swept her hair aside, licking in easy circles. The duel sensations of their raspy tongues, one teasing the bundle of raw nerves that was her clit, another at her neck, had Lynx writhing in her answer.

“Make me,” she gasped.

She felt the warm sting of the water raining down as Leo slid his thick cock, inch by swollen inch, into her sex.

Craig licked her clit as Leo fed his cock into her pussy from behind. Craig was achingly tender, at first. But then Leo thrust his cock deep, and his sharp incisors emerged at her neck. Craig growled and nipped. Fire streaked through her blood, heated it, and then boiled over.

A scream tore from her lips as she rocked between them in a free-fall of pure pleasure. She floated there, drifted. The waves hit her, one after the other. Leo's deep groan at her ear, his hands at her breasts, sent renewed shock-waves rippling through her.

Craig took a long, last lick of Lynx's raw and sensitized clit as Leo groaned behind her. Leo's cum heatedly flooded her in time to his pulsing strokes.

Craig made his way up her body, found her mouth, and kissed her softly before kissing his way past her ears to the mark Leo had left. Craig took a tender bite.

Leo held her close, rocking slowly as Craig finished in a hot spray of seed against her belly.

"Kitten," Leo whispered repeatedly as her hand closed over Craig.

At her lips, Craig mouthed, "Little minx," as the final drops from him rained down her skin.

Leo traced the sigil there.

Craig groaned his approval. He caught his breath, finally, "What does it mean?" Craig asked Leo.

Leo answered solemnly, reverently. "It's the Imatu symbol for my pride. Now, Craig, the pride, the magic of the symbol is yours, too."

Craig gently drew the symbol on her.

Lynx knew then, past the shadow of any doubt, between Leo and Craig would always be her refuge from any storm.

Chapter 24

Leo left Craig there to dry Lynx off. He needed to go check in with Demar. He wanted to find out if the twins and Daniel had made it back yet. A dozen other ranch duties awaited him, too. Although the list was long, Leo couldn't stop smiling.

As Leo rounded the stairs and turned from the hall into the kitchen, Leo was met by three familiar and curious faces-Daniel, Colby, and Drake. Judging by their speculative gazes as he walked in, Leo could easily guess what they were intrigued about. Leo would guess the trio had at least heard enough to whet their curiosity, if not their damn appetites. It wouldn't even take Imatu ears to have heard the sounds from upstairs. Oh, well, too late now...

Daniel, at least, looked away. He seemed a bit embarrassed. Colby looked amused and slightly hungry. Drake, however, looked more carnivorous than usual. Yep, the carnal sounds had carried. Leo was sure of it. Double damn.

Despite the twin's rapacious, appraising looks, Leo didn't waste the time to explain. He needed to hear about the trio's trip and how they came to the disturbing deduction Adonis might be headed back their way.

The twins and Daniel, however, took their time and turns telling Leo about the storm.

"We would've been back earlier, but the storm was so bad we didn't want to risk it," Drake explained in an expressive drawl.

"That was probably for the best," Leo agreed. "None of you would be much help laid up in the hospital, or worse." Leo took a sip

of his coffee. "We've been fine here," Leo said. "So far, at least, nothing unusual has occurred."

The men nodded, looking relieved.

Colby spoke up. "We're really glad to hear that, Leo. We hoped that was the case, and we made it back before any real trouble arrived."

Leo was about to ask what had tipped them off that Adonis might head back when Craig and Lynx rounded the corner and walked into the kitchen. Craig had a sheepish, satisfied smile on his face. Lynx, he noted, still glowed.

Leo waited. He could see the questions on their faces now, but before Colby could drop the zinger Leo halfway expected, they heard the back door close with a click. Roberto strode into the room and headed straight for the coffee pot. He grabbed a cup and gulped the hot liquid down.

Leo asked softly, "How's Felice holding up, Roberto?"

Roberto leaned back against the counter. "She's resting right now, naturally. Trey says she'll be fine physically. Otherwise, she's still pretty shook up, and who knows what the long term effects will be?" Roberto let out a sigh. "Overall, though, Felice is doing about as well as can be expected. Right now, she just wants to sleep. A lot."

The connotation wasn't lost on Leo.

Roberto continued. "Trey left Felice some good meds. Right now, she certainly needs them. I think she'll be okay once the shock wears off and she realizes she's safe."

Roberto's eyes gleamed. Leo could see the anger and frustrated vengeance burning there. "So, do we have any idea where that bastard is yet?" Roberto asked the question almost casually, but his expression hardened. Roberto took another long sip of his coffee.

"No, not yet, Roberto. Hell, I hate to report in with no news," Daniel responded.

Drake looked at Roberto and murmured. "Trey will take good care of Felice, Roberto. Trey's the best doctor around, and Felice does trust him."

"I'd hate to think of Felice having to deal with an unknown doctor at a time like this," Colby added in agreement, looking at Drake.

"I would, too," Lynx agreed. "I liked Dr. Trey," she added.

Leo caught Daniel's shrewd look at the twins. Daniel seemed to be catching on. Sooner or later, he was going to have to explain Imatu telepathy. And sooner or later, Drake needed to just make his move on Trey. He didn't understand what the hold-up was. Trey certainly seemed interested.

"Sounds like this Dr. Trey's a good friend to have around these parts," Daniel interjected. "So, when will he make his rounds again? I'd like to meet this Trey after hearing Drake and Colby sing his praises."

Drake's look of surprise amused Leo. Leo turned away, hiding it. Drake's response seemed affected. "I'm not sure, Daniel. Roberto, when will Trey be coming back to check on Felice?"

Roberto cleared his throat. "Trey will be calling with the results of Felice's blood test as soon as the lab returns them. I plan to run a few of my own."

"What exactly are you looking for with your tests, Roberto?" Daniel asked curiously.

Roberto cleared his throat again. He looked away, almost distantly, before answering, as if scanning the room for answers.

"First, I'll catalogue the individual components in CatNip, the drug Adonis gave to Felice and Lynx. We need to find out what it is comprised of."

Looking at Leo this time, Roberto added, "So far it looks to be one hell of a chemical combo. But I haven't been able to isolate all of the drug's components, yet. I've been spending more time with Felice since she's been home than in the labs," Roberto admitted.

Daniel shrugged and nodded. "That's for the best, Roberto. I'm sure they'll run a complete analysis at COBRA's labs, too. We'll just have to wait and see what they find when they get the samples."

Roberto continued. "The new drug seems to be a powerful date rape cocktail. But the caveat is the victims don't get the luxury of unconsciousness, unless the drug is combined with a sedative. Instead, they experience heightened awareness. They also seem to suffer a short-term paralysis which may affect certain abilities. The paralysis may possibly interact with or affect an Imatu's other senses as well, in ways we're still trying to figure out."

Roberto grimaced.

"We also did a pregnancy for Felice. The bastard raped her in the middle of her heat cycle."

There was gravity-laden pause at the table.

Daniel's face was a study of confusion. Craig looked surprised, momentarily.

Daniel was the first to speak up. "Heat cycle? What do you mean by that, Roberto?"

"Yes, what exactly do you mean by that?" Lynx asked, puzzled.

Roberto shot a quick glance over at Leo. "*Some back-up would be nice here.*"

Leo took Roberto's telepathic but large hint and spoke up. "Okay. Let's just say that the heat cycle is just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. The information I'm about to share is not something many people know about us. People are not always accepting of differences, especially concerning things they don't understand. I say this because what I'm about to trust you with could mean the difference between life and death for our kind."

Daniel looked more confused than ever, but Craig's face held a placid look of expectation.

Leo continued. "Daniel, do you recall when I left COBRA on an extended break years ago?" Daniel nodded.

“Well, around that time I discovered I had these unique abilities, genetically inherited abilities, actually.” Leo stopped to take a sip of his coffee.

Daniel still looked confused. “So, you have some unique genetic abilities? But you mentioned implications for *us*. Who exactly do you mean by that, Leo, and what?”

Lynx just listened quietly.

Leo shrugged and set his cup down. “Daniel, you, Lynx, and Craig are whom I refer to. The three of you have a similar genetic marker. Naturally, Daniel, if you have it, so does Lynx.”

Leo looked at Craig and said wryly, “But apparently, so does Craig.”

Craig moved restlessly in his chair.

Leo looked at the three of them waiting expectantly, and laid the facts out.

“Your bloodlines are all very similar to mine. Your parents were descendents of an ancient race known as the Imatu. They’re also referred to in legends as ‘the cat people.’ The Imatu have blended, melded really, into human society since the beginning of time. They have shared the same space with humans, but they are different. The Imatu are gifted with some unusual abilities. Because of this, and the superstitious nature of humans, the Imatu conceal the nature they were born with.”

“So,” Daniel asked impatiently, “what are these unique abilities you keep referring to? If Craig, Lynx, and I have them, how come we didn’t know anything about it?”

A subtle, knowing look passed from Craig to Leo. Craig cleared his throat as if about to say something, and then took a swig of his coffee.

Leo’s eyes pierced into Daniel’s. He was just thankful that as an alpha, leader of the pride, his telepathic skill as a sender was better than average. Although telepathy was innate to anyone born Imatu, not everyone born Imatu could do what he did.

Leo opened the telepathic channel to everyone at the table.

“This is one of our gifts, Daniel. You’ll find other innate gifts as circumstances or timing demands them. At some point, you’ll even be able to shift form. Old Indian legends speak of men with the ability to shape-shift. You are cat, like us, as is your sister, Lynx. Craig, you share our heritage. Everyone here is descended from the Imatu. Fate has given us another gift. Our kind have scattered through the years. We are doubly blessed that so many of us have converged here.”

Daniel’s face was a comic study in shock. He shook his head as if still not sure of what he’d heard.

Leo spoke out loud, confirmed Daniel’s suspicions. “Yes, I was speaking to you telepathically before, Daniel. More importantly, you were able to hear me. You have the same abilities as the rest of us. Only you just haven’t been made aware of them.”

Leo could see the light of understanding finally start to dawn in Daniel’s eyes.

Daniel, curiosity piquing, just had to ask. “Leo, what did you mean by ‘cat like us’?”

“We can shape-shift into cat form,” Leo answered. Daniel seemed at a loss for words, momentarily.

Craig took advantage of Daniel’s shocked silence to ask a question. “What exactly precipitates the shift, Leo? Does it just happen involuntarily every time, or can it be controlled in time?”

“I’d like to know that, too,” Lynx said quietly.

Leo didn’t answer immediately. Instead, he probed with a question of his own. “Craig, you sound as though you’ve already experienced the change to some extent.”

“Yeah, to some extent, I guess. It was one night early on, here at the ranch. I’d had some whiskey. I was almost dozing, you know, zoning out in my room. It just happened before I even realized what was going on.”

Leo looked at Craig bemusedly. “Hmm, would that, by any chance, have been the same night you took Lynx for a walk in the garden?”

Craig, looked slightly abashed, but he nodded at Leo.

Leo could see the color rise on Lynx’s cheeks.

Daniel finally forgot his shock enough to ask questions. “So, I take it Felice and my sister are Imatu as well, then? Roberto, you said something about a heat cycle and possible pregnancy with Felice because she was raped during it. How long before you know whether or not Felice is pregnant?”

Leo understood Roberto’s need for control. Roberto answered calmly. “The test results I ran came back this morning.”

The silence in the room was so palpable it had a pulse of its own.

“So, is Felice pregnant?” Leo asked.

Roberto put his head in his hands briefly. He straightened. “Yes, Felice is pregnant. The bastard got her pregnant when he raped her.” Roberto shook his head as if to clear it before carrying on with a slightly strangled voice. “Felice doesn’t know yet. She was still asleep when I left. I plan on telling her the results this evening. Demar promised to keep a close eye on the bungalow in case she wakes up so she won’t be frightened or alone.”

Leo caught Roberto’s eyes sympathetically.

Roberto quickly added, “I’m going to tell her as soon as she’s able to hear it. Unless Felice wants an abortion, there’s no way I’d ask her to have one.” He uttered the last sentence, looking a bit defiant, as if waiting for disapproval.

Leo nodded approval instead. “Good. I know how long you and Felice have been hoping for a child. I think it could tear Felice apart if you asked her to have an abortion, to lose that chance, even now.”

