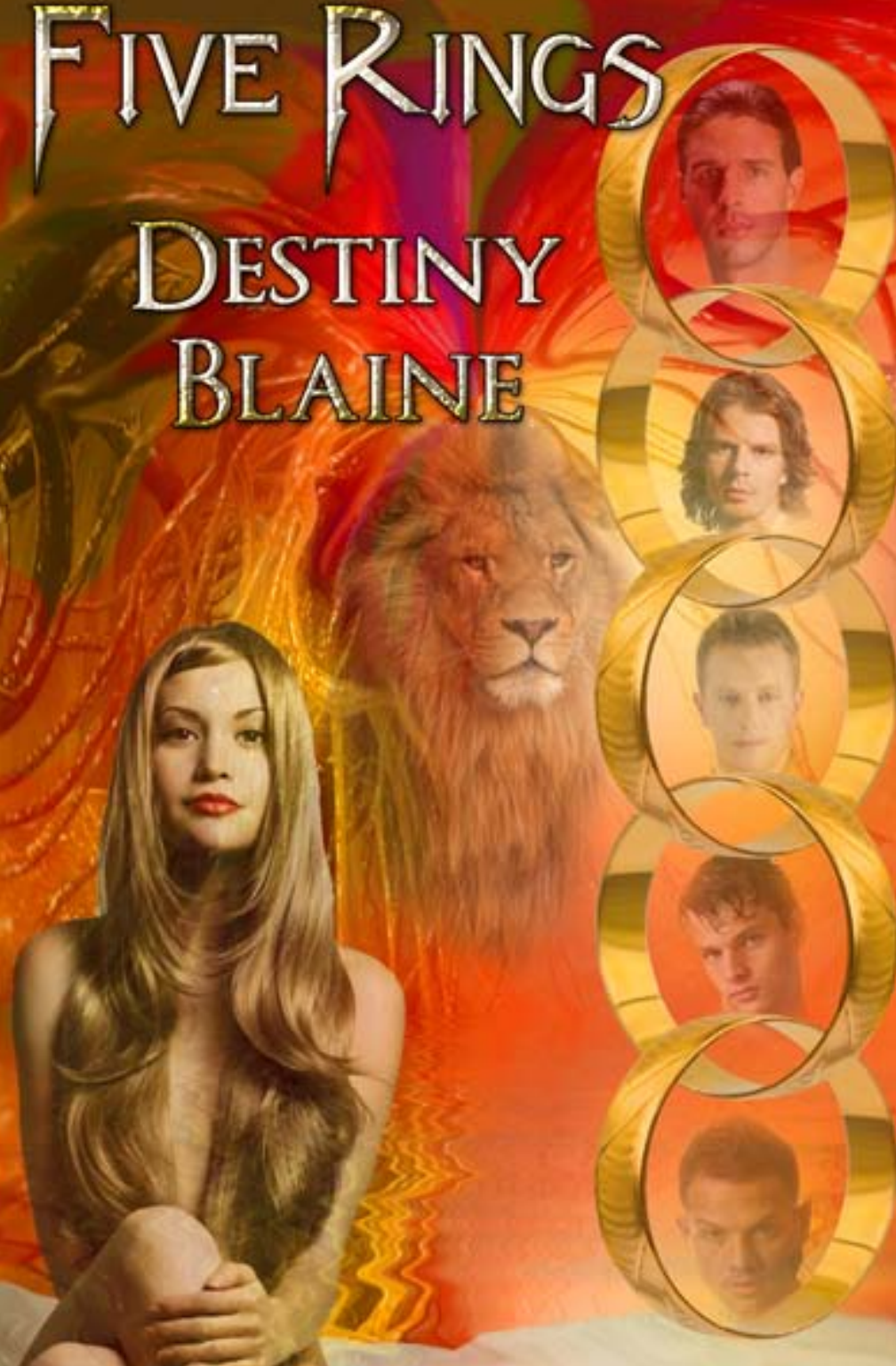


FIVE RINGS

DESTINY
BLAINE



Members of Jason Lory's original pride coalition warned of the shifter-mates remaining – some were thought to be man-eaters.

Others, the nomads, were considered very volatile and unable to shift successfully without the stimulation of five rings, only no one knew with absolute certainty what these rings were or where to find them. Jason Lory figured out the mystery.

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Five Rings

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FIVE RINGS

BY

DESTINY BLAINE

CHAPTER ONE

“Lauren Duran, you have a call on line three. Lauren Duran, line three.” The old-fashioned intercom buzzed with the front office receptionist’s lazy drawl.

Lauren envisioned the face belonging to the voice and crinkled her nose. Sometimes when the older woman made a hospital-wide call, the hairs on the back of Lauren’s neck bristled. There wasn’t any love lost between herself and the aging receptionist, and for good reason. If anyone realized Lauren had secrets, no matter how well she kept them hidden, Fran Conway knew all about them.

Strolling across the pale blue linoleum floor, Lauren nodded to one of the recovering addicts on her unit. He was a young fellow, probably around twenty, and visiting *Broken Dreams Recovery Center* for the fourth time. He smiled, and didn’t bother to conceal the effort he made when checking out her ass. After rubbernecking all he could, he continued his stroll down the padded hallway.

The young guns never ceased to amaze her. They all possessed balls of steel and sucked up to

the women on the floor, especially the psych techs. Of course Lauren understood the reason behind their motives. They formed alliances wherever they could find them and pulled out all the stops while they were drying out, especially if their visit to *Broken Dreams* wasn't one they made of their own free will.

After approaching a nearby wall phone, Lauren snatched the receiver and punched the blinking button. "This is Lauren Duran." She should have patted herself on the back. She sounded professional, but friendly. Busy, but patient enough to handle the call, and rushed, but calm enough to translate whatever someone said to her on the other end.

"Have any wet dreams last night?" A husky voice filled the line followed by a low, stomach-clenching guttural growl.

God, she loved the way Marcus sounded so hungry for her whenever they spoke. Her nipples throbbed when she heard the raspy masculine way he presented his question. For a few passing seconds she thought of the last time they were together, which made her reply all the easier. "You were in every one of them."

"How many did you enjoy?"

The truer meaning shifted from fantasies to orgasms and she dared to tell him some of the truth. Too many to handle in one eight-hour sleep

considering five men filled her every waking hour, never mind her dreams.

"Plenty," she finally responded, picking the lint off of her plain low-cut top.

"I'll pick you up after work and have dinner waiting for you. I'm thinking hot beef for dinner and lots of rich cream for dessert. What do you think?"

"I think you're very obnoxious."

"What time will you be ready?"

Not to mention presumptuous.

She scanned the open recreational area. A few nurses worked from the center of the circular nurses' station busy dispensing the afternoon meds. Some of the new patients walked past her with their heads down, and one or two of them yawned like they'd never been quite so bored in all of their lives. Lowering her voice she said, "Marcus, I'd love to see you tonight but I can't."

"What do you mean you can't?"

"I have to work a double."

"I see," he said, apparent that he didn't believe her. "But haven't you worked overtime all week?"

Yes she had sort of, and she hated to inform him but since he was the fifth link in her line of five, he'd receive the same reply again tomorrow and the day after until his turn came. "This weekend," she promised. "We'll spend some time together Saturday."

"I can't wait that long. Can you?"

Actually, she could. She planned to meet one of her lovers around six that evening.

"Have lunch with me."

Sighing, she turned around and spotted a buff, thirty-something year old attorney. She'd had her eye on him since he started coming to the center over a year ago. She soon discovered his problem with the bottle and the reason why he made frequent trips to rehab. She decided he wasn't a likely candidate for her bed so she gave up her pursuits. She liked her men alert when their pants balled up around their ankles.

The handsome patient still provided a highly sexual woman plenty of initiative. While premature gray strands added a little salt to his pepper-colored hair, his buff body demanded attention, and yes, she fantasized about him at times. In his prime—and before he became best friends with Jose Cuervo—she'd bet dollars to donuts he kept a few women on bended knees.

"Lunch, Lauren," Marcus persisted.

Marcus wasn't a man who accepted no and she wasn't a woman who enjoyed declining men like him in the first place. "I only have thirty minutes," she reminded, wondering if anyone would notice if she left the premises for a little while.

"Half an hour is all we'll need," he promised. "I'll pick you up. Think big and bold and you'll

find me. I'll park on the third level of the parking garage. Don't worry about Fran. I'll tell her to let you have a day pass and then promise to bring you back in one piece."

After dealing with obnoxious Fran and receiving the promised pass, Lauren hurried to the exit and up the stairs to the third level of the parking garage.

What she hadn't imagined when Marcus provided limited hints on how to find him, was a refurbished bus once used by a local band. The inscription on the side read *Step Inside and Find a Free Ride*.

Considering their plans for the bus, Marcus might as well have inked his name under the space that once read *The New Experience*, the letters now faded and barely readable. He should have replaced the original text altogether. After all, every time she took Marcus on, he came up with fresh and interesting ideas. He wasn't just a new experience, he was the whole adventure.

The band that once owned the bus never made the big leagues but she remembered the members as being talented in their own right. During their touring days, the lead singer often mentioned the personal journeys the musicians provided to interested young women with all the right moves.

Her senses came alive while walking toward

Marcus who stood beside the vehicle. She wanted more than a ride on the former band's big old bus. She noticed the smirk on Marcus's face when he saw her. He liked to play things cool, but she knew better. He liked her and he liked her a lot. Fortunately, Marcus had more going for him than any drug-induced rocker she barely remembered.

"Took you long enough, you hot looking woman, you."

Heaven help her, Marcus possessed a naughty smile. He always looked like he was up to something or maybe his cocky attitude led her to the wrong impression. Marcus worked his suave like many gals put an extra sway in their wiggle. Truly handsome, Marcus trimmed his chestnut colored hair right above the ears. His milk chocolate eyes were hidden under thick, but not bushy, eyebrows. He had a long, lean nose leading to a light mustache he most definitely tried to grow and the fullest heart-shaped lips she'd ever kissed. Dressed in a lime green Polo, he wore tan slacks and brown dress shoes, and looked polished to perfection with too much time on his hands. He'd probably stepped right off the golf course and straight into his unconventional luxurious bed on wheels. Tipping off the bad boy appeal he somehow managed to pull off despite his overall well dressed appearance Marcus wore an earring in his left ear. Best of all, he was by

every stretch of the imagination great in bed and ready to fuck on a dime.

"Marcus, what on earth is this?"

"Looks like a bus to me," he said, popping a kiss on her cheek and discreetly moving into her when they embraced. "Lunch is served, my lady."

He opened the door and with a wave of his hand allowed her to lead the way into their love shack. Apparently rented for the sole purpose of fucking her straight through one memorable afternoon, the large reminder along with the hard erection bulging in his pants, drove home his point. No expense was ever spared when Marcus wanted a woman.

"Marcus, don't you think this is a little extreme?"

He stepped inside, slammed the door, and secured it by a bolt-type lock. His mouth devoured hers before she asked any other stupid questions. "I know how you love it when I push for over the top."

"Yes, but a motel room delivered to my doorstep qualifies as drastic." Her head tilted sideways as he kissed, licked even, from her collarbone to her ear. The fact that she was so incredibly turned on bordered with absurd.

Odds were she hadn't gone unnoticed when she'd left for lunch and didn't quite make it to the nearby sandwich shop where nosey Miss Fran

most likely thought she'd head after providing one of the special free passes. Of course, she couldn't remember a time when she'd actually been permitted to eat with the other mental health employees anyway.

Drawing circles around her nipple with a lone finger while pushing her shirt high above her head with his free hand, Marcus said, "I had to have you. Saturday won't do."

"Saturday is —"

"Too far off." He smacked his lips over hers. His tongue lapped at her mouth while he carefully stripped her clothes from her body, all the while robbing her soul with his kisses.

"You're right. I'm hungry." Her hands moved to his waist and she unhooked his belt while dropping to her knees.

"God, yeah," he said, a low roar hanging in the air when she freed his hard length.

He took a step back, gripped the sink behind him, and let her have her way. She ran her fingertips up and down his shaft and kissed the precum showcasing a sparkle of his gratitude, never mind his obvious excitement.

"Good, baby?"

"You know it," she murmured. "Lunch is ready."

Her jaws opened and his dick pulsed in anticipation. "I'll make sure you get your fill,

sweetheart. I'm the only meal you need."

She sucked, pulling his veined length into her mouth until her tongue twirled around his size. She noticed how his heavy eyes turn to hot mocha right before he started to grind.

"Ah babe, you're the best," Marcus whispered, reaping the rewards.

She smiled to herself and sipped the tiny slit tipping his cock with her tongue, lapping at him as if he were minty flavored ice cream. Oh yes, she enjoyed coaxing a man forward until she felt his satisfaction by the evidence coating her throat. More than anything else she enjoyed *Marcus* in her mouth, his weighted balls slapping against her chin.

Lauren watched for signs of success, the remarkable close drawing near. His heavy eyelids hid a fraction of his enthusiasm, but the thick uncontrollable hunger left his lips when in a broken voice he said, "Ah yeah, Lauren. This is what I miss when you're not with me."

Her tongue whipped around him, and her lips clamped tighter. She sucked him in as deep as his cock would go. He was a goner. She made sure of it. His thighs pressed against her shoulders and he held on for the ride, gently placing his palms on either side of her head.

Lauren and Marcus enjoyed a natural chemistry. She'd always heard women in their

forties enjoyed younger men. They were, after all, well matched in the bedroom. She believed every word of the old adage. Chemistry rarely defied logic.

Holding onto his tight thighs, she felt the way his muscles bunched under her touch. He suddenly seemed larger than before, more masculine.

"That's it, sweetheart," he mumbled. "Bob that pretty little head."

He thrust into her mouth. She indulged in the visible signs of his fervor, greedily devouring every inch of him then, watching him take his climb and humping out his passion. He stared at her with a rare intensity, a new flavor of heat.

Without a doubt, Marcus loved what she did for him. While he inched closer to his release, she noticed something else. He also had more hair on his legs than most men. In fact, his hair resembled the soft texture of animal fur and to her surprise she loved burying her hands deeper, finding comfort in his body temperature.

His cock jerked and he screamed out her name. A salty thick drip and the first taste of cum prepared her for the jet behind the rest. Marcus was always ready for good head.

He wasn't the only one.

CHAPTER TWO

Jordan St. Johns arrived at her place early and caught her coming out of the shower. Thank God she'd had time to bathe. She could still smell Marcus on her skin long after her lunch date, and the spicy rich scent of his *Sexy Man* cologne had driven her wild for the better part of the afternoon.

"Hey there, beautiful," Jordan said, holding out a robe and examining every inch of bare flesh.

Her nipples spiked under the scrutiny, almost as if a wisp of whiskers ran over her breasts. Funny, she mused, how the sensation made her incredibly wet. She wondered why the brushing of hair particles, real or imagined, made her crave Jordan's perusing hand.

Her body, already well saturated after reliving in her mind the precious moments she'd shared with Marcus, welcomed any guaranteed invasion. With Jordan, she never second guessed what he wanted. They always headed for wonderland and

ecstasy typically came fast.

"How was your day?" he asked, loosening his tie and tossing it aside.

"Good," she said, grabbing a large comb and running it through her matted wet curls while standing in front of a full-length mirror. She didn't bother to close the front of the silky robe and her long blonde locks cascaded over her breasts.

Studying her reflection, the fluorescent lighting picked up the pristine shine in her hair. The waves gleamed with golden-like flames. She bent over, using a hair pick to work through the tangled curtain. Looking to the right, she studied her full breasts bouncing as she worked with the comb.