Roberto’s eyes grew moist. “Thank you for the support, Leo.” He wiped his eyes furtively.

“Okay, change of subject here,” Daniel said, “Going back to Craig’s earlier question, what exactly precipitates this so-called shift

you're talking about? Is it the same for everyone or is it entirely individual? Can it be controlled or not?"

Leo stood up, stretched, and gave a half-growl. He strode purposefully towards the large sunken living room. He removed his clothes so swiftly no one even had time to comment. He walked back towards the group, and mid-stride, so fast it was almost a blur, Leo shifted. The massive lion took a few more steps toward them.

Daniel flinched in reaction. Leo could hear that Daniel's heartbeat had accelerated significantly at his transformation.

"Well," Daniel managed to choke out dryly, "guess that answers that question."

"I'd say," Lynx retorted.

The lion moved forward a few more feet. Before Daniel even had time to react again, Leo, the man, stood there naked as a jaybird.

"So," Lynx asked, to Leo's great amusement, "every time you shift you get nekkkkkid?" She stretched the word out humorously.

"Basically," Leo rejoined as he slipped his jeans back on and over the equipment he'd noticed Lynx was eying greedily.

"Well, the nekkid part will sure keep things interesting," Lynx quipped. Craig let out a whoop of laughter. Colby and Drake grinned ear to ear.

Daniel, looking flustered, got up with his cup, and went to the pot for some more coffee. He gulped it fast, too fast. He nearly choked. He coughed and sputtered. Colby jumped to his feet and quickly started thumping Daniel on the back until finally, Daniel's coughing eased.

It would just take some time for Daniel to come to terms with being Imatu. At least, that's what Leo hoped. Leo put the rest of his clothes back on and sat down at the table again.

Daniel sighed. "That was some demonstration there, Leo, but warn me next time, would you?" he said, looking rueful.

Leo barely contained his grin. He didn't want to embarrass Daniel further. The man had sustained a bit of a shock.

He slapped Daniel on the arm. "I'll try to remember that. But there will come a time when I might not have time to warn you, understand? If we went face to face with Adonis again, it would be wasted time. Adonis wouldn't waste the time, I guarantee it."

Craig didn't ignore that one. "What do you mean Adonis won't waste time, Leo?"

"Well, much as I'd like to say that all shifters are created equally good," Leo explained wryly, "they're not. Just like with humans, shifters can be good or bad people, and Adonis is just one example of that fact."

Craig sucked in air. "You mean to tell me Adonis is one of us, he's a shifter too?"

"No," Leo hastened to explain, "not one of us. He's a rogue. He has Imatu blood, but he uses his gifts for criminal activities and his own selfish gains. Unfortunately, he followed in his father's footsteps. What's worse, somewhere in Adonis's bloodline runs the ancient and formidable line of saber-toothed Imatus."

Leo could see an identical expression on Daniel, Craig, and Lynx's faces. It was a look that plainly said, "What the fuck?" Daniel and Craig both spoke up at the same time, incredulity in both their tones. "Saber-toothed Imatus?" Both men's shock reverberated through the room.

Leo held up a hand. "Yes, saber-tooth tigers do still exist, but they're rare, even for the Imatu. But back to your original questions, Daniel. The shift is a very individual experience. Yours could come at anytime. It depends on you and your reactions to circumstances. Females, however, are more likely to have their first shift precipitated by a true heat cycle. It's not always the case, but very often that's how it happens."

Leo slowed to give Lynx, Daniel, and Craig time to process the information. "For instance, I've heard of some male and female shifters learning of their abilities only after coming into contact with their mates."

“Why is that?” Daniel asked, sounding surprised.

“Best we can figure,” Leo answered, “is that nature intends for the bloodline to endure, for our kind to survive, and with our gifts relatively intact. That’s why pregnancies are so prized with us. There are small groups of shifters scattered far and wide, but it’s not as easy for us to procreate. Pregnancies are rarer than they should be. The number of Imatu has steadily declined in the last decade because of it, too. Full-blown shifters are becoming rarer to find.”

“Oh,” Daniel said. Leo knew Daniel had a lot to digest.

“Well, that’s a lot of information for you three to absorb, I know,” Leo said dryly. “Unfortunately, some of it was definitely necessary at this point. When it comes to Adonis, I don’t want to have to stop and explain anything to anyone during a confrontation. We just can’t afford it.”

Leo looked over to Roberto almost guiltily, but Roberto shook his head knowingly. “Don’t go there, Leo. I can’t afford to, either. We did the best we could. We both thought Felice would be able to signal distress sooner or break away long enough. She’s a powerful female shifter, for goddess’s sake. But what we didn’t count on or realize was how powerful the drug was. We had no way of knowing. But next time,” Roberto sucked in his breath and vowed, “next time, Adonis won’t have the element of surprise. It’s good we’re all on the same page here, now.”

Leo reached over and gave Roberto a fierce, brotherly hug before shoving his chair out. “All right, we’re all good then. We need to get this show on the road and our asses into gear. We’ve got women to protect.”

Lynx chuckled. “Right,” she said, “the nekkid knights ride again.”

Craig hooted with laughter “*Damn, Lynx can sharpen her little tongue on my cock anytime.*”

Leo just rolled his eyes back at Craig. “*Yeah, we’ll show the little minx some ‘nekkid’ nights,*” he thought back.

~ Of Felines ~

Lynx felt a lump come to her throat, seeing Craig and Leo goof around and witnessing the group's agreement and determination. She was glad to see it. She had a *lot* to think about now. She still hadn't wrapped her head around all the Imatu information. But, Lynx knew it was time for her to check in on Felice. She needed to make a certain phone call first, though.

Chapter 25

The formerly deserted warehouse in Auburndale was currently a beehive of activity, getting busier and fuller by the minute. Parked inside was the Honda Pilot Adonis and Chamber had stowed there, and alongside it sat a sleek black Jaguar that Pasqual and Ahmed had arrived in shortly after dawn. But the bulk of space was occupied by the helicopter Samuels had arrived in.

After breakfast, which Pasqual had stopped for on their way in, Samuels got down to business. He was methodically devising a course of action for their intended ambush at the Lascaux Ranch. In Samuel's mind, Adonis had gotten sloppy when he'd let Minx's sister go. Now Adonis was convinced he'd bred the other bitch. Who knew? There might already be a new Cervantes on the way.

"Family," Samuel muttered to himself. If the other bitch was going to possibly have a litter, perhaps even of Cervantes blood, well, hell, what choice was there? He would just have to make sure Adonis didn't screw this one up. They had to have a plan that would ensure they managed to get both the females. This factor naturally would make it a slightly more difficult operation for them. Coordination would be a key element to their success.

Samuels could only hope it would do Minx good to have her sister around. It might perhaps make it easier to gain Minx's cooperation in the long run. He, personally, didn't want to have to use CatNip on Minx. He wasn't exactly sure of how it might affect a future pregnancy. Too bad, he thought, his nephew hadn't thought of that when he'd taken the other bitch.

Ah, well, Adonis was still young, Samuels reasoned. He understood the temptation to use CatNip. Goddess knows he had been tempted. His patience was wearing awfully thin with Minx.

Samuels bent over to see what Adonis had mapped out of the Lascaux Ranch. It was a rough sketch of the farm and the surrounding buildings and land. Still, it was fairly comprehensive for a sketch. Adonis had done a decent job of it. Samuels knew this was important to his nephew. Adonis's time spent camping in the nearby preserved forest land had evidently paid off.

By late afternoon, Samuels, Adonis, and the others had gone over their plan. They had analyzed it backwards and forwards. They wanted to be sure there was nothing they had missed. They hoped to avoid any surprise elements that could come back to bite them. The extra preparation, Samuels knew, would be worth it.

Ahmed finally offered to go pick up some lunch for everyone when Chambers started rumbling on about his appetite. Samuels would've preferred a good hunt, hell, they probably all would.

Game was plentiful if you knew where to look, but it just wouldn't be wise, not now. To do so could ruin their ambitious plans. Hunting was out until after their extraction of the two females was complete. No need to preemptively go announcing their presence. The rare steaks Ahmed promised to return with would have to do for now.

Samuel's eyed the winding, long and narrow, but empty road that led to the warehouse. He was so hungry for blood, he could almost taste it.

Chapter 26

Roberto stepped into the small bungalow. Demar had called to say Felice was awake again, and he would stay with her until Roberto could return. Roberto found Demar and Felice at the table in the bungalow's small kitchen. Since he'd left, Demar had started a pot of coffee and had even made a very late brunch for them.

They both looked up as he came in, and Demar swiftly stood up. "I made some of my breakfast burritos. Want a plate, Roberto? I realize it's closer to suppertime, but, well, I knew you both liked these."

Roberto nodded and Demar stepped over to the cabinets and got another plate down. He began dishing up some for Roberto, too.

The phone rang. Demar looked at Roberto, who nodded. "See who it is, Demar."

Demar listened for a moment, then said, "Sure thing, I'll get her for you."

"Here you go, Felice. It's Lynx. She asked for you." Demar handed the phone over.

Felice hesitantly took the phone, not sure she was ready to talk.

"Hey, Felice," Lynx began, "I just wanted call and see how you were doing?"

"I've been better, but I'm doing okay, if that makes sense," Felice offered wearily.

Concern laced Lynx's voice. "I'm here to talk to, Felice, anytime you need to. I hope you know that."

"Thanks, Lynx, but I am really holding up okay right now," Felice replied quietly. "How are things with you?"

"I'm good. I don't want you to be worrying about me any," Lynx insisted. "I did want to let you know, I talked with COBRA's staff psychologist, Dr. Sara-Beth Allen, a little while ago. She said she would be more than happy to offer her services when you feel up to it, if you would be interested."

"Oh, thank you, Lynx. I'll think about it," Felice murmured.

"Felice, just so you know, Dr. Allen does all the evaluations and counseling for COBRA and for the other teams, too. I can tell you from personal experience that she's very empathetic and a great listener. From what I understand, she had some traumatic experiences growing up that prompted her decision to be a psychologist. I really think you'll like her if you decide to see her. Here's the number, just in case you want to set up a time."

Felice listened as Lynx gave her the number. "I'll contact her, Lynx," she replied slowly, "but it may be a little bit before I do. I just don't know if I'm ready to discuss what happened with a stranger yet."

"That's okay," Lynx answered. "She said to tell you whenever you felt up to it, just call and she'll work with you."

"That's very considerate of her," Felice sighed.

"One last thing. We should do a lady's night here soon, whatever you like. We could rent some chick-flicks, have some popcorn and munchies, you know, just relax and hang out together. It might do you good."

"Soon," Felice promised, "just not right now, Lynx. I'd be really questionable company right now. But really, I'm fine. You don't have to entertain me, although, I appreciate what you're trying to do."

"Felice, anything you need, call me, all right?" Lynx persisted.

"Will do," Felice said quietly. "Thanks, Lynx." Felice slowly laid the phone down.

"Felice, how are you feeling today, honey?" Roberto asked softly as he gingerly took a bite of the burrito Demar set in front of him.

Felice looked at Roberto. His eyes were so full of concern, it damn near broke her heart.

Felice glanced over at Demar, who'd sat back down and was observing. Demar, she noted, eyed her with some concern, too, but he wasn't looking at her like he thought she was broken or could break apart in the span of a heartbeat. No, he looked at her as if he knew she'd be okay. His expression was still oddly protective, however.

Felice grimaced. She didn't want Roberto thinking she was fragile like glass, nor did she want him eaten up with guilt over what had happened to her. She understood what guilt could do. Although he had assured her that she shouldn't feel guilty, she still did, and she knew him. Roberto tended to feel the weight of the world rested on his shoulders alone.

She leaned towards Roberto, reaching out to smooth away a worry line on his forehead. "I feel much better today, baby. Demar made sure I ate, and I'm already feeling stronger. Don't worry so much. You know I'm made of some pretty tough stuff. I will survive this. We will all survive this."

Demar reached for her hand, too, took it momentarily, and then gruffly said, "Felice, doll, you know how we are. Men just can't help being protective, especially after what happened. You should know, we'd lay down our lives before we'd let anything like that happen to you again." Demar stroked her hand briefly, reverently, before he laid it softly back on the table.

Tears started to well in Felice's eyes. She might still be a total emotional mess at the moment, but she didn't doubt for a second that she could count on the people she loved. That was enough to keep her going, for now.