Sometimes she wanted to grab a pair of scissors and snip her way toward a more manageable style, but she knew her men would never allow something so preposterous. All five of her companions loved her natural mane—hair, she mentally corrected. A few of her fellows invented new and kinky ways to use her locks to control various sexual acts. Besides, Lauren had lost her scissors and she hadn't had time to buy a new pair.

Flipping her hair over again her breasts jiggled with the sudden move and she turned her face toward the mirror, spotting Jordan behind her. Straightening all at once, she pranced over to the small velvet stool in the corner of her bedroom,

sliding her bare feet into open-toed high heel sandals.

Her gaze held Jordan's and she ran her fingers over pointed nipples, pushing her breasts up for show and at the same time flipping a few wayward hair strands out of her way. The sexual tension sliced through the air. Motioning him with her forefinger, she listened to the heady growl she intentionally inspired.

Jordan had the sexiest mouth and used his full lips the way most women enjoyed. He rarely delayed moving down a woman's body, going south for a full bodied excursion. All she had to do was ask nice and push him there, but today she wouldn't speak of oral pleasure, fearing Jordan might suspect the recent visit of another male who'd recently brought her pleasure.

Jordan's ears were large, perfect for gripping, which made them a true necessity she grew to appreciate. An aquiline nose instantly claimed center stage upon first introductions. Most failed to notice the man's large hands and feet, which she'd been told gave a woman a sneak preview to what hung between a man's thighs.

Jordan was her first official fuck buddy. Before she allowed anyone else in her life, he served a purpose, scratched an itch, provided a service, and she imagined she did the same for him since he came back, week in and week out.

The man wasn't without his share of strange hang-ups and at first sex with him was difficult, if not painful. His penis curved naturally toward his ass and when they made love, he couldn't pull out until he was flaccid otherwise his dick scraped her vagina, drawing – more than once – a true scream.

"Drop the robe," he said, a low moan tipping her off to his sudden mood shift.

As hospital administrator, Jordan carried the weight of workplace stress and really didn't take the time to pursue a woman. What they shared worked well for them, a quick fuck here or there and the occasional candlelight dinner, without commitments.

"Jordan," she purred, instantly covering her mouth when she realized how easily a cat-like meow left her lips. "You just got here."

He ran his large hand through his brown hair and splayed his legs. "I can't stay long. Strip. Now."

She hooked her finger down the front of the robe he'd slipped off her shoulders and gave it a slight forward and back motion. She struck a pose and the robe fell to the floor. "Well?" she asked, standing in front of the mirror again facing him so he could see the reflection of her ass while gaping at her breasts and pussy. She glanced over her shoulder and made sure her bottom still had its firm apple shape. Most men liked her rear and her

figure was part of the reason she had so many gentleman callers. Yes, she mused, she provided a well-rounded package.

"Come here," he barked, sitting down on her bed. He opened his fly and freed his cock.

The thick swell of a protruding point, rather than a mushroom head, extended toward her with his hand cupping the base, which only assisted him when he aimed. Holy sweet temptation, she'd never seen him so hard and if the bright red end provided a small sign, he needed to screw and she couldn't wait to accommodate him.

"Turn around," he instructed, drawing her hips to his lips when she followed his request. Biting and nipping her moons, he licked her body and released a sudden roar that barely escaped his lungs. The man had developed a new guttural way of calling out to his inner beast and God help her, he sounded like a mountain lion ready to mate for the first time.

She faced the looking glass and watched the most arousing act he'd ever performed. Starting at her lower back, he licked a clear path to her nape and back down again. He seemed entranced, like the act itself was as delicious as penetration. An unfamiliar sensation, the kiss, if a woman called an animalistic gesture as such, heated her flesh. Her nerve endings didn't buzz in satisfaction, they sent a bolt of electricity straight to her pussy and

her legs parted instinctively. "What did you do today?" she asked, squirming under his touch.

"Don't talk, sweetheart," he mumbled. "Just do what I tell you. I need to take you a certain way."

"Okay?"

"Get on your hands and knees in the center of the bed. Bend your head down and raise your hips for me." He paused while she obeyed his requests. "That's my good little kitten," he said, rubbing her head on the very top like he might pat his domestic cat. "Raise those pretty hips. That's good, sweetheart. Keep your tail up and bend your arms a little."

"Like this?" she asked, peering through the cascade of highlighted strands and waves of blonde.

"Yes, exactly like that," he said, penetrating all at once. "God yeah, like that." He leaned over her back. She could feel his wide mouth, almost indicative of a true muzzle, capture her neck between his pointed teeth.

"What are you doing?" she screeched.

Releasing her for a split second, he said, "Shh, kitten, don't worry. I won't draw blood." His tongue laved her shoulders and after the quick swipe, he bunched her hair above her head and grabbed her nape once more. "Screw me," he demanded. His teeth, which seemed retractable, descended upon her flesh and nicked her skin

with a deliberate nibble. His mouth sucked and pulled at her skin until she felt the weight of his entire body heavy against hers.

"Work it, sweetheart. Close around me baby. Uh-huh," he groaned, twisting higher and higher into her channel. Seconds later he made his demands. "Come!" Another second passed and he warned, "This time, pulling out will sting like a motherfucker."

And he was right. When he moved away she screamed bloody hell and the painful leave drew a hiss she hardly recognized as her own. "What the fuck are you doing?"

"Shh, kitten. I'm preparing you for bigger and better things," he said while dressing. "Come here and let me take the sting away."

"Not a chance," she snapped. "It felt like a thorn left my body when you pulled out."

"Come here, kit—"

"And stop it with the kitten stuff. I'm hardly a cat!"

"Oh but you are," he assured her, putting his tie back on while standing at the edge of the bed.

Lauren glared at him, nearly driven to claw his eyes out. She'd show him a cat if that's what he fantasized about and in the process use a lioness's personality when she snubbed him for other lions in her pride. Wicked thoughts, she mused. Delicious and even arousing, regardless of what

inspired them.

"Let me kiss your pussy. I can make it better," he offered. "I want some sweet cream before I leave. I'll lick your pretty little cunt until you remember all the reasons you want me. Come on, sweet thing, let me fuck you with my tongue. What do you say?"

By now Marcus's scent would be hidden by his own. Did he have to ask twice? Hell no. No one talked any dirtier than Jordan and no one had a thicker tongue trained for a woman's oral satisfaction. Well, come to think of it, one man beat him on both counts, and he beat him by a mile.

CHAPTER THREE

Michael Mahoney penetrated very deep. Heck yeah, he always stroked the true fuck out of her and sometimes he forced her to beg for mercy.

He took a leisurely pace at first and then thrust high, all at once. "That's it, sugar. Milk this cock," he said, rubbing her clit with his thumb while pounding into her. "Give me your sweet little pussy, honey. Rub some sweet heat all over me. That's good. Right there."

Locking her legs behind his back he reached around his waist and gripped her calves, pounding forward when he secured the position he wanted. "Good. Damn, girl. This is hot. Shit," he continued, pouring into her like he thought he held some measure of ownership of her body. "Come for me, baby. Come now."

She watched the sweat pour off his forehead, barely exposed because of the tiny damp curls clinging to his brow. He was coming. Without a doubt, they'd reached their peak and his loving

was good, and smoldering hot.

At one time, Michael courted a lot of women. One look at him and most gals thought down and dirty raw sex. He delivered always, gaining more than his place in a woman's bed. He'd possibly earned a little devotion from the women in his life.

With dark blond hair parted in the middle, Michael managed—or didn't—an unkempt style of shaggy hair and ringlets that fell well below his ears. When he moved, his hair swayed with him, adding a lot of sex appeal when he worked his body and rode out his release. His light mustache was barely visible above his bow shaped lips. When Lauren looked into his deep emerald eyes he transformed her into a sex goddess, one who had one initiative, fucking for hours.

"Ride my lights out, honey. Work your pretty little body. I'm coming inside you. Today! Now! No pulling out." He hammered forward until she screamed out his name, taking her orgasm and milking his cock in hopes of claiming one more climatic moment.