CatTears

Damn, if seeing Felice's tears didn't unnerve him more than Roberto's possible reaction. It had been instinctive, his need to

comfort Felice. Demar glanced over at Roberto. Roberto's eyes reflected only appreciation and tender affection for Felice.

Good, he hadn't overstepped. Demar pushed out his chair. "Since you're here now, Roberto, I should probably go make another perimeter check. I'm keeping a close eye on things. I even had Colby help me install a few extra security cameras."

Roberto nodded. "That means a lot to us, Demar. I really appreciate you being here with Felice the times I have to take care of other business. Thank you. Oh, and it doesn't get any better than your burritos, man. Somehow, they taste better each time I have them." Roberto took an appreciative bite.

Demar tipped his hat and quickly headed outside. It had been a struggle of will just suppressing his urge to wipe away the lone tear he'd seen about to trickle down Felice's cheek.

Demar made his rounds, his high-powered rifle swung at his side. He slowly walked along the fence-line encompassing the better part of the property at back of the ranch, deeply immersed in thought.

Chapter 27

When the security guard appeared, Ahmad hastily stepped back behind the cover of trees and retrieved the camera from Chambers with a low warning grumble and scowl. As the ranch's security guy got farther away, Chambers flinched at Pasqual's hard stare.

Pasqual gritted out quietly, "Don't be doing that again, Chambers. All we need is to tip these bastards off that we're here. We'd have every damn one of them coming after us before we're even ready."

On the defensive, Chambers muttered, "Well, you did say to take a picture."

Ahmad turned on him with a glare. "Yeah, but I thought you'd have enough sense to wait until their guard was far enough away."

"Yeah, well," Chambers countered, still feeling defensive, "the guy's back was to us, and he didn't see anything, so no big deal."

"Lucky for you, that," Ahmed replied with a wilting look. "Next time, think before you go shooting off. Now, let's make our way back to the other side. We need to get back to the warehouse. There are lots of last minute details to work out with Samuels and Adonis. Hopefully, they should have the supplies we need by now."

The trip back was quiet. Chambers could tell he'd aggravated the two brothers. The two of them made him nervous, anyways. They were usually serious, and they didn't joke around a whole lot. Lord knows Adonis could be intimidating, and Samuels, too, but at least they knew how to laugh.

Before Chambers even realized it, they were pulling into the warehouse.

Outside, the air barely stirred, twilight had settled over the quiet scene, and the only sounds were made by crickets and some distant traffic. The warehouse was set back off the main road, and not a whole lot of traffic went directly past it.

Chambers was relieved to exit the Jaguar's back seat.

Sometimes luxurious just didn't cover tense by Chambers's reckoning. Hell, he'd have settled for a good cheap burger, but Ahmed and Pasquel had promised Samuel's steaks. So, steaks it was. Chambers didn't mind. He was starving, so just about any meat would do at this point.

Inside, Chambers was glad to finally hunker down to eat. Despite the earlier tense atmosphere, he gleefully dug in. A short while later, he wiped his mouth and watched as the others finished up, his mouth watering. That had been good, but more would've been even better. Pasqual shot him a hard look. Evidently, eating hadn't improved his mood much.

Chambers excused himself to go have a smoke. He got the distinct feeling if he even looked wrong at the other man's meat he'd wind up regretting it. *Nope, not going there* He wasn't that hungry.

~ TattleTail ~

After the last of the meal was consumed, Ahmed and Pasqual showed Samuels the photos they had developed. "So, this is the barn, eh?" Samuels asked, not waiting for any real answer. "Adonis, you mentioned there was some pretty stunning horse-flesh housed there, right? Any of you three notice if their prize stud was still boarded in the barn when you were out there today?" Samuels looked expectantly between Ahmed, Pasqual, and Chambers.

Samuels saw the reproofing look Ahmed aimed at Chambers before answering. "Yes, from the looks of it the stud's still housed in the barn, as are some prime mares. I saw one of the men leading another black stud in from the back pasture while we were there."

Then Ahmed casually added, “If Chambers here hadn’t nearly waved his camera in the security guard’s face, we might have actually been able to find out more. As it was, I didn’t want to take chances on being spotted.”

Chambers blanched.

Samuels was too psyched to waste time berating Chambers. He reckoned Ahmed and Pasqual, from the looks of it, had already ripped the defenseless Chambers a good one already. Samuels silently chuckled. Excitement curled in his stomach again. Samuels swiftly outlined his brilliant plan for tomorrow’s ambush at the ranch in detail. Soon, Chambers’s mistake of earlier was forgotten in the fever of their mounting excitement.

Chapter 28

Mort Greene was on his way across the field, returning from checking to see if the big storm from the previous night had wreaked any lasting devastation on his land. Mort was relieved to find little consequential damage, other than to the big oak closest to those cypress trees at lake's edge. The oak was a gorgeous old tree, and Mort thought it a crying shame.

Hell, but Mother Nature often left scars like that. Lightning had damn near split the majestic oak in half. The upside was it had rained so much with the storm that no fires had started. It had been a very dry year. Mort knew all too well a single lightning strike could damage far more.

The old oak wasn't too close to Leo's farm, set back like it was by the lake. Back from his trip, Mort didn't need an excuse to be neighborly. Besides, he hadn't talked to Leo or his men in a while. He was headed that way when Mort noticed the flash of light.

Mort also caught a sudden flash of movement nearby. It was difficult to say for sure, though. Nothing had been there when he'd looked back seconds later. His eyes sure were not what they used to be. Mort decided he'd go back and check it out later. It probably meant nothing.

Mort was whistling when he walked up by the eastern fence. "Hey there, Demar," he began.

"Hey, Mort, is that a new Gator cap?" Demar asked with a big smile.

“Sure is,” Mort responded with a wide grin. In no time, he had filled Demar in on the latest, greatest Gator’s victory and FSU’s sad loss. He noted Demar looked a little lost when he talked football.

“Hey,” Demar interrupted, “Mort, did you want to talk to Leo or something?”

“Sure, I’d like that,” Mort answered.

He was eager to do more visiting. Mort knew Leo was a bigger football fan. He didn’t mind at all recounting the game. It was like an instant replay, and football was full of those.

Demar went and opened the gate, waved him in.

~ *Cat’s Out of the Bag* ~

A half-hour later, Mort was about to leave when he suddenly turned to Leo.

“Leo, I forgot to tell you about earlier.”

“What happened earlier?” Leo asked. He hoped asking wouldn’t lead to another of Mort’s long stories.

“Well, I saw a flash out near the woods. Then, I caught some sort of movement out of the corner of my eye. It was probably nothing, but I figured I’d mention it just in case.” Mort scratched his head, clearly puzzled. “I’ll be checking around back there tomorrow.”

Leo’s ears perked up. As soon as he’d heard what Mort had to say, his instincts had started kicking in, big time.

“Hey, I’ll give you a drive to your truck, Mort,” he offered.

Mort insisted he was fine, but Leo was the more insistent of the two and soon had talked Mort into it.

As he dropped Mort off by his truck, he had to add, “Be careful, Mort. I know you can handle yourself, but you and I both know that there are some really dangerous people out there anymore.”

Mort nodded. “You’re not lying, Leo. Things just aren’t like they used to be when I was growing up. Hell, you can’t even lend a helping hand like you used to. Why, just the other day, I saw a

hitchhiker. I thought about helping out, but it's just not the same world we used to live in."

"So, what did you do?" Leo asked, curious.

"Why, I picked him up, but then I had ole Morticia laying right there where he could see it.

Leo knew the Morticia Mort was referring to was a lightweight Heckler and Koch pistol that was eminently practical and yet equally dangerous. He also knew Mort carried the small gun with him as a precaution, not primarily for any human threat he might come across. Mort, he knew, recognized better than most that forest and swampy glades were home to numerous wild animals. Wild animals were often prone to unpredictable behavior.

Leo had known Mort a long time, and he admired the old cracker's dedication to conserving and caring for the land. Mort's conservation of the nearby forests benefited every rancher around, besides protecting the local wildlife.

Leo reiterated his warning.

"Remember what I said about being careful out there, Mort," Leo remarked as he watched Mort climb into his truck.

"Sure, will do that, Leo. Hey, you take care of yourself and that pretty woman I caught a glimpse of back at your house, too," Mort added with a wink.

"It will be my pleasure." Leo winked back, laughing at Mort's attempted inflection of humor.

Leo continued to smile as Mort drove off, but it faded as Mort pulled out of sight. He was doubly eager to get back to the ranch, to Lynx. The threat of Adonis looming closer preoccupied his thoughts. Leo couldn't have been more distracted as he parked just inside the gate and started walking up the wide porch.

Trouble was headed their way. Leo sensed it, and his instincts were rarely wrong.

Chapter 29

Lynx, meanwhile, was growing restless. All her senses were burning, on fire. Her jeans chafed the sensitive flesh between her legs, even the barrette holding back her hair, grown damp in the muggy night, bugged her. She tossed the barrette on the kitchen counter, grabbed an apple, and quietly slipped out the back door. She heard the front door open as she softly closed it.

Lynx delicately made her way over the stepping stones that dotted the landscape. Every sound was excruciatingly magnified to her ears. The cricket's soprano chirp, the frog's bass croak down by the lake, even the occasional accompanying whinny from the barn sounded amplified. Distantly, she heard the chorus of the cows mooing. At least they sounded placid enough tonight.

Her feet had carried her to the barn before she'd realized it. Lynx always loved seeing the horses, but Lady Jane was her personal favorite. The mare had such soft brown eyes. They were beautiful set against the sable-red coat of her muzzle. In the barn, Lynx found Lady Jane's stall. Lady Jane normally greeted her with a neigh. Tonight, she snorted, stamping her hooves, refusing even the apple Lynx tried to hand her.

"Whatsa matter, girl?" By this time, Lady Jane had backed up in her large stall, refusing contact. "That's all right, Lady Jane, I'm feeling kind of prickly myself tonight." She carefully set the apple where Lady Jane could easily reach it.

She padded out of the barn, irritably tugging her borrowed Pink Floyd tee-shirt from her hip-rider jeans. Looking down, Lynx saw with horrified fascination she had ripped the shirt, shredded it really.

Was it her imagination or had a claw emerged and retracted? Her skin tingled oddly, but it was the alluring smell on the breeze that had begun to stir that distracted her, her shirt forgotten. Musky and earthen, the wickedly enticing smell clung to her nostrils, arousing feverish impulses. Lynx's head lifted instinctively, her body instantly attuned to the fragrant pull of the wild scent.

Simultaneously, the hair on Lynx's body grew thicker. Lynx stared as a fine pelt began to cover her forearm. Hurriedly, Lynx pulled off her jeans, frantic now. The restraining fabric beyond bearing, she could hear her heartbeat pounding in time to the pulse of the earth. Her clothes felt claustrophobic, and surrounded by nature, she quickly shed them.

The soft swell of a cougar's seductive call sent shivers over Lynx. Spasms and ripples contorted across her skin in response. With a shock, Lynx realized she had dropped to the ground and was answering the distinctly animalistic cry. On all fours now, the change roiled over Lynx fluidly, so rapidly a mouse forty meters away startled, squeaked, and then disappeared around the back of the barn. Her eyes caught the movement, but that was not what she sought.

Another snuff of the air and she was racing past the barn on silent paws, tracking the elusive, beckoning scent. The woods swallowed her form instantly, the trees closing in like curtains behind her. A heartbeat later, she saw the shape before her. It was coming closer with every second. She knew it, recognized it.

The larger male cougar circled her, crowding close, nose against fur. Lynx rubbed up against him, enticingly, then, just as quickly, took off at a run. The cougar was at her flanks in a flash, cutting her off in another, stalking her movements with untamed snarls, savage nips at her neck and heels that only fired her Imatu blood. She turned, swiping at the cougar with sharp claws. He came back for more.

A growl of approval emanating from close by captured Lynx's attention, distracted momentarily from the cougar at her flank. A massive, dark amber- and gold-maned lion materialized beside them.

The forest hummed in Lynx's ears, but the low rumble of roars later turned into indistinguishable purrs.

CatCradled

A few hours later, Leo, Craig, and Lynx returned to the big barn. They quickly redressed. Leo found Lynx a spare shirt, and both men helped her into it. "Let's get Lynx to bed," Craig said, cradling her head to his shoulder.

"Take her on up to the house," Leo suggested. "I need to see Demar and take care of a few things, and then I'll be right up."

"See you in a few, kitten," Leo said, bending to kiss her. She threaded her hands in his hair, pulling him to her. He still tasted wild. Heat flooded her veins again, surprising her with its renewed intensity. "Go," Leo said hoarsely, "the sooner I get done with that, the sooner I'll be there."

Craig pulled Lynx back, close to his side as Leo walked away. "Come here, kitten, I've got to stroke you first," Craig ordered huskily.

Lynx felt her juices, slick and warm, coating her swollen clitoris, pooling in response to Craig's sultry invitation.

Craig's hand slipped under the hem of the long shirt and over her mound. She moaned, low and guttural. Her need igniting again and fire splintering through her blood.

He tweaked the swollen ridge of her clit between his fingers as he backed her up against the wall. Her groan was strangled as Craig's lips came down hot and hard over hers. His tongue invaded her mouth, insistent as he rode her legs with the bulge in his jeans. The man had magic fingers in her. He swallowed each gasp she gave. Craig's mouth worked magic of its own. Lynx couldn't deny it. She gave in to the allure of his lips and tongue.

Her shirt was no match for Craig's fingers, either. He smoothly worked the shirt up, off, and over her head in a smooth motion. Still

manipulating raw moans from her throat with the tactile stimulation of his other hand over the mound of her pussy, Craig pressed the slippery folds apart. When he slid a soaked digit past the knuckle on a groan of his own, a hot gush of fluid eased his way.

Lynx felt her pussy throb. The spasm elicited another groan from Craig. She reached for his cock. It was beyond hard, it pulsed in her hand. She had to touch it. She wrapped her fingers around the velvety steel of his shaft.

Craig withdrew his hand from her mound and shucked his jeans. Lynx mewled in frustration at the absence of his touch.

Craig moved back to her. Lynx felt the thick crown of his cock as Craig rubbed against her, parting the slickness of her pussy. She screamed as the heavy stalk of his erection slid in on a single thrust. Craig growled satisfaction at her ear.

Then he grabbed her hips and repeated the motion silkily, surging fast and hard. She felt the wall at her back shiver on contact at his thrusts.

“I don’t want to hurt you, kitten.” Craig slowed, muttered against her face as he thrust once more. Lynx could feel his body strain with the urgency. “There’s a blanket in the tack room, come on. Now.” He nipped her ear lightly and gave a last hard teasing thrust before withdrawing.

She hurriedly led the way. Craig just as quickly spread the blanket and her. Lynx pulled him down to her, and cried out at the pleasure that began to spike as Craig sank in slowly.

His eyes connected with hers. She could feel his cock pulsing, her pussy’s slick, throbbing flesh already contracting around him. The intense pleasure only built as he stroked in and out. Lynx lost herself in the slate-blue depths of his eyes. She could see Craig’s need, his pleasure when his eyes darkened. He groaned long and low. The sound was primal, and it only made her grow wetter, wilder.

His mouth descended to hers in possessive ownership as he began tunneling into her. Her breathing quickened as Craig’s tongue and

cock established a rhythm that made her body ache with the intensity. It was perfect. Craig's thick cock rocked her clit on every deep drive while his tongue reinforced its ownership.

"So pretty," Craig growled, breaking from the bruising kiss he gave her. He took her hands in his and drew them above her head as he bent to her breast, arching over her. The fat crest of his cock was barely inside her now.

Lynx shuddered as Craig's lips closed over her nipple. It swelled tauter in his mouth. He suckled strongly, sending small spasms through her, racing to her sex. He groaned against her. His tongue laved the hard tip, and more shivers played up and down her skin.

He growled again, and Lynx felt the sharp scrape of his teeth. She gasped as Craig plunged suddenly. He sank balls-deep as his teeth pierced. He continued to suckle, sending shockwaves of pleasure with just a bite of pain coursing over her. His body tensed as her body bowed and arched off the blanketed floor to meet his. She felt the first hard spurt of his release as powered into her.

Her startled cry as she came was joined by Craig's ragged groans and then Leo's.

Still gasping from the intensity of her own orgasm, Lynx looked over, trying to focus again. Leo stood there, cock in hand, fingers glistening with the creamy fluid of his release.

"I got done sooner than I thought I would, and, kitten, that was just too sweet to watch," Leo stated, his dick still pulsing.

She motioned Leo to her as Craig rolled to her side with a groan. "Sweet doesn't cover it. She may have done me in with that one. I think I'll just watch, now," he said giving her a slow grin.

Lynx sat up as Leo came to stand beside her. Leo's cock gave a small jerk. She guided him to her and began to lick. "Oh, goddess, Lynx. Kitten, that feels incredible," he said hoarsely.

She only felt the pulses under her tongue a second before the slick knob of his cock extended and more juice shot onto her tongue.

Lynx swallowed, lapping the sweet cream, her throat working in time to Leo's rocking motion.

"I think that was it for me too," Leo groaned again as he shuddered one final convulsive time.

"But you'll both be ready for another round when we get back to our room, right?" Lynx asked, keeping a straight face as Leo gave her a hand up.

Leo and Craig groaned comically, in unison.

The barn rang with her teasing laughter as the trio redressed.

Hand in hand in hand, they found their way back to their big, comfortable bed. A few hours later, too exhausted to ask for more, Lynx fell sound asleep, spooned between them. Craig's arm was slung over her shoulder, Leo's leg over hers. She felt secure, well-fucked, but even more loved.

~ *Cat in Heat* ~

The next day passed excruciatingly slowly for Lynx as the heat coursed through her body, unbidden. A wave of pure fire whipped over her. Her nipples peaked, taut against her plain tee-shirt. Wetness trickled from between her legs. She looked at the clock on the wall, near panting. It was only seven-thirty. It had only been nine long hours since Craig and Leo had left her satiated in their big bed, sleeping, to go tend to ranch chores. Nine hours, and she was feverish, she had to be. Every movement of fabric against her skin sent electric shivers racing over her.

She shimmied out of her jeans, in a hurry to shed the hot material. Her tee-shirt came next. She had to find Craig and Leo now. Her body demanded it. Lynx padded to the dresser drawer and pulled out the blue-lace camisole negligee and matching lacy thong naughty enough for her purposes. Leo and Craig had seen her off and on throughout the day in her casual clothes. Casual was not what she had in mind.

Nine hours of remembering the feel of them taking her over and over had turned her blood to fire.

The big house seemed quiet. She knew Roberto and Felice had already retired to their bungalow. Demar had left to prowling the grounds. She figured her brother must have gone with Colby and Drake to toss back a few beers at their bungalow. Then she heard the low murmur of voices from the recreation room. Her ears perked up. Her heart was thudding as she listened.

She breathed a sigh of relief. Craig and Leo were playing pool, apparently. She recognized the sound of someone racking balls and their easy banter. Lynx opened the door and slipped past it into the room and light.

~ Cum Here *Kitty, Kitty* ~

Her eyes sparkled like diamonds. The lacy blue of the negligee embraced her curves, accentuating them. If negligees could talk, Leo thought, this one screamed, "Fuck me, please!"

Lynx looked irresistible, arousing. And he could tell Lynx was already aroused, overheated even. Leo could scent the essence of it dripping from her. He could see the sheen of perspiration that beaded her brow, the sweet, rising flush on her skin. Assailed by her alluring scent, his cock flared in recognition.

Leo licked his lips, and his tongue felt as thick as the blood-infused cock that jutted, heavy and aching against his thigh. Desire slammed through him.

Craig looked up, the pool stick falling slackly from his hand. It rolled onto the shag carpeting, but Craig didn't seem to notice. Craig had gone hard, too, instantly. The bulge in his blue jeans was obvious. He had surely recognized Lynx's scent of hunger, too.

Lynx parted her lips, and then swiped them nervously.

Leo bit down on his.

Oh, goddess! Craig and Drake's eyes had also zeroed in on Lynx. The realization did nothing to stem the excitement that coursed through Leo's system. The knowledge couldn't seem to quell the fire between his legs.

Lynx's nipples had tightened into personal standing invitations. Erect and pointing, the sweet tips all but shouted, "Suck me, bite me, eat me, swallow me whole, pluck and play with me." They jutted through the sheer lace, prisoners begging for the mercy of his tongue, the release his mouth.

Drake couldn't help but notice those. No way in hell. Leo had seen Drake fiddling with the stereo, about to put in a CD, when Lynx had made her entrance.

At the moment, all Leo could think about was her pouty lips wrapped around him and his shaft pounding deep into the warm, wet recesses of her mouth. His mouth went dry.

What must Drake be thinking?

Drake looked paralyzed. He had frozen in place, literally. Leo could only guess that if Drake moved from behind the safety of the bar, his dick would give him away.

Lynx looked from Leo to Craig to Drake and back again. She opened her mouth to speak, but what came out was between a whimper and squeak. She was definitely at a loss for words.

Leo could see Lynx had been as surprised as they were when she walked in to find the three of them. But he'd also seen the flash of desire that darkened Lynx's eyes for a fraction of an instant when she'd met Drake's hungry ones. Lynx was turned on by the thought, judging from the look and aroused scent of her. In full heat, her cat didn't cringe from the idea.

Leo had never questioned Drake about his preferences. He had met one of Drake's former lovers years before, a blond and very male lover. He would bet the farm, though, that Drake was hard as nails behind that bar. Otherwise, Leo realized, awareness dawning, Drake would have found a way to gracefully exit by now.

Well, he'd be damned.

Leo turned to Drake. "Drake, why don't you put on some music?" He paused for emphasis. "You've never had the pleasure of seeing Lynx dance in private before."

Leo's words must have penetrated Drake's lust-fogged brain at last, Leo figured, because Drake gulped back a groan, and then swiftly turned to the CDs.

At his quick but revealing movement, Leo saw the bulge in Drake's jeans. It didn't really surprise him. Leo looked over at Lynx, gauging her reaction. She still had the look of a deer caught in the headlights. She looked wide-eyed, mesmerized, and a little afraid to move. But Leo also heard the tiny hiss that escaped her lips. She was primed to blow, but unsure.

Leo pulled Lynx into the shelter of his arms. "Lynx, would Drake watching us dance turn you on, kitten?" Leo's voice stroked her even as his fingers trailed over her lower back and hips. He slid his tongue over her parted lips before she could answer.

"Yes," she breathed into his mouth. His tongue slid deeper, slipping and tasting, delving in deliciously widening forays as he subtly, but demandingly, inserted his leg between her legs and pushed them apart. The sounds of Eric Clapton and B.B. King drifted from the speakers.

Behind them, Craig shifted his stance, too, drawing a whimper from Lynx as his hands came up under her arms and slid to her breast. The same breasts and hard little nipples poked against his chest.

Fluidly, they began to dance. Hands, feet, and tongues slid and parried. Lynx moved between them, undulating to their touch.

Lynx gasped as Leo said, "You like that, don't you, kitten? You love Craig's hands on your breasts and my fingers in your pussy."

Lynx whimpered. Her eyes fluttered open at the contact, and Leo rolled with firm and knowing pressure against the swollen knot of her clitoris. It was a bundle of slick nerves. His fingers slid under the lace and sank into her cream drenched pussy.

Her pussy spasmed around his fingers. Leo saw her eyes open wide and lock on Drake's. Drake had positioned himself by the pool table. He leaned back like a big cat tensing to spring. His eyes had gone dark with lust. His cock strained his low-rider jeans.

Leo watched Lynx's face. His fingers worked rhythmically, soaked in her juices. Lynx licked her lips and moaned. Her eyes had drifted downwards as if magnetized to the juncture between Drake's thighs.

Leo's swirled another thumb at Lynx's nipple in lazy patterns to the seductive rhythm and beat of the song. Clapton and King were belting, "Come On" Another spasm rippled through her pussy.

Craig hooked his fingers around the thin band of Lynx's panties. He dragged them down her legs in an erotic, drawn out stretch. Lynx stepped out of them. Craig was already moving back up against her body, tugging her negligee up with his teeth and fingers as he went.