Her mouth opened and she thought she'd stopped breathing. Fearing pregnancy more than trusting she couldn't have children, Michael often pulled out when he came, leaving her to hump at thin air. But not today, and the fact he told her in the midst of her orgasm added punch to their pleasure.

Only one other man ever caught her completely by surprise, but he liked to use a different approach—a little wine and a whole lot of romance.

Michael screwed away her right to breathe and God help her, she lusted after him like no other. Until he pulled out and scraped her with a damning dick just as Jordan's cock had behaved the day before. Only with Michael, the withdrawal wasn't completely painful but almost arousing. The spiny texture scraped the walls of her vagina and she gasped when he was out. Somehow, the action brought an unexpected reaction and a flood of heat warmed her pussy and dampened her labia once again.

Maybe she simply viewed everything with Michael as perfect. He kept her sated, and often she thought if she settled down with anyone, Michael might be the one. After a second consideration, she changed her mind. The youngest of the lot kept her dick-whipped and he'd pay her a visit soon enough.

CHAPTER FOUR

She seated herself on top of Simon Warner and watched in awe. One of the reasons she never stopped seeing him was because of his need to carefully eye her in the midst of their screwing.

Every move she made, he quietly observed. His midnight blue eyes were large, and whenever he fucked her, she drowned in their depths. He had tanned skin, black hair and his high cheek bones and nose caused her to think he had Indian blood flowing through his hot veins. He could melt her, oh could he ever.

When Lauren sucked Simon's cock, he often wrapped her hair around his arm forming a band of sorts, and he always reserved an appreciative smile she imagined was just for her. When she rode on top, he looked up, as if to make certain he didn't miss a thing as he suckled her breasts and lapped at her nipples, caressing them with an obedient tongue, lavishing them with extraordinary attention to detail. In the missionary

position, he clasped her hands high above her head and continued gazing at her as he came and never picked up his pace even when she groveled.

God love his heart. He looked about nineteen although he was older and he could have taught every man on the planet how to perform better as a lover. He was remarkable, a sheer pleasure in bed.

A sexy treat with short dark hair that looked damp following the overuse of hair products, his curly bangs barely touched his brow, but when they did, never moved. Her fingers itched to pull the small locks free, but she somehow feared during intercourse wasn't the time.

So the man had a few issues with vanity, and she had a few problems keeping her pants up. Regardless, they made an unlikely team when their bodies slapped together.

Simon defined perfection in every way imaginable. His large size had made him a little hard to handle when she first started fucking him, but the six pack abs, and surfer-boy good looks, ensured the added effort was well worth the trouble. Whenever he took her to bed time stood still. That is, until he thrust inside and went completely rigid, a lovemaking tactic he used whenever she exploded around him.

He held onto her arms pinning them at her sides and made her truly feel the length of a man.

He always waited for her to orgasm first and he'd continue to poke and prod, holding out for his own release. The only thing he allowed her to use when she found her pleasure was her pelvic area, guaranteeing she remained drenched in lust, dying for more action. But he always delayed jerking inside her and for some reason his impossible self-control thrilled her.

Simon held her down, prohibited mobility, and watched her fall into the clutches of ecstasy. A broad smile covered his cheeks once he achieved his goal.

Only one other man made her come first. One other partner who challenged her on an intellectual level more than the rest, and yet he was a rebel. But he wasn't one without a true cause.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jason Lory could have given her anything she wanted. At one time he might have. He had proposed the year before and she'd said no, only because she assured him she wasn't the keeping kind. Sometimes she wished she'd given his offer a little more thoughtful consideration.

He cradled her in his arms after he'd sexed her one way and then another. For several hours they'd kissed, groped, fucked, and finally fondled their way right into another round or two of kissing, groping and more hard-core fucking.

"Roll over," he said again nearly two hours after their explicit romp began. She'd mistakenly thought they were finished.

"Jason, please give me a minute."

"No," he said, demanding what he wanted as much as showing her what he expected. He pushed for his way and soon, she found herself in a very familiar position, one all of her men had insisted on over the past week. Her palms rested

against the plush comforter and her hips were raised, her ass higher than what she considered a natural position. She bent her arms without the suggestion, getting somewhat used to the request.

Jason penetrated fast, licking her back slow and easy. He pumped his cock into her seven or eight times, released an animalistic sound, one resembling a low growl and withdrew shortly thereafter, roaring—a shocking sound coming from Jason—when he'd achieved another satisfying conclusion.

She wanted to find out what was different, what had changed in their love-making. She felt compelled to ask him what was with him and every other man in the county, but bit back the need, because to reveal her hand would be damning, hurtful to Jason. Maybe every man in Nashville recently read a men's magazine with an article entitled *Unveiling the Animal Within*. She still wasted little time complaining. "That hurt."

He tried to make it up to her with a little cuddling. "Come here, kitten."

"Did you call me kitten, and if so, why?"

"No reason," he said, rolling his tongue over his bottom lip.

"There must be at least one you can think of," she encouraged, thinking of how Jordan recently referred to her as a cat.

He lapped at her skin and bit at her ear in a

playful gesture. "It's because of your sweet pussy. It's like a Freudian slip."

And just like that, she let it go. A Freudian slip sounded believable enough.

"What are your plans for Christmas?" he asked breathlessly when he finally tucked her at his side.

"I haven't really thought about the holidays," she said, moving to her pillow.

His dark green eyes sparkled like the color of new money. "I want you to spend Christmas with me." Caressing her arm, he stared lovingly at her body waiting for her reply while moving his hands over her, cupping her breasts one minute, her hip the next, and even dipping his fingers between her legs to twirl them around her opening.

"Christmas Eve or Christmas Day?" she asked lazily, acting uninterested, but yet quickly revisiting past conversations with her other lovers. She would make arrangements and spend time with all of her boy toys, but since Jason asked first, he took precedence.

He held his tongue to his upper lip and closed one eye. "Let's see," he said. "How about we start with Christmas Eve and see where it leads? I bet I can keep you in heat for at least a couple of days."

"In heat?" She pressed her lips together for a moment while digesting this term. "So tell me, will we mate or fuck while we're enjoying our

eggnog?"

"Mating adds an extra zing to it, don't you think?"

No, she didn't. But after he gave her a taste of his animal sex, the truth had an alarming way of making her note the obvious. She was in heat or at least lust-ridden again, so she flipped onto her back and pulled him over her.

His cock hung at her vagina and his mouth tempted hers while he provided a shower of feathery kisses so soft they almost felt like whiskers caressing her lips. All the recent talk of cats and the maddening sex made for a keen imagination. She studied his neatly trimmed dark blond hair and noted how his new cut made him look very professional.

She missed the longer hair he once wore right below his ears. Jason needed the extra fur—hair—because like Jordan, Jason possessed big ears the naked eye wouldn't quite miss. With a fair complexion and sensual lips, he wasn't the most handsome man in the world, but where he lacked in looks, he made up for when he took a woman to his bed. She rolled her hips forward to serve as a reminder.

The kitty cat living within wanted the big bad lion to chase her into a dark, moist cave.

He plunged his fingers into her vagina, rotating and tapping against the tender walls, holding his

cock at the base with his other hand, but keeping it away from her grinding vicinity. "None of this until you give me your answer. Spend Christmas with me?"

Since his plans were the only solid ones offered at this point, why not? Even if his holiday invitation led into an overnight stay, she could regroup and make it back to her place by ten o'clock Christmas morning. And so what if she didn't? Her gentleman friends often kept her waiting, and turn about seemed like fair play.

"I'd love to spend Christmas with you."

"Christmas Eve it is," he said, nipping her lips and thrusting his cock back into the core of her sex. "I have a surprise for you," he said, fanning her hair over the pillow while stroking her. "And you'll really enjoy what I have in mind."

If it had to do with sex and Jason, then she was game. In fact, as long as his agenda included sex, she was happy, content, and for the time being, loved.

"When the average man shops for a ring, he isn't thinking of the gold band in the metaphorical sense.

He sees the symbolical meaning and finally understands.

While there are some things money can't buy, love is not one of them..."