Leo steadied her as Craig straightened to pull the slip of fabric off. He stepped back and slid his belt out, un-looping it. Leo dropped it to the floor. He unzipped his jeans. His hands slowly, deliberately grazed his cock as it sprang free. He quickly shucked his jeans. As he watched, Craig broke off kissing Lynx so he could dispose of his clothes, too.

Craig pumped his hand over the shaft of his penis before moving back behind Lynx. Leo stood back and watched as Craig nipped Lynx's nape. Craig parted her cheeks, spread them. His cock was jutting thickly against Lynx's tender ass. Her eyes were dilated in anticipation.

Leo saw Drake push his jeans down and off. Drake stood there, his face flushed, arousal darkening his eyes, legs spread. He was as hard as a brick.

Leo understood Drake's tension.

Drake moistened his lips. His eyes fluttered closed, very briefly as his hand closed over his cock. His low groan said it all.

Leo moved back to Lynx's front. Craig had danced her against the couch. She mewled as Leo nudged the large head of his cock against her mound. He fed his cock into the hot, slick slit. It stretched over him tight. He pushed inside slowly, groaning.

Lynx whimpered again as Craig moved back into position behind her. Craig had lubed up. Craig widened his stance behind Lynx and pushed, Leo felt more spasms rippling through Lynx's pussy and gritted his teeth. He wasn't ready to blow, yet.

"So fucking tight," Craig groaned as he thrust forward.

Leo groaned in unison as he felt Lynx's pussy spasm again, and then the added friction and pressure of Craig.

"Watch Drake, kitten," Leo drawled, dragging his lips across Lynx's. He cupped her face and turned it gently towards Drake.

Drake's look could only be described as hungry. Drake's hand worked up and down as he stroked. Judging from the pearly syrup coating Drake's fingers and his heavy breathing, Drake was already close to coming.

Lynx's breathing grew harsher.

Craig widened his stance, withdrew part-way and pushed in again, sending more spasms through Lynx. Shudders shook her as Craig's cock slid back inside the tight ring of muscles. Leo knew from experience how that felt.

A look of pain mingled with pleasure twisted Lynx's face as the sudden orgasm tore through her, sudden and sharp. Lynx let out a half-scream, clawing at his shoulders. Craig seated himself fully. He began to ride in rhythm with Leo's thrusts.

Leo and Craig rode easy at first. The friction was unbelievable, tight. His cock was gripped by white-hot, electric pulses that fired his blood, swelling his cock more.

Leo was caught mid-thrust, Lynx exploding around him on a blast of heat and cream as her pussy squeezed him mercilessly. He

swallowed her mewl of ecstasy, parting her lips, drinking it in as he drove into her.

Behind her, Craig detonated, pumping his release fast and hard. Lynx's pussy clamped down on Leo forcefully. Craig came in long curses of gratitude. "Fucking beautiful," Craig whispered. "Your ass is fucking beautiful, Lynx." Craig's groan at Lynx's ear gained tempo with Leo's next thrust.

Lynx was still writhing as Leo slid his lips past Lynx's other earlobe to the side of her neck. His teeth found the familiar mark and sank in as jets of seed pumped from him in seemingly endless spurts of pleasure.

Lynx moaned, bucking and screaming, pinned between them.

By the pool table, Drake groaned and tensed, exploded. Drake roared, and his body jerked, semen spurting and spilling over his fingers as the orgasm shook him. More strands of the silky, sticky fluid slicked his palm.

Craig slowly withdrew as Lynx groaned. Leo eased out then, holding Lynx carefully.

Her knees looked about to buckle. Leo picked her up, cradling her to his chest. "Let's get her to the shower and to bed," he said to Craig. Craig nodded assent. "Goodnight, Drake," Leo added as he strode toward the door with Lynx in his arms.

"Goodnight," Craig added, as he followed Leo out.

~ One Relaxed *Cat* ~

Drake watched until the door closed. *I wasn't expecting that. Damn, that was hot.* He went his way to the bar's sink and cleaned up. He swiftly redressed, then switched off the stereo and left the room.

He made his way quietly back to his room at the bungalow. He avoided the sitting room where he could hear Daniel and Colby still up, talking and laughing. Exhausted, Drake shrugged off his clothes, and for the first time in years, he slept a deep and dreamless sleep.

Chapter 30

It was the quiet hour before dawn when the first explosion rocked the silence. It startled Lynx out of sleep. Leo and Craig both heard it, too. They leapt out of bed simultaneously.

“What the hell?” Leo snarled, grabbing his clothes.

Craig cursed, too, as he stumbled about trying to get into his jeans and grab his weapon at the same time.

Leo strode to the window, looking out over the back of the ranch property, and then started cursing again. “Damn it, the barn’s on fire. Craig, you stay here with Lynx. I’ve got to go see about getting Captain Jack and the other horses out.

“Don’t let Lynx out of your sight. Don’t you dare leave her, not for any reason, not even for a second!”

Craig nodded. Leo raced down the stairs and for the door.

By now, Lynx was out of bed and doing the same dance Craig had done earlier, trying to dress. After finally managing to pull on shorts and a shirt, she grabbed her Baby Beretta. She fully intended to head downstairs to assess the danger and leap into it if necessary.

Craig, though, wasn’t having it. As she headed for the door, Craig stepped in front of her, resolute. “You heard Leo, and I’m telling you, too, Lynx, you’re not going out.”

“Bossy men,” she grumbled, pushing against his chest, getting absolutely nowhere.

“Little spitfire,” Craig whispered, pulling her into his arms gently. He just ignored the irritated look she gave him and wrapped his body around hers more protectively. “You do realize, don’t you, Lynx,” Craig said, nuzzling at her ear and sending shivers of awareness

coursing through her even now, “that we just can’t let anything ever happen to you. You are our life, mine and Leo’s. Just stay here with me. Just let us protect you.”

Lynx pondered her options. On the one hand, she might not be able to get past Craig, guard-dogging her like he was. As much as she despised waiting around for action to commence, by the same token, last time around she and Felice had ended up kidnapped and drugged. It had happened despite her and Felice’s capabilities or their guns.

With a sigh, Lynx settled against Craig’s chest. “Okay, but if I can help or I’m needed, let me do it, Craig. I am still a trained agent.”

“Okay, Lynx. Just stay here with me.” Craig’s kiss grazed the top of her head as he held her safely to the side and quickly peered through the barely opened curtains. Peering around his shoulder, she could see the burning barn and the land beyond. Still, there was no sign of movement except for Leo and the others rushing towards the barn.

~ *CatAttack* ~

Leo reached the barn just as Colby, Drake, Daniel, and Demar came rushing up. “Let’s get the horses out,” he shouted.

The explosion had been small, and the barn was huge, fortunately. However, it was a natural tinderbox. As Leo watched, the fire began to spread, flames licking and burning their way towards the side of the barn where the horses were stalled. He and the others had a struggle on their hands, though. Captain Black, Lady Jane, and the three other mares were spooked already.

Under normal circumstances, he often had to coax Captain Black. As the fire raged towards them, it became a battle of nerves and straining muscles to guide the horses out of the smoky barn.

Leo and the men herded the terrified mares towards the back pavilion and closed the gate. Leo turned Captain Jack loose in the paddock back to his separate field and let him go.

Just as Leo turned to go back to the others, Colby came stumbling out of the smoky barn. Scant seconds later, a blazing rafter crashed down in the spot Colby had just been. Drake leapt forward, pushing his twin away from the raining debris. They both stumbled to the relative safety of pavilion's fence-line, behind where Leo, Daniel, and Demar stood.

Colby doubled over. He coughed and gasped for breath, unable to talk at first. Finally, he straightened. A split-second later, he doubled over again, this time gagging and vomiting into the grass. Eventually, Colby straightened again and managed to croak out, "I found Mort in there in an empty stall. He's dead, Leo. Some bastard ripped the poor son of a bitch's throat out."

Leo growled, enraged. "The bastards," he spat out. "Mort didn't deserve to die like that."

Shock, sorrow, and horror lined the other men's faces.

But before the bad news could even sink in, another explosion ripped through the bungalow behind them. In unison, Leo and the men turned and raced towards the burning building where they knew Roberto kept watch over Felice.

Demar let out a piercing yell. It scorched the air as surely as the flames fanning it. Grief rent the air in the explosive cry. "Felice!" Leo heard him scream. No reply came.

The heat emanating from the burning bungalow was intense. Leo couldn't imagine anyone coming out of it alive.

"We've got to get back to Lynx and Craig, now!" he bit out tersely.

Suddenly, the neighing of the horses could be heard over the sizzling shudders, cracks, and eerie noise of the burning bungalow and barn.

What the hell?

Leo and the others turned to see the blurred outline of a huge cat bursting from the woods. It exploded out from behind the smoking remnants of the barn and Captain Jack's pavilion.

Leo and the others surged forward on a run, shifting mid-stride. Daniel raced behind, trying to keep up, his weapon drawn.

Leo's large lion, Colby and Drake's cheetahs, and Demar's black panther raced to block the snarling saber-tooth beast. The tiger, close to the pavilion where Captain Black snorted and reared, leapt over the fence.

Suddenly, another large, fierce saber-tooth streaked between them. Both saber-tooths circled, growling. Leo's lion roared and then attacked the larger of the two.

Colby and Drake's cheetahs and Demar's panther leapt for the smaller saber-tooth tiger in unison.

Demar's panther ripped at the haunches of the beast as it charged, swinging its formidable tusks at Drake's cheetah. The panther's weight on the saber-tooth's back had it arching back with a snarl, angrily distracted by the needle-sharp claws imbedded in its skin and the blood streaking down in its back.

Leo's lion and Adonis's saber-tooth continued circling, roaring and growling fiercely. With a mighty leap, they clashed in mid-air. Leo's lion twisted sharply to avoid the deadly fangs before they smashed down. The two large cats rolled to the ground, battling for supremacy.

~ Eye of the *Tiger* ~

Inside the ranch house, Lynx and Craig heard the creak and rustle on the stairs below. Craig pushed Lynx into the bathroom. "You stay here and lock the door. If anything tries to get in, shoot if you need to." Craig padded to the other door. He peered around the corner cautiously, scanning the long hall and stairs below.

To Craig's relief, it was Roberto and Felice. They hurried into the room and Craig shut the door behind them.

"Lynx, you can come out. It's only Roberto and Felice," Craig called through the bathroom door.

Lynx unlocked the door and rushed out, throwing her arms around Felice. Tears streamed down her face as she embraced their friends. He and Lynx had watched in stunned horror after the bungalow exploded in flames. They'd had to assume the worst.

Lynx had been frantic to get to the burning bungalow, but he'd finally persuaded Lynx to stay put. He'd pointed to Leo and the others running towards it. Thank the goddess. His reasoning had finally sunk in. Leo and the other men were closer. If Leo and the men couldn't rescue the couple, Craig knew Lynx couldn't.

Roberto started to explain how they had escaped, when the sound of ominous growls reached their ears. Roberto pushed Felice behind him.

"You and Felice, get in the bathroom, now!" Craig urged. Fortunately, neither woman needed told twice. They rapidly obeyed. Craig could hear the loud thuds coming from the bedroom door. He calculated the sounds, definitely more than one beast.

Roberto yanked off his clothes and shifted fluidly. Another large, jarring sound reverberated. The beasts were ramming the door now. Roberto's lion tensed in readiness for the spring.

Fury and protectiveness poured through Craig like fine whiskey, burning hot and savage. These beasts were after his woman. Just then, the door came crashing in and with it came the huge saber-tooths behind it. Craig felt his shifter's blood coursing through him like thunder in his veins. The storm burst, ripping over him. Craig's skin, teeth, and nails transformed to fur, fang, and claw.

Roberto's lion soared into the air, barely missing the great curved fang that was swung at him mid-air. Craig's cougar was faster by far than the larger saber-tooth before him. Craig's claws swiped jaggedly as the great saber-tooth beast spun for him. Then, the two cats were rolling, crashing across the room.

Roberto's lion and the other saber-tooth circled one another, intimidating each other with snarls and growls. The saber-tooth leapt

suddenly, raking a claw down Roberto's lion's flanks. Roberto's lion roared in pain.

A fraction of a second later, the sharp tusk of the second saber-tooth hooked under Craig's cougar's shoulder, piercing flesh and sinew. His cougar screamed as pain and rage flared, nearly blinding him.

The bathroom door was flung open. Felice charged out, changing as she burst through the open doorway with a roar. Evidently, she'd heard Roberto's cry.

Lynx followed, her Beretta in hand. Felice's lioness charged straight at the saber-tooth standing between her and Roberto. Despite his wounded flank, Roberto's lion was keeping the larger tiger at bay, but barely.

Lynx tried to line up a clear shot at the beast Craig was fending off. His cougar was bleeding profusely.

Craig's cougar ignored the pain and blood, looking for a way to disable the beast before him. Protecting Lynx was paramount. He couldn't afford to fail.

But his Lynx didn't wait around. She took careful aim and fired.

Chapter 31

The battle behind the barn grew deadly. Daniel grabbed hold of Captain Jack. The big stud was still too close. He led Captain Jack, snorting and prancing skittishly, to the outer paddock where the mares were. Daniel turned him loose. Captain Jack immediately raced for the far edge of the field where the other mares nickered and neighed nervously.

Satisfied the horses were okay for the time being, Daniel raced back. Adrenalin pumped through his veins almost as fast as his heart raced. It took him a minute to realize that the *whomp, whomp, whomp* sound he'd heard wasn't the hammering of his heartbeat against his chest. Daniel looked up and saw the helicopter that circled the field where Captain Jack had been before.

Daniel breathed a sigh of relief. *Thank you, COBRA*. Ethan and Javier had arrived as backup. They were going to need it. But, first things first. Daniel sprinted towards the makeshift landing strip. Within minutes, the two COBRA agents had landed the helicopter and hurried to meet Daniel. Behind him, the fighting was getting brutal.

Both agents turned wide eyes and trained their guns on the impossibly bizarre scene playing out before them. No surprise, Daniel could bet they'd never seen anything like it.

He threw up his arms in the hold-your-fire signal. Ethan and Javier instantly froze. Their eyes riveted to the terrifying sight of the great beasts clashing.

Daniel understood too well the shock, confusion, and, finally, understanding that bloomed on Ethan and Javier's faces as he hurriedly explained the situation. "Shape shifters exist. I know

because I'm one. Lynx, Craig, and Leo are, too. But so are Adonis and company."

"Fuck," Javier groaned, "this is some unbelievable shit. If I didn't see it right now in front of my face, well, fuck!"

Ethan, even in his state of suspended shock, was more stoic. "What do we need to do, Daniel? Just tell us that. Who do we aim for here? Give me that and I'm good." Ethan's eyes tracked the movements of the lion and saber-tooth as they circled each other in the field.

"Fuck! Do bullets even kill those things?" Javier asked incredulously.

Daniel hesitated the merest split second. "I suppose so. If we can be wounded, then we must be able to die. Doesn't matter right now. We can't let Adonis win this. The saber-tooth tigers are all Adonis and his men. Don't hesitate to shoot one of them if you get an opening."

Ethan quickly set his sights on the huge beasts at Daniel's directive. Daniel could see Leo's lion was gaining ground in his attack and had already drawn first and second blood from Adonis. A long scarlet gash marred the striped length behind the huge tiger's ear. Adonis began slowly backing up, on the defensive now, damaged, but more dangerous than ever. A third saber-tooth came charging from the woodsy area beside the barn, barreling straight at Leo's lion head-on.

The air once again filled with the clash of bodies and new roars reverberating as teeth met flesh. Leo's lion was the larger cat this time, but not by much. The third saber-tooth fanatically inserted himself between Adonis's wounded saber-tooth and Leo's lion.

But nothing seemed to stop Leo's lion. Leo roared, his claws raking a furrow of flesh and blood across the interfering saber-tooth's side. The savaged saber-tooth screamed in agony and rage.

Ethan, Javiar, and Daniel were poised, ready to shoot, but blood and fur flew and constantly moving targets were tricky. They didn't want to shoot the wrong cat.

The largest saber-tooth of the three still battled with Demar's enraged panther. Drake and Colby's cheetahs were doing their best to keep the huge cat distracted and not get gored. It was a life or death struggle that none were prepared to lose.

Refusing to be deterred, the saber-tooth leapt menacingly for the dark and sleekly muscled form of the determined panther, growling and swiping deadly fangs. Ethan lined up the shot. Javier and Daniel bit out bullets in quick succession. The huge saber-tooth crumpled to the ground, fangs jerking spasmodically.

The battle still raged, the savage sounds of it echoing all around them. The third saber-tooth snarled, refusing to allow Leo's lion to advance on Adonis's. Both saber-tooths were bleeding, but Adonis's wound was deep. Leo's massive lion stalked, searching for an opening to finish Adonis.

Advancing, the third beast roared and charged Leo's lion. Leo met him head-on in a clash that shook the ground beneath. Adonis's saber-tooth started to slink away, behind and past the still-burning barn.

Putting on a quick burst of speed, Adonis raced for the nearby woods.

A shot rang out, then another. Daniel could see the bloom of blood at the saber-tooth's shoulder. Putting on a last burst of speed, Adonis's tiger slipped into the woods. But new blood flowed at his side as he ran.

Daniel raced after him. He stopped at the fence-line by the edge of the woods, intending to chase down and shoot the wounded tiger. But he could almost feel his claws curling around his weapon. For a second, he fought the overwhelming urge to shift. Somebody should be cocked and loaded.

He began tearing off his clothes. Ethan and Javier had weapons. They were crack-shots, too. But he needed speed if he would catch the great beast.

Suddenly, he realized with perfect clarity, he did move much swifter as he flew on four legs, sure-footed on the uneven forest floor.

The scents rushing Daniel were so potent they were almost distracting. Heaviest in Daniel's nostrils, however, hung the stench of Adonis's blood. The huge tiger had a small lead. Daniel's leopard found the right trail, though. His nose unerringly led him to it.

~ *CatPeril* ~

Slightly ahead, Adonis raced towards his destination. He had wisely ordered the helicopter left in a clearing at the other side of the dense forest. He was going to need it now. Samuels had brought it, and the other men had come in the Jaguar. The Jaguar was parked there too.

His wounds would have to be dealt with later. Pushing himself even as the blood pumped out of him, Adonis finally reached the small aircraft. He shifted back. It hurt like hell. He quickly took the pilot's proffered hand, pulling himself up through a force of sheer willpower and survival instinct. The engine roared to life. Adonis flung himself into the helicopter, panting, agonizing pain knifing through him.

~ *CatDown* ~

A scant ninety meters behind him, Daniel burst into the small clearing right as the plane streaked across the clearing and took off. Disappointment sizzled in his veins, but adrenalin still surged. The freedom of his new form was exhilarating.

He flicked his tail as he bent to sniff the heavy blood trail Adonis had left behind. Good, the slimy saber-tooth might not make it after

all. He watched, and his eyes narrowed as the helicopter above picked up altitude only to dip again. The chopper was headed farther out, growing smaller on the horizon. Ruefully, Daniel turned around and took off in a flat-out run.

Minutes later, the sound of the day's third explosion rocked Daniel's ears. This one was loudest of all, though it didn't come from the ranch ahead of him. The leopard could see a fiery trail of smoke where the helicopter must have crashed.

Adonis could not have survived that, surely.

The crash site too far away, Daniel's leopard turned and loped back towards the ranch.

Chapter 32

Daniel's return was welcomed. Although, by the time he got back, the epic battle had played out. Leo spotted him as he came out of the woods. They had waited on him.

Daniel shifted back. Naked, he signaled to Leo the sign for hold on. Leo just rolled his eyes. He grabbed his clothes from the fence and moved back behind the small copse of trees and brush. Dressed again, Daniel walked with Leo over to where Colby, Drake, Ethan, Javier, and Demar stood.

Eagerly, the men filled in the blanks Daniel had missed while chasing Adonis.

Leo had shredded one of the saber-tooth's throat. But that had left the biggest saber-tooth still to contend with.

Leo joked, "We would've made short work of him, too, but crack-shot Ethan over here didn't give us a chance."

Ethan shot Leo a clearly decipherable smirk.

Leo smiled.

Daniel chuckled at their interaction. Leo and Ethan had always gone head-to-head in the sharp-shooting games COBRA staged with the unit. It was a competitive challenge between them that Leo must remember and probably missed.

"You should've seen and heard it, Daniel," Javier added. "It's true, the bigger they are, the harder they fall."

"We need to get back to the house," Leo interjected. "I need to call Trey to come over as soon as he can get here. Craig was injured when two of Adonis's pack tried to ambush him. Lynx, Roberto, and Felice are at the house."

As the men headed back to the house, Leo recounted that as soon as he had finished fighting, he'd spoken telepathically with Lynx and the others at the house. Craig had told him that Lynx bravely shot not just one, but two saber-tooths.

Daniel could hear the sheer pride in Leo's voice.

As the men walked in, Leo hurried to Lynx. She sat by Craig in the kitchen. Leo gathered Lynx into his arms. Daniel could see she still looked white as a ghost, but Craig appeared to have gotten the worst of it. Craig gripped Lynx's one hand, but his other arm was streaked with blood and sported a makeshift bandage.

Felice was on the nearby couch, holding Roberto's hand. Demar moved over and stood protectively behind the couple.

Relieved that his sister and the others were well, Daniel glanced over to where Colby and Drake stood. Colby had sustained several jagged scratches. Still, there were no gores that he could see.

Colby only begrudgingly allowed Drake to help him. They stood by the kitchen sink. Daniel watched from a stool at the kitchen's bar.

"Don't be such a pussy," Drake growled as Colby protested. "I'm just going to disinfect the wound. I'll let Trey deal with patching up your smart-ass."

Colby shucked the ripped shirt off. Even wounded, Colby looked buff. Daniel could see the long scratch that ran from his muscled forearm, over and across Colby's chest. The scratch ended somewhere below Colby's jeans in the soft whorl of hair.

Daniel glanced down, assessing the wound. He glanced back up. Colby's eyes met his and held as he lifted his arm for Drake and held it over the sink.

"Do your worst, Drake," Colby answered, his eyes still fixed on Daniel. To Daniel, they felt like laser beams.

Colby continued sarcastically, "But if I had to guess, Drake, the good doctor would rather patch your smart ass."

Daniel saw Drake's lips tighten briefly, and then he flashed a wicked smile at Daniel. "That's only because I'm better looking, bro."

With those words, Drake turned and poured alcohol over Colby's wound.

"Fuck," Colby gritted out, "you're such a bastard sometimes, Drake."

"I know," Drake murmured, "that's because I'm your twin."

Daniel, Leo, Lynx, and Craig all laughed as Colby shot Drake a mutinous look. Colby had been struck, for once, utterly speechless.

~ *PussyPyre* ~

Leo, meanwhile, reluctantly released Lynx's other hand to call Trey as Daniel reiterated his story of Adonis's escape by helicopter and the subsequent crash.

Leo got off the phone and sat back down by Lynx. "Trey's on his way to the ranch right now."

Drake paced the room, looking anxious.

Ethan spoke up. "Javier and I don't want to wait any longer. We're going to take the Cobra-Hawk back out. Hopefully, we'll bring back Adonis's body."

Leo was of the same opinion. "Good luck and thanks, Ethan, Javier. I'd be more than happy to bury Adonis tonight, too. I hope your reconnaissance mission's a success."

"I'll help bury him," Craig muttered.

"Not with that arm, you won't, Craig Marozi." Lynx leaned in to kiss Craig. Craig surrendered gracefully with a shrug and a stifled groan.

"She's right, Craig," Leo said, smiling over, "I'm sure you don't want to be laid up twice as long because you over-did it. Besides, there are at least three, if not four, other men here, to help with that."

Leo eyed Colby speculatively. Colby nodded. "Yeah, count me in," he muttered good humouredly, "I'm not a pussy."

Drake snorted, but the doorbell rang, and Drake jumped up.

“Ha!” was all he said. Colby’s grin, Leo noted, looked a tad malicious. If he were Drake, Leo knew he’d be on the lookout for one of Colby’s pay-back pranks.

Trey made quick work of treating Roberto and Craig’s more serious wounds. Colby protested, but Trey insisted on an antibiotic injection for him, too.

“Can I give it to him, Doc?” Drake asked, giving his brother a devilish smile. Yeah, Drake was in for it, judging by the innocent smile Colby sent back to Drake. Drake and Colby never failed to amuse him with their brotherly rivalry and antics.