— Jason Lory

CHAPTER SIX

Jason picked her up at six o'clock on Christmas Eve. She'd talked to Marcus, Jordan, Michael, and Simon right after work. She'd told them of her plans for the holidays and insinuated she'd spend time with family.

Jason could have been the only family she needed she reminded herself when he pulled in front of his multi-million dollar estate. Gulping when the iron gates parted ways, she digested that jagged little pill again while they continued to follow the long, circular driveway.

All of this could have been hers. From the massive Olympic-size swimming pool to the tennis court complete with a courtside hot tub, Jason lived a lavish lifestyle. The amenities on the property proved he had the money to support a rich man's hobbies.

Jason drove around to the back of the house. "Stay here."

His tone was mysterious and left her wondering. Strange, she thought, smoothing her hands over her little black dress, but she waited as he'd suggested. She retrieved her small handbag from the floor of his Hummer and pulled down the sun visor. Puckering her lips, she painted her mouth red and checked out her make-up. Tiny whiskers gleamed back from the reflection. Screeching, she pressed her nose practically against the mirror and nearly squinted in an effort to see the offending hair. She gasped again. There seemed to be a shadow of black displayed in an hourglass formation leading to a muzzle! Oh God, she thought. She blinked several times.

Lauren studied herself once more, though reluctant to make out a muzzle, never mind the whiskers. She focused on her lips again.

Breathing a sigh of relief when she didn't see the evidence of feline markings staring back at her for a second time, she glanced down at her black high-heeled shoes. Damn shoes were so uncomfortable, she thought. She wiggled her toes and laughed. *Feels like feet to me*, she reminded. *No paws here.*

Opening the door, Jason offered his hand. "Are you daydreaming about me or someone else?"

"I was just thinking about something."

"Something or someone?"

"Okay, you caught me," she teased, patting his

face. "Everything is always about you, isn't it?"

"Me and four or five others, huh?"

"Oh, Jason," she drawled. "You're such a visionary."

"Any truth found in my imagination?"

"No, hon, none at all." The lie slipped out so easily.

"You're sure?" he asked, drawing her close and kissing her on the lips.

"I'm positive," she said. "You're all the man I need."

At least for now, she reminded on the wings of a giggle. *Tomorrow is another story.*

Once inside, they bypassed a large buffet set up for more than two guests. "Expecting company?" she asked.

"Why? Would you like some?"

"Only if they're tall, sexy and devilishly handsome."

He tilted his chin upward and squared his shoulders. "Don't worry, sweetheart," he said, pulling out a chair in the massive dining room. "I only invited four other guests."

"Two other couples?" Maybe this was part of his 'surprise'. None of her lovers had ever socialized with her in public or introduced her to their friends and family.

He chuckled. "You'll have to wait and see." Reaching for the tea service cart, he retrieved a bottle of wine from the ice bucket. "Would you

prefer a white wine?"

"What do you have in your hand?"

"Would you like for me to teach you about wines now, darling?"

"I can't learn if I don't have a good instructor," she said, batting her eyelashes.

"Are we discussing wines or something else altogether?"

"Wines of course." And bedroom gymnastics, though she wasn't sure any one man had taught her everything she knew.

"I see," he said. "In that case, this bottle is a nineteen-ninety-five *Screaming Eagle Cabernet Sauvignon*. It's actually purple in color and one of my very favorites. It has a nice finish, easy on the palate."

She watched him pop the cork. "Like the fine wine, you're smooth and provide a nice flavor to the tongue."

He blushed. "I hope you'll think so in about an hour."

"What happens then?" she asked, studying the grandfather clock located near the foyer.

He lifted his chin and his nostrils flared. "Maybe sooner. On second thought, you're almost ready now."

"Almost ready for what?"

"Christmas heat, my sweet kitten. You'll enjoy this night more than you'll ever delight in another.

During the holiday season, you'll have everything you're meant to have in the most pleasurable ways possible."

She swallowed hard. He'd called her kitten again. That's when concern washed over her. Did her facial features remind men of a feline? If so, maybe she should consider electrolysis for hair removal and give some serious consideration to Botox. A loud boom sounded from upstairs, startling her.

"I'll be right back." He started up the spiral staircase with barely a glance in her direction. He ducked behind the massive artificial Christmas tree in the center of the upstairs hallway and disappeared.

"Jason? Is there someone up there?"

"Let me check it out," he called out. "Sit tight. I'll be right back."

Lauren paced in front of the bar and eyed the selections. Jason must have been expecting more than four guests originally. Either that or someone coming to the party had a mighty big appetite.

She thought of her own hunger and eyed the bright red strawberries chilling in serving bowls filled to the brim, several exotic cheeses and crackers on platters, nuts and caviar. Though the food looked scrumptious, she had the man munchies and the hunger for carnal fulfillment was unexplainable and excessively rich tonight.

Thinking about what she conceivably would later receive, she bypassed the finger foods and opted to wait for a more substantial fill. 'Tis the season. The more the merrier. The passing thought caused her to miss the other men who often shared her bed.

Sometimes Lauren imagined herself loving one man in a monogamous relationship. She thought of her ex-husband, the once trusted person who cut all ties with her after she readily admitted she harbored certain sexual cravings she couldn't control. A man with influence and political power, her ex-husband didn't want to remain married to a woman he quickly dubbed as a whore. He couldn't understand why she had needs he didn't fulfill, but once she openly confessed to having a problem with sex, he readily offered her to his friends at their lavish parties.

One particular dinner engagement, as she recalled, was designed to shame her. Mistakenly, she indulged in the men who took her husband up on his generous suggestion to join her in the bedroom.

He later used the incident to turn what could've been an amicable divorce into a very nasty battle. After her divorce was final, Lauren pursued other men, many of whom pushed for a commitment. Sometimes she even imagined telling them all about her dirty little secrets. As she thought of the

consequences, the pros and the cons, the heat licked at her pussy lips and the familiar drips of early lust teased and tormented her vagina.

A more profound urge than she'd experienced in the past drove her to steady her shaking knees. Placing her palms against her inner thighs, she slid her hands upward, stopping short of fingering herself.

Oh God, she thought. How she longed for the hands of all her men. She craved sex, the gift of the magic she found in their hard bodies and rigid cocks.

The fantasies tickled her womb and she realized a harrowing truth. She wanted to take all of them to bed and she was one step away from making the request.

Perhaps calling them together for an intimate meeting would expose her secrets, but inevitably place her into the hands of those ready to view her in a different light. A woman who disclosed her ravenous needs, explicit feelings, and uncanny ability to juggle five men would undoubtedly turn them on, wouldn't it?

No, she thought. Her expectations hardly justified what she knew of her companions. They were the kind of men who liked control, loved the one on one action they manipulated by insisting that she first meet their needs so they later complied and met hers as well. Jason in particular,

wouldn't share her, even if the others would consider a multiple partnership.

Her pussy continued to weep and burned with the sudden hot flames of desire. She thought of how her men pleased her on a physical level. She wasn't willing to forfeit the material personal advantages discovered in five lovers.

She nearly suffocated when she thought about the strong feelings she'd developed for each man in her life. Didn't they deserve to hear the truth straight from her lips? Maybe, she decided, but not during the holidays. After Christmas she'd consider her options again. If she still felt like the time was right she'd call them together and reluctantly – because the fear of losing one or all of them gnawed at her heart – tell them the truth.

A thump interrupted her future plans. She eyed the stairs. "Jason?" She inched closer to the handrail. "Jason? Is everything all right up there?" There was no response. Her heart pounded harder. "Jason, if you don't answer me, I'm coming up there!"

Really bright, genius, she thought. If someone lurked upstairs, perhaps an intruder, she made an obvious mistake. She'd announced her intentions, taking away the advantage of sneaking up on a possible trespasser.

Whoever waited at the top of the steps knew to expect her. She crept up the stairs on her tiptoes.

Cautiously, she inched her way down the hallway. Her heart thudded against her ribs. What would she find behind Jason's closed door? His body? Oh, God, surely not.