“Well, I guess it’s time to take out the trash,” he said, letting go of Lynx’s hand. Leo stood up and bent to kiss Lynx’s head. “You just stay here with Craig, kitten. This shouldn’t take too long,” he added.

Colby, Drake, Demar, and Daniel followed Leo up the stairs. Somehow, they managed to drag the two saber-tooth carcasses from the upstairs bedroom. It wasn’t easy. Getting the huge, leaden bodies down the stairs again and out the back door was a feat of strength.

Leo promptly went to recover the farm’s hay wagon from the back field. In unison, they hoisted the huge bodies onto the back of the wagon. After recovering the other bodies by the barn, he and the other men built a large pyre of hay around them and set fire to it.

Mort’s body wasn’t on the pyre. They owed him a private burial. Everyone agreed with him on that. Sheila, his housekeeper, had been devoted to Mort. She deserved the chance to mourn. In truth, they all did.

The tired and sweaty group made their way back to the house. Everyone needed to clean up.

“Go ahead,” Leo offered, “I can wait.”

The other men divvied up the available showers.

Leo found Lynx momentarily in the kitchen. He pulled his damp shirt up and off and tossed it over a chair. “Honey, I’m home,” he whispered, as he backed her up against the wall.

~ *CatSearch* ~

Before supper, Trey slipped Felice the pre-natal vitamins he'd remembered to grab as he raced out the door headed for the ranch. "Felice, I brought these for you," Trey said quietly, handing them to her. Trey pushed a lock of his thick, blond hair back. "Roberto's going to be fine, you know," he added finally.

"Thanks, Trey, you're right, he will. I'll take care of him, too," Felice said softly.

Trey nodded, the lump returning to his throat. He knew the couple had mutually decided to accept the pregnancy for the gift it was, on its own merits. Trey glanced over at Demar, who watched Felice like a protective, but hungry hawk. Trey recognized that look. He sighed. Time would tell.

Right before dinner was about to be served, Ethan and Javier returned. Ethan made the call to Captain Slater. He turned on the speaker phone. The others listened in silence.

"Captain, we couldn't locate Adonis's body, and the only evidence we found of him was a blood trail leading to the clearing where they took off. Yes, their helicopter went down as we suspected. Adonis was possibly with it. We didn't find a body, so we don't know if he made it out alive. If he did, he probably wouldn't have gotten far without help."

"Are you done searching for the night?" Slater queried.

"Yes, it's already dark. We will be up at dawn to see what we can find."

"Hopefully, Adonis's dead carcass," Demar muttered from where he sat.

"That's doubtful. We didn't find any blood trails at the crash site," Ethan admitted. "Unless we get lucky and his body turns up, we have to assume it's possible he is still alive."

Ethan went on to relay the condition of Adonis's chopper. It had been destroyed. By Daniel's account, Adonis had suffered tremendous blood loss even before the crash.

Ethan hung up the phone.

He could see the exhaustion that edged everyone's faces. Was Adonis dead or alive? Trey glanced over at Drake. At the moment, he just thanked the goddess. Everyone he cared most about had survived this day.

Chapter 33

The day's victories were something to celebrate, but supper was a subdued affair, considering.

Leo and Lynx dished out, and then took up some of the beef stew for Craig. Back in the room, Lynx couldn't help but stroke Craig as he rested. Trey had given Craig a powerful pain killer. Craig dozed right off before finishing his stew. Lynx sat back on the bed, gazing at him. She set the spoon back in the bowl and handed it to Leo. He set the bowl down on the end table.

"At least his wound isn't as bad as we thought it might be," Lynx whispered to Leo. "Trey said that the wound was shallow and shouldn't take too long to heal."

"Mmm..." Leo nuzzled against her. "I know. I would hate for anything to have happened to Craig, too, kitten. Not just because he was protecting you, baby. I enjoy having Craig here with us. It feels right, like having you in my arms."

Lynx reached over and kissed Leo, and then slid in beside Craig. She motioned Leo to her. She drew Leo down to her and kissed him deeply.

Night sounds wafted through the open window. Even the air felt subtly different as the breeze rustled the curtains. Peace drifted over her.

Leo stroked her nape and shoulder with idle caresses, spooning behind her. Lynx turned to face Craig, her head resting slightly against Craig's uninjured shoulder. Lynx gently stroked Craig's thigh, unthinking.

“Hey,” Craig said sleepily, “you guys don’t have to worry about keeping me awake. I might not be in the shape to do some things properly, but I have never minded watching.” Craig chuckled. “Just promise not to get upset if I should accidentally conk out at some point. Trey gave me the good stuff.”

Craig grinned. It was a lazy, lascivious grin. He looked more than a little dopey. “Not that I think I could fall asleep watching that, mind you. Some things are just too stimulating to be unconscious for,”

The invitation wasn’t lost on Leo. Before she could tell Craig he needed his sleep more, Leo tilted her back on the mattress beside Craig. His tongue invading her lips and swallowed her moan of half-hearted protest.

As he slowly rubbed her lace-covered breast, he scraped the lace back and forth over her engorged nipple. Leo deepened the kiss until she was moaning again. Only this time, there was no protest in it.

Breaking from the kiss, Leo bent his head to the curve of her neck and nibbled his way down her throat. She gasped as his mouth closed over one sensitized peak through the delicate scrape of lace there. She arched towards Leo’s mouth. It felt too damn good.

Lynx reached for Craig’s hand beside her. He was breathing heavy. Craig took her hand and moved it down his torso with a groan.

Her fingers closed over the velvet-soft skin, deceptively so, she realized. Craig was hard as a brick, his cock achingly erect.

She stroked Craig in time to Leo’s sweet, long pulls at her breast.

“I’ve got it, little Minx,” Craig finally groaned. “If you don’t stop now, I’ll lose it too soon. I want to watch some more first,” he admitted with another dopey smile. Lynx gave Craig’s cock one last teasing stroke before she reluctantly released him.

Her hands were captured by Leo. He slid them above her head and held them there, restraining her firmly. He bent, ravaged a nipple beading through the peek-a-boo lace.

Lynx groaned and arched.

"I love watching you get pleased," Craig said huskily. Craig grabbed his cock, and then winced at the twinge of pain.

"Are you okay, baby?" Lynx gritted out as Leo's teeth scraped across her nipple. Her panties were soaked. An involuntary moan left her lips.

"I'm wonderful, kitten," Craig crooned. He slid his hand back and forth over his aching cock in a long and slow motion.

Leo let go of Lynx's hands momentarily, sliding down her body and bathing her skin with warm, wet strokes of his tongue. But that was only until he reached the apex of her thighs at the edge of her lacy panties. He left them on her, licking over the straining nub of flesh through the thin material.

Lynx could not help but writhe under the assault of his tongue. "Like that, do you little, Lynx?" Leo purred, briefly stopping to look up at her.

"Don't stop," she gasped. She strained for his mouth. Leo's hands moved down her torso, tracing the satiny skin. Then, his finger parted the slick folds below the lace, finding her center.

"Baby, you're so wet," Leo groaned out before plunging his finger inside her. Leo lowered his mouth down to her.

Lynx twisted, straining for more. Leo stopped again, removing his finger. "You're better than my favorite candy, sweetness," Leo said as he slowly withdrew his finger from inside her. Leo brought his finger to his lips and licked it slowly. "Mmmm, so sweet," he growled.

"I want to taste her, too. Again. Soon." Craig growled. His hand stroked up and down faster. The sight of Craig's excitement sent more shivers up her spine. She loved it when they told her what they wanted to do with her.

"I'll watch you sip her sugar soon," Leo said. "You'll get your turn, Marozi," he joked.

Leo reached down and wriggled Lynx's panties down her thighs before stopping mid-way.

"What are you doing, Leo? Don't stop now." Lynx gasped.

“I’m admiring the view,” he answered.

Lynx lay there, legs open, panties half on and half off. What was his damn hold-up?

“But Leo,” she started to protest. Leo didn’t let her finish the sentence.

“First, kitten, I’m going to eat you.” His hands gripped her bent legs as he plunged his tongue into her. Her breathing hitched.

“The taste of you on my tongue is almost as good as the feel of you on my dick. I don’t think I can wait much longer, though, kitten. I need so badly to feel you on it,” Leo admitted. He moved beside her, parting her lips with his tongue.

On his kiss she tasted herself.

Leo pulled away, moving up beside Lynx. “How about we let Craig get a taste, kitten,” Leo suggested.

“Lynx, slide over him.” Leo rumbled a deep purr in her ear as they all switched around. Hungrily, Lynx drew Craig’s hard shaft to her lips.

Leo moved behind her. Lynx felt the swollen shaft start to sink in, excruciatingly slowly, inch by hard, heated inch. Heat flooded her pussy. Leo’s cock fired, then fed her fever. He slid in and out on a succession of thrusts. His thrusts rocked her against Craig’s greedy mouth, hands, and cock. She tried to concentrate on Craig, but the sensations were too much.

Her pussy clenched. Her muscles were tense and aching in anticipation. The first burst of pleasure tore through her as hard and swift as a cork exploding from a bottle of champagne. Moans welled in her throat and spilled over Craig’s cock. Intoxicated by pleasure, Lynx’s juices flooded out in orgasmic, blissful shudders.

~ *CatRewards* ~

He would never get enough of her. Lynx’s potent essence saturated his senses. His taste buds craved every ounce of satisfaction

wrung from this woman, their woman. His eardrums craved her caressing cries of ecstasy. Her sweet nectar filled him, and her body's offering was everything he'd ever hoped for or ever dreamed of.

Waves of love crashed over Craig. Intimate and powerful, love squeezed his heart like a vise. He was breathless in love's grip.

She was the fire that made his body burn. He felt it all when he was with her. And she gave him all, from emotions and feelings to the more sensual pleasures. Lynx spread liquid fire in his veins and made his heart melt at the same time. She was warmth and heat to him. She was goddess of his- their hearth, home, and hearts.

Her groans as Leo fucked her, well that was just the sweet cream icing he couldn't resist.

Craig heard Leo let out another strangled groan over Lynx.

"Goddess, Lynx, you're going to make me come if you keep clamping down on me like that. Your pussy's like fucking honey. Keep squeezing me and I'm going to fill you up, kitten." Leo's voice sounded ragged, hoarse.

At Leo's words, a sob of pleasure escaped from Lynx. The sound made Craig crave the soft moue of her mouth again. He slid from under her, taking care with his injured arm. He went to his knees before her.

She sucked him into her warm, wet mouth. Already slippery with excitement, his cock's thick circumference was still not easy for her to take. Craig groaned and watched his cock slowly disappear in her mouth.

Leo slowed his thrusts. Head bent to Lynx's ear, Leo growled, "Can you come for me again, kitten?" Leo trailed his lips down Lynx's neck, sought and found his goal.

Her cries of ecstasy slid over his ears. The sight of Leo's primal possession of Lynx sent fire scorching through Craig. Wet heat licked over his balls, flames boiled up his cock.

"Oh, fuck, yeah!" An oath of surrender ripped from his throat as Lynx slid one honey-soaked finger in a wet trail from his balls along

his perineum. Lynx stroked there, wetly and purposefully nudging the sensitive, clenched hole. Her mouth came down again over Craig's cock in a whoosh of pleasure that took his breath away.

"*Wicked, busy tongue,*" Craig teased, before he gasped, words deserting him. Lynx's finger slid in, sending chills racing up his spine as her finger hit the perfect spot.

With a roar, Craig erupted in volcanic jets that spewed up his cock and against the back of her throat. Her moan of pleasure and acceptance humming around him, Craig came apart. His hands tangled in her hair as his seed flooded hotly from him.

Lynx devoured his every last drop. He could see satisfaction glittering in her eyes. When his shudders finally eased, he withdrew and collapsed.

"Lie down and rest with Craig, kitten," Leo urged as he got up.

Craig held out his good arm in comic invitation. "Yeah, come here, baby."

Lynx licked her lips and settled in the crook of his arms.

Craig whispered, kissing her hair. "I love you, little minx."

Leo bent to kiss Lynx. "I love you, kitten," he murmured. "I'll get a washrag, and I'll be right back."