Fear centered in her stomach. She slowly turned the door handle, hesitating for a moment. Whoever hovered in the dark shadows beyond had the element of surprise in their favor.

And by golly and Christmas holly, they used it.

*"Every nymphomaniac hopes good sex will find her
And then transform her into the goddess she already
believes lives within..."*

– Simon Warner

CHAPTER EIGHT

The whole set-up was like a dream come true – and her fucking worst nightmare.

She pinched herself five times, the number of pinches strictly a coincidence, and decided this was most definitely a dream. She rubbed the sting in her arm.

Who the hell had come up with such a stupid practice anyway? She felt real emotions when she slipped into the dark abyss of sleep, and she could damn sure feel pain and all other sensations. Then there was the fact she'd enjoyed countless images where all of her men were active participants in fantasies guaranteed to dampen her panties. Pinching again served little purpose, but she twisted her skin anyway, blinking to make sure her eyes weren't deceiving her.

"Merry Christmas," her men chimed in together as soft light flickered. They were all decked out in Santa hats—nothing else—and waited with their dicks in hand.

"Oh my God," she muttered, trying to keep her eyes from meeting Jason's hot gaze, one she translated as lust rather than anger, thank God. Then again, they were in his house. Presumably, if anyone put this private party together, he had orchestrated the whole holiday surprise.

"Merry Christmas," Jason said, leaning over and kissing her cheek. "This is our gift to you."

"But how did you know?" she asked, feeling more euphoric than usual and unsure if she should partake in the celebration or run like hell while she still had a fighting chance.

Jason's eyes held her to a challenge. "Did you really think I wouldn't notice your other lovers? I've been sharing you with four men, for God's sake!"

"Sharing?" she asked.

"That's what we've all been doing, right?" Jordan chimed in, seemingly amused.

"Yes, but isn't this a little uncomfortable for all of you?" she asked, focusing on Simon's face and finding his expression, as always, hypnotic.

"You don't find it preposterous to keep five men bidding for your time?" Simon asked. He watched her while stroking his cock, clasping his hand around his thick and meaty erection.

She bet he'd come in her presence even if she refused to touch him. They had a spectacular chemistry and she turned him on without a lot of

effort. Then again, he might return the favor. He could look at her and drive her forward with those orgasmic eyes.

Lauren studied them independently. "I couldn't choose between you."

Jason smirked. "You won't have to, kitten."

Somehow, the way he called her kitten didn't bother her now. She was in fact wet with a fascinating need to fuck.

"She's excited. I smell her arousal now," Michael announced, waiting casually on Jason's bed. His cock glistened with lube. He performed quite frankly the most aggressive hand-job she'd ever enjoyed watching.

The others acted like they didn't notice. Michael's back arched. His head dipped, and he pumped his dick in and out of his hand with fast and ferocious speed, adding the occasional ooh or ahh for her added distraction. No one else appeared overly interested in Michael's need for self-exploitation, or rather, his obvious desire to achieve an orgasm.

She paid attention, close attention. In fact, she noticed something else too. Michael as handsome as he was, seemed to change before her very eyes. His body bulged with a more muscular appearance. Facial hair appeared as if the tiny particles decided to bloom all at once, rather than provide him with the luxury of gradual growth

forming a stubbly beard.

His tongue darted in and out, but rather than entice her with a waggle of one of his greatest assets, he gave his chops a long, savory swipe across what now appeared as a muzzle rather than his mouth. His nostrils flared and he crooked what was left of a forefinger, rapidly transforming into a claw, back and forth.

“Come over here, little pussy cat. Let me show you why this will be the best Christmas of your life.”

Thank God she’d started up the steps with her large wine goblet in hand. She turned that sucker up and downed it until not a drop remained in the clear crystal stemware. Too bad she hadn’t thought to bring the bottle.

Jason looked devastated. “You don’t gulp a glass of wine from a two-thousand dollar vintage just because you’re caught in a trap. By the way, darling, in case you haven’t noticed,” he said kicking the door closed. “The trap has already snapped and you’re fair game behind these locked doors.”

The sound of the door slamming alerted her senses. Each of her nerve endings independently found a fuse, a spark to ignite each feeling as her body became lit with lust and the kind of desire she wasn’t able to taper. If Jason thought he’d scared her, he was wrong. She was excited and

anxious to find out what they held in store.

She placed her hands on the small of her back. "I always heard there's a true season for everything. A time to behave—which I'm obviously not going to do—and a time to pretend you were intoxicated as hell when you weren't."

"One glass of wine didn't get you drunk," Jason pointed out.

"Maybe it's her medication," Simon suggested and prompted a room full of sneers.

"I'm high on something," she admitted, agitated that Simon mentioned something so absurd.

"It's called desire," Marcus added, stalking forward. "We know something about lust, don't we, Michael?"

Naturally, he'd say yes. Michael didn't have a problem with slipping into the role of a yes-man when his cock was involved, and his dick was definitely earning its own right to an opinion. He stroked his erection again, up and down. The ridges of his foreskin strained tight while he worked hard to achieve his goal.

Since he'd formed some sort of alliance with Marcus, she could only imagine what he might agree to, especially while he had a rock-hard distraction. Marcus smacked his lips and walked toward the bed. Dropping down on his knees, he shocked her, wowed her actually, when he yanked

Michael forward and planted a sensual man-on-man kiss right on his ready lips.

Michael stopped yanking his cock and grabbed Marcus's fingers, encouraging him to feel him. "This could have been a real stinger, Lauren," he said, groaning, eyeing Marcus while he worked his shaft into a masculine hand. "But I forgive you."

She didn't apologize.

"Ah yeah," Michael said, leaning back on both elbows. "That's it, bitch. Keep it hard for me."

"Bitch?" she asked, gulping. *Did Michael really call Marcus his bitch?* She pressed her palms to her sides and tried to work her black dress over her hips. Maybe if they saw tits and ass, they'd pay more attention to her and less to one another.

Surprisingly, they didn't stop to gape. Michael focused on Marcus's cock and she was highly aroused by their performance.

The way the two men played fascinated her. Still, she couldn't help but feel a wave of jealousy shoot through her heart. When Michael and Marcus were in her bed, they were fucking machines and never left her without a satisfied smile. She longed for some of their loving, but they only had eyes for each other.

She hiked her skirt up and noticed the amusement dance across Jason's face. With his back to the wall, he stood next to Simon and

Jordan who also seemed less interested in her and more concerned with the ass action beginning on the bed.

Gasping, Lauren felt her jaw quiver when she watched Marcus lie on the bed, taking the place Michael previously occupied. Marcus and Michael pressed their foreheads together, their gazes held in some sort of unbreakable silent bond and then they butted heads.

Michael roared and Marcus sneered. Michael pushed Marcus down on the bed and they wrestled like mad. Marcus was on top, then Michael perched high above throwing his weight around with a rare determination to apparently mount a man. Marcus again took the lead and Michael twisted his way around Marcus's body and dominated once more. Their dicks slapped together and their hands locked. Wildly, they nipped at one another, their lips meeting and parting, while their dicks tapped together.

Another animalistic call to the wild made her swivel around and watch the three men behind her. They were flirting with one another! God help her, what was going on here?

They touched each other intimately, brushing their fingers up and down their dicks in unusual and exquisite patterns. Soon, they fondled with aggression, taking possession of the hands they held, the cocks they pumped, groping and

moaning, working toward release.

Shaking her head she couldn't turn away and wouldn't have refocused her attention at all, but a sudden sound ripped through the room and she flinched when she heard what sounded like complete arousal coupled with defiance and anger. She heard another wildly obsessive roar and immediately eyed the bed where two men had wrestled.

Now, a massive lion with a beautiful golden mane covering his neck and comb lay across the mattress. The long mane stopped short of encompassing the forelegs and shoulders, and part of the hair draped over Marcus when Michael straddled him.

"Damn it, Michael, give me a minute!" Marcus chanted, his hand wrapping his cock tightly as this beast, this most magnificent creature, proceeded to climb in a visible struggle to tower over his prey.

"Michael?" she asked, tears swelling in her eyes, but not because she was sad or even scared. She was, in fact, dying to trade places, stretch out in front of the lion and let him take her, hold her like he pinned Marcus under him and lose her hands in the mat of fur covering his muscular chest and framing his beautiful face. As a man, Michael was sexy. As a lion, oh God, he was spectacular.

She gazed into the eyes of the lion. Pawing at

Marcus with his claws retracting, Michael nuzzled his back, trying to mount with an extended penis so peculiar in size and shape, she winced, while watching his efforts rebound.

Marcus rolled over to face his mate, the man-beast ready to take him, but visibly withstanding the need to make his move right then. One turn and then another. Slowly, Marcus developed the markings of the lion. His black mane encircled his neck. The creature's hind legs and flanks appeared as toned as the beast behind him, only Marcus had a smaller form. He was still a good three hundred pounds and even as a shifted animal, apparently horny.

The nuzzling and caressing began, the apparent teasing of the lion, and then he mounted at once. Thrusting inside, Michael entered his male mate, but the humping didn't last long.

Lauren's mouth opened, her pulse rate increased. She watched the lions mate and wondered about herself then. Why was her pussy clenching in anticipation? Why did she want to see the lion's penis? She certainly didn't want to fuck a lion, did she? How perverted had she become?

No, she mused. How absurd. Completely insane. Wasn't it?

Marcus bottomed for Michael and Michael hammered inside him, beating toward his release as soon as he began penetration. When he

finished, he licked Marcus's back, romancing the lion providing the service. Then he moaned, smacked Marcus's tail root with his paw and withdrew, gaining defiance the second his penis left Marcus's body.

She watched the man and the beast roll over the mattress again. What kind of bed and box springs did Jason have designed in order to accommodate their weight? She copped an uncomfortable smile watching the three men—those remaining in human form—continue their play for one another's hand, or perhaps an ass, while they stood against the same solid wall. Why did all of this seem so natural when she should have found their actions bizarre and those of the lions terrifying?

Simon watched her with an endearing expression. She really hoped the others hadn't talked him into something he didn't want to do.

"Turn that frown upside down," Jordan teased. "Tonight and all others following, you're off the hook. We belong to you."

"You do?" Damn if she didn't hope so. She was horny, dying to get laid by man or beast, by fingers or penises, but nonetheless...laid! And Jordan had spoken the sweetest words a man could utter.

"Yes," Jason said. "Normal men might be angry to discover you have five boyfriends, but then

again, most men don't know what we know about shifter mates."

"Mates?" she asked.

"You've been assigned to us. You are ours," Simon explained. "And your care will take all of us. Five mates are required to keep you happy, especially while you're in heat."

Jason grinned. "You nailed that one."

"You'd better believe it," Marcus said, shifting back to human form and eyeing Michael with a little resentment and a lot of lust.

Weren't they cute? The good old boys club, or should she refer to them as the lion coalition, definitely intrigued her and they were sexy as all hell regardless of their form.

She accepted this was a dream, the confines of a very vivid fantasy. If she woke up before the final act played out, she was going to have a serious chat with Saint Peter. She clasped her hand over her mouth. "Oh no," she said.

She looked at the men who had been at the core of her personal life for many months. She studied their expressions and noticed how remarkably calm each man seemed, even in the wake of their recent discovery. Even Michael's sudden shift didn't seem to faze them.

There was only one explanation.

She was dead.

Why sure, that clarified everything. At some

point between Jason picking her up and arriving at his mansion, she'd died and gone to—she gasped in acknowledgement—was she trapped between a heaven for animals and one for men? Or, worse still, were they all in hell? Either way, life as she'd known it, was undoubtedly over.

CHAPTER NINE

“You aren’t dead,” Jason assured her after she voiced her inner fears. “Yet,” he added with a wink.

“We may fuck the life out of you,” Marcus told her, looping his arm around her waist and working her short dress over her hips. His hands were rough, like a cowboy’s, which was a little odd. Marcus used to have smooth hands. Now, they were calloused, but so damn arousing. She found him even more alluring after watching him rumble around with another lion.

“What color panties are you wearing?” Jordan asked from across the room, lighting the candles on the fireplace mantle. Vaguely she noticed the room filled with dozens of flickering candles now sending eerie shadows over the walls. It added a very romantic touch to the room. Someone had turned off the lights, the only illumination now glittered from the flames. The fireplace crackled. And where had those vases of blood red roses

come from? Were they there when she'd entered the room? She really hadn't paid attention. Her focus had been and still remained, on her five men.

Lauren pursed her lips. She didn't like the fact they directed their gazes and comments to one another more than they spoke to her. They made her feel like she was there for one purpose—to serve them up a hearty, sexually explicit Christmas dinner.

"I'm betting on a thong," Michael stated flatly, picking up his flaccid cock and working it into a tempting hard on again. Even after the kind of sex she'd watched him engage in earlier, he still had desires and she knew who he craved. Her name was on his lips, branded there. And the way he studied her mouth was almost as if he touched his tongue to her lips and sealed them with an unstoppable kiss.

Jason smirked. "She doesn't wear a thong when she's with me. Her ass is bare tonight, gentleman."

Marcus shoved his hand under the bunched silky black material like a greedy lion in search of a mate. His lips twitched and he cupped his hand under her vagina. "She's drenched."

She stood on her tiptoes, stretching so she could taste his lips. He snaked his arms around her hips and lapped at her mouth. Soon, she felt the whiskers of the lion appear and his paw cupped

under her pussy.

"Oh my God," she whispered.

"Like that, do you?" he asked.

"Rub," she said, clutching his face to her own and kissing his nose, nuzzling him in encouragement to bring about the full shift.

"No," he said, releasing her with a quick swat to her bottom. "We'll have time for that later."

Lauren felt like she'd landed in the middle of a gentleman's club complete with attentive men and their highly sexual counterparts—the beasts they shifted into on a moment's notice. Only, Lauren wasn't the only object of their affection. Oh no, her men possessed several objectives. They wanted sex from one another as much as they evidently planned to use her body. She didn't believe in postponing the fucking or the mating for that matter.

They had all the time in the world, but wasting one minute of erotic pleasure waiting to unfold was like jumping out of a plane without a parachute. Sure, the rush was nice, but what did one have when they landed without the appropriate gear? Nothing, and there wasn't a damn thing to help them avoid the crash at the end.

She didn't want to miss a second of their time together for fear it would all end too soon. And then what would she have? Too few memories,

and she wanted her share of them. There were five men there to enjoy. If she later experienced a quick let down, she wanted to capture the mental images before she started her descent downward, assuming she'd ever crash at all.

"A soldier leaves for war and hopes the hard battle ahead will not take his life.

A woman with multiple personalities leaves for an institution and hopes a life of confinement will not break her spirit...

— Jordan St. Johns

CHAPTER TEN

The men in Lauren's life always showered her with affection, but tonight they seemed overly interested in one another. Even though her fellows didn't really know one another, at least she presumed they didn't, they were particularly chummy. Their purpose went beyond friendly flirtation and easy conversation. Foreplay and fondling showcased their obvious goal of leading one another to bed.

Their interest in each other sexually, stimulated and drove her curiosity. The group maintained relaxed physical positions, but tense facial expressions. Their eyes danced with amusement, but their features tightened, until soon Lauren noticed another transformation. With a sudden gasp, she paid attention to something far too outlandish to interpret.

Her handsome fellows transitioned into lions again, this time without any noted stimulus other than their noses tilted high in the air and a gleam

in their eyes she recognized as lust. Pawing at the carpet, a few places were torn from the impact. Michael in particular seemed uneasy, but rather anxious to make her his next full course meal.

Jason approached her, keeping his distance—though barely—his body forming a complete circle around her. His neck rubbed against her torso and his upper and lower jaws shifted to show pronounced teeth. A roar left his throat, and with his paw he swatted at her crotch.