Before Leo could even return, Craig fell back asleep. The last sound he remembered hearing was the sound of Lynx purring at his ear.

~ CatAclysm ~

Dawn's light was coloring the horizon. Lynx was in the throes of the best dream ever. She screamed as an orgasm broke over her in waves of raw intensity that left her shuddering. Finally, she stilled. Leo worked his finger in and out of her for a few seconds more before withdrawing. He took one last long lick and looked over at Craig.

Lynx saw Craig's eyes grow dark. Craig languorously stroked his bulging cock.

Leo bent to Lynx's ear. "Lynx, kitten, how would you like to help Craig out again?" His heated whisper sent renewed shivers through her. Her pussy still throbbed. Not yet recovered from her climax, Lynx didn't immediately answer. She wanted to. She just didn't seem to have the breath.

"Turn around on the bed, Lynx, and take Craig in your mouth." Leo ordered. "And I want to see your pretty little ass in the air, Lynx."

Lynx looked up at Leo. He looked fierce, golden in the morning light. And damn if she wasn't getting wet at Leo's tone of dominance. Complying quickly, she shifted positions on the bed as Craig moved to his back, letting his hand fall away from his engorged cock.

Lynx grew hungrier at just the sight of Craig's thick, throbbing shaft. It was hard, but the skin was soft. She remembered well. Damn if it weren't dewy, too, just for her.

She licked her lips and lowered them over Craig's jutting erection, straining to wrap her lips around it. She glided down along the length of his cock in slow measures until he reached up and grasped her hair in his hands. Craig groaned and surged up to meet her.

"Now, Lynx," Leo's voice almost startled her, "I want you to move over Craig so that he can get a good taste of you like he wanted." Lynx scooted over to do so, but Leo ended up helping her in position.

He still wasn't through giving orders, though, apparently. "Put these on." Leo held up a different pair of skimpy lace panties.

Craig eagerly reached up to hold Lynx's head in place. He gave a growl. The sound of pure male arousal only spiked hers. Lynx went down on him again, just to hear it. Her tongue rasped along his cock as she descended.

Craig's groan as he pumped into her mouth was the first clue. His accelerated thrusts were another. Craig was already close to coming.

Leo must've sensed it, too. His voice broke through Craig's next strangled groan. "Craig's gonna watch me take your pretty ass for a ride now, Lynx. Any screaming you want to do, you'd better do it

around his cock, kitten.” Leo’s voice lowered again, sounding so dominant she shivered.

Lynx felt another shiver go through her as Craig’s cock spilled more pre-cum on her tongue.

Leo swiveled her slightly.

Craig groaned again. He stilled to watch as Leo pulled the flimsy panties up slightly. Lynx paused, too, in edgy expectation of what was to come. Heat bloomed across her rear as Leo’s hand came down on a hard smack. He repeated with a second hard smack to the same spot.

“I told you to suck Craig,” Leo said on a low growl.

Lynx writhed and twisted, and then hissed. Craig’s engorged cock choked off the sound.

“Suck him deep, kitten.” Leo growled in her ear. He leaned over her, and then he leaned back. She felt his finger sink in. Leo was showing her where he aimed to plunder soon. She gasped around Craig’s cock as Leo began finger fucking in and out of her ass. She couldn’t concentrate. She slowed in her deep-throating of Craig’s cock.

“You’re not sucking him like I told you to.” Leo’s voice was silky this time, but his other hand came down, hard, on her ass. It was not silky or soft. It fucking stung.

She let out a strangled half-scream and then another as the burn slid from her cheeks right around to her throbbing clit. She bucked into Leo’s large hand as another burning slap landed.

Leo slowed. Slipping his finger from her, he moved back up over her where she could feel his heavy cock rocking against her, rubbing slowly. Leo whispered in her ear as he lightly pushed her head back down over Craig’s jutting cock. “I told you to suck him, kitten.”

Her toes curled.

Lynx lowered her head at Leo’s urging and Craig surged hard and thick into her mouth. Craig reached up, tangling his hands into her hair, holding her. Lynx looked up at him.

Craig fucked her mouth reverently. His eyes, like heat-seeking missiles, bore into hers. The pleasure built. Worship, desire, and love were plain to see.

Lynx lost herself. All she could see were his eyes. They grew darker, going from slate-blue to midnight. His long, black eyelashes fanned his cheeks, briefly. He reopened them, searching her eyes. He knew her and she knew him. Heated jets erupted across her tongue and down her throat as Craig came.

But Leo's voice was at her ear again, and Leo's hands were at her waist. Leo spread her wider, and his cock slid between her legs, gliding over the small aperture to her rear in heated little strokes, sensitizing her. He repeated the move, this time with a little push, the slick head of his cock sinking in, inch by agonizing inch. The tight muscles resisted Leo's thick intrusion.

"Stop, just for a second. Breathe in and out, kitten," Leo purred at her ear, pausing briefly. A moment later, he leaned back as he grabbed around her hips with one arm. Leo worked his way forward with a quick thrust of his hips. A cry of pleased pain broke from her lips.

Craig stiffened, swelling again. He stifled her next scream as he guided himself back to her mouth. He shafted in and out, his hands on her head. The sound vibrated around his cock. Craig groaned raggedly in response, his hands twisting harder in her hair.

The intensity spiraled higher as Leo's thrusts became faster, harder. She felt the burn, she cried out again, and Craig jerked in response.

Lynx's cry became a muffled sob of pleasure as Leo half withdrew, and then thrust full force in again. Craig, riding her lips, jerked again. "Lynx, honey, I'm going to come again..."

"Swallow him," Leo ordered, "then lick him clean, kitten. I'm about to make you come again. I'm going to explode hard and deep inside your tight, little, wicked ass." Leo withdrew, and then plunged deep.

Lynx's felt her vision dim with pleasure. Craig began fucking her mouth slowly, rocking in perfect time to Leo's thrusts. Craig shuddered and exploded, jettisoning liquid lava against her tongue.

Leo reached under her and rubbed the erect nub of her clit as he slammed into her. The words he growled finally penetrated through her haze of pleasure.

"Your mouth's a fucking miracle, Lynx. I don't know which I like better, seeing you suck and swallow him, kitten, or pounding your sweet little rear." Leo groaned again as he began to pummel faster, harder, and deeper.

Unleashed, Leo powered forward, nipping the back of her shoulder. She shuddered, and her muscles went tighter around him. He surged forward again and bit, sinking his teeth into her shoulder.

Leo hissed his pleasure, and Lynx felt his hot release flood her. Her orgasm hovered, burst. Craig withdrew, watching her.

She quivered and came, arching to meet Leo in mindless spasms of pleasure. Electric tingles raced over her from head to toe as Leo gave a final plunge, groaning, half-growling into her ear. He collapsed against her, still throbbing, heavy, and hot.

Lynx whimpered, dazed, smaller shock waves still crashing over her. Finally, the pounding of her blood slowed. She moaned as Leo withdrew. Craig's good hand found hers.

Leo rolled over, and then cradled her to him. As his breathing slowed, Leo sighed and slipped Lynx into the crook of Craig's good arm. He came back and gently washed her. He slid back in beside them.

She snuggled in closer to Craig's chest as Leo pulled the covers up. Leo wrapped his arms to her waist as he spooned against her, one big leg over her smaller one.

Craig bent his lips to Lynx, then, feathering soft kisses against them before saying softly, "I love you."

"I love you too, man," Leo replied amorously, joking.

Lynx struggled not to laugh.

“Hey, I do love you both,” Craig answered, gazing past Lynx to Leo. “I’ve never loved two people more.” Craig chuckled and winked. “Lynx is still a sight prettier than you, Leo. But,” Craig added, his tone serious, “I love you both.”

Craig looked a little embarrassed, but Leo simply answered, “I understand, I do.” Leo stroked Lynx as he talked. Lynx listened to his words, feeling a rush of warmth that went beyond sexual heat straight to her heart.

“Craig, I’m fully invested in a future together with Lynx. I believe you are, too. This is your home, if you wish it. With Lynx, with us,” Leo added, nuzzling her neck.

Craig looked into her eyes, and then back to Leo. “I don’t want to go anywhere if it means leaving Lynx. Or you,” Craig amended with a smile. “My home is here, with you and Lynx.”

Lynx sat up and looked from Leo and back to Craig, reading their minds. “Okay, you two numb-nuts. Break up your little love-fest. I’m still here, you know.” She folded her arms in mock irritation.

Craig and Leo cracked up and began raining kisses on her.

On a breathless sigh, Lynx admitted, “I love you both so much. Craig, Leo, I couldn’t live without either of you. You both complete me. Big beastie boys,” she added, teasing them again. “But you’re both mine, all mine.” The last ended on a giggle as both men dove for her, growling.

Even as Lynx succumbed to their seemingly indefatigable attentions, she wasn’t sure if the sounds emanating from their lips were contented purrs, growls of excitement, or both. It didn’t matter, she knew. Her smile was one of soul-deep satisfaction because the same satisfied sounds were coming from her lips, too.

Their love was an aphrodisiac the drug CatNip could never be. She was safe and loved in Craig and Leo’s arms. Her home, her ultimate pleasure would forever be found in their addictive cat nips.

Epilogue

Eight and a half months later...

The Lascaux Ranch veritably hummed with excitement. Daniel had returned for another visit to the ranch, but that wasn't the cause for the electric buzz that filled the air. Daniel visited frequently. The last time had been for the small wedding ceremony when Lynx had said "I do" to Leo and to Craig. The Imatu ritual blessing was theirs.

Studding Captain Black out, breeding horses, and raising cattle was a profitable venture for the Lascaux Ranch. The happy threesome had opted to stay and work the farm rather than leave on dangerous missions for COBRA.

Leo and Craig were happiest staying close by Lynx now, too. Lynx found she no longer itched to work in the dangerous world of COBRA, either. Oh, she still loved her Beretta, but she was about to have much more to baby. She was four months pregnant with twins.

Leo and Craig were both over the moon about it. Children were considered a blessing among their kind. The Imatu instinctively recognized the gifts children brought. Very soon, their family would be full of blessings.

But, not even that news accounted for Daniel's return this time. Daniel waited at the door with Leo, Craig, Lynx, Drake, and Colby when the two vehicles arrived. Roberto and Demar both hopped out of the one, rushing over to help Felice down and out of the larger SUV. Gingerly, the men extracted the baby seats from the back.

Trey hopped out of his silver Escalade. He walked over and helped Felice out and to the door.

Everyone gathered around Felice and her beautiful twin girls, Samantha and Sabrina. Witnessing it, tears of joy sprang to Lynx's eyes. Dreams of the future momentarily clouded her vision. She dabbed away the tears of joy.

They were headed inside behind the others when she felt it, a strong series of thumps. Startled, Lynx grabbed Craig and Leo's hands, wide-eyed. "Feel that," she said, her voice trembling as she directed their hands to her growing stomach.

Leo's grin nearly split his face as Lynx's baby bump bumped his hand. "Somebody in there sure has my strong legs," Leo said proudly.

Craig bent to tenderly kiss the still-rippling mound. "Or my strong arms." Craig laughed. "I guess you two wanted to meet your future playmates, huh? Well, let's get your pretty Momma inside and let you do just that, little bean and little sprout." Craig said, using his sweet nicknames for the twins as he straightened. He reached for her, and Lynx took Craig's hand as Leo took her other. Together, they walked in to celebrate another purr-fect day.

THE END

<http://www.myspace.com/jesuislapretresse>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Mynxe-L-Silles/170779216268366>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hello. I'm a married mother with three wonderful children I gave birth to, and one other wonderful young lady I think of as a daughter. I consider life to be a grand adventure. I find something fascinating around every bend, whether it is a new book to read, new music to discover, another wonderful person to get to know or just another new animal to take into my heart. I live to learn and to discover more about this fascinating world we live in. My husband is a bean-counter by day, but many nights and weekends he transforms into an accomplished musician. I've performed with him on a few rare occasions, but I always enjoy musical entertainment, whatever the venue may be. We have many wonderful musician friends, and I've been blessed with many wonderful, talented friends from various walks of life. Friends truly do make life rich, be they animal or human. Of course, I love to write. Writing has been a passion of mine since I was very young, and that's been a while (smiling). My hope is that readers will enjoy my writing too.



Siren Publishing, Inc.
www.SirenPublishing.com