“Stop, damn it.”

He swatted again. All of the lions seemed to laugh with her when she rubbed her body over his back. “Tease me again and I’ll clip your ears.”

The lions turned to eye Jason and they stared at his unusually large lion ears as well. She might later regret the statement if Jason didn’t let her use his human ears to steady herself when she needed them the most.

Swallowing once, she turned with him afraid to keep her back to him while he acted like an animal stalking his prey. Again, she heard the low rumble, the undeniable animalistic noise.

The others joined in and when they turned the sounds into a group sport her body shivered, but anxiety didn’t wash over her. She was aroused. Turned on by the sound, the intense heat in the room rose with the mutual attraction and an apparent connection the men formed without her

encouragement. Something about this day, this moment, stood out as life-changing. She had a feeling her life would never be the same after Christmas Eve.

Jason motioned for Jordan with a rapid toss of his head. Then, he covered her hand with his paw, forcing her to fall to the ground under him. Oh, heaven help her! The soft texture of a paw rather than a hand caressed rather than nicked. He patted her with the pad, making a quick play for something more intimate and swatting her mound once again. Jerking her arm back, she stared down at another transformation.

"Jason? What's happening?" Her heart pounded against her chest observing Jason now locked between a human form and a shifted lion. She heard the thumping in her ears, the sound of a wild and erotic beat. The roaring of the tide as it thundered onto pristine sands. Did she imagine a tune? Hear a song? The sound of drums continued their staccato rhythm.

"Turn around," Jason said softly while pulling her to him so he could give her a whirl.

The drum banging grew louder and louder. She looked up to meet heated stares, but instead of finding eyes of men, she glared into the eyes of man's most feared beasts. Their voices were sharp with defined roars. They bared their teeth and circled her and each other. "Jason!" she wailed.

"What's going on here?" She quickly looked away from the lions, their intimidating muscular bodies and their cold, hungry eyes.

"You can't run, Lauren," he said evenly. "You will not escape."

"Escape?" They wanted to harm her?

"Yes," he said. "There's no way you can get away from all of us and we outweigh you in your human state by several hundred pounds independently."

"You don't say?" She eyed the lions again.

They seemed to smile at her and behind the eyes of each, she saw the familiar gazes of the men who had shared her bed. The seductive way they blinked made her forget the danger most people saw when they looked into a lion's eyes set under chiseled foreheads, high above their noses and muzzles.

Jason eased behind her, bracketing his thick arms around her. One limb fell against her waist like a human's arm, muscular and limber. The other gripped with a soft paw flat against her abdomen and claws scraping across her middle. "Don't move," he hissed. "This situation must be handled delicately so you have to trust me."

She dared to look down the length of her body taking in the characteristics of both man and feline. Should she try to run, or was running, as Jason suggested, a waste of her energy?

Biting at her nape, he said, "We're here to complete the five rings of pleasure and claim you as our mate."

"Your mate?" she asked. "That's funny." Ha. Ha. Ha.

She assumed the feline inching closer was Marcus, enchanted by the beautiful dark markings she'd spotted before. His nostrils flared and he bucked his head up and down her body, rubbing her into a heightened state of perception.

Jason tried to intrude. "Marcus, stop. You'll scare her."

He continued forward, a predatory walk, a lion in pursuit of something to eat, potentially devour. He bypassed her and went straight for Jordan.

Thank God, she thought. Not that she wanted Jordan to suffer, but since he seemed trapped inside a lion's skin, he was certainly better equipped to handle the situation of a large beastly pursuit. Changing his mind, Marcus butted his head against her pussy before moving on to Jason's cock. Moaning aloud, Jason tried to push Marcus away, only to have the lion retreat and come back again.

"He must be trying to tell you something," she said.

"Yeah," Jason assured her. "He's horny."

"Oh," she said quietly. "Imagine."

"About the five rings," Jason said, rubbing

Marcus between the ears like he was a housecat rather than at the top of the food chain, he continued with his explanation. "In order to complete the circle of love, we must earn our place in your den. Once your five rings or realms of pleasure are marked by the lion pride, your mating process will begin."

"My what?"

"Your den is metaphorical way of explaining things. For the next few days, you will mate twenty to forty times a day, but you may not realize when you're ready for us so we'll come into your den when your scent lures us. Since you're in heat, you'll have strong desires, a lust you won't be able to control, and at times you'll need all five rings of pleasure stimulated."

"What the hell are you talking about, Jason? Five rings? Mating? Twenty to forty times a day for several days? Are you mad?"

"No," he said. "And frankly, I'm rather excited by the idea."

Apparently Marcus was as well. He inched forward, stalking Jason again.

Damn it. She wanted Marcus to pursue her!

Jason's feline eyes took form and Marcus used his long tongue to lick the length of Jason's back. Shivering, Jason said, "Knock it off, Marcus. I need to finish explaining...the—"

Marcus nipped at Jason's exposed human cock.

"Fucking prick!"

"I'll say," Lauren said. "Apparently he doesn't want you to have yours."

The two lion-men glared at one another.

"Please go on about this mating thing," she said, tapping her foot and crossing her arms. She was seconds away from throwing a good old fashioned bitch fit. She already wanted to claw Jason's eyes out. Thinking of her nails as claws, she felt a strange sensation and immediately stuck her hands out in front of her body and studied her nails. "What is happening to me?"

Awareness apparently inspired growth, and her nails took the shape of claws before rescinding into her nail bed again, leaving her with the same French manicure she had earlier. Taking a peek at her feet, she breathed a sigh of relief when she realized her shoes remained in place. *Still no paws. Thank God.*

"We will take you as men and as lions. You'll succumb to our desires as both lioness and woman. Best of all, we're here to walk you through the entire process from start to finish. Let the mating begin, kitten."

He eyed her breasts and when he moved around her, she saw the appearance of whiskers again. Oh God, she thought. "You're starting right now?"

"Leave this to us," he said, paying Marcus no

mind when he placed his nose to her crotch and growled in what translated as something mighty close to pain.

"What's he doing?" she asked, shivering.

Jason stifled a grin when Marcus nudged him in the groin as well.

"Great," she said. "I guess he wants you as much as he wants me? I needed such an ego boost."

"He does," Jason said. "Males and females in our pride often have homosexual relationships. It's typical and expected for males to mount other males." He eyed Michael and she watched as his tongue slivered across Jordan's back.

Jordan immediately attacked, pouncing on top of Michael in an effort to make one thing clear. He wasn't in the mood to play the part of any lion's bitch.

She shivered in excitement. Did that mean her darkest fantasies unraveled right before her eyes? She looked across the room at the beautiful feline eyes studying her. Jordan and Michael tilted their noses in the air, lapping at their whiskers.

"Do they know—"

"Yes," Jason told her. "We smell your scent."

Marcus suddenly leaped and Jason shifted into his complete lion form, striking Marcus with his front paw to ward him off and send him away. He didn't retreat. Oh no, if he smelled her heat,

Marcus wouldn't go far. She knew too much about the man's sexual drive to believe he'd slump into the shadows to observe and pout.

Lurching again, Marcus nipped at her ass and whipped around the front of her body, rubbing his head between her legs.

"Stop!" she screeched, but it was too late. He worked her legs apart and whirled her into the air until she landed on her back.

The lions gathered around her. The pride formed a circle around the lioness they must have now viewed her as. Jordan's long tongue swiped across her full breasts and her nipples pressed into the soft material of a dress she considered all but ruined. Again, he lapped at her nipples, this time covering her body in order to secure her under him.

Instantly she thought, two rings of pleasure. Three remaining. What the hell? How could she know such a thing? She eyed Michael and he slowly bobbed his head twice as if he understood what she might be thinking. Then he raised his paw and clawed at the material until the shredded dress draped over her middle and he licked across her mound. "What are you doing?"

Jordan's gaze was piercing. He expected her to know.

The third ring, she mused.

Jason and Marcus fought like true lions,

nipping and biting until one of them conceded. Marcus eased closer in an attempt to nuzzle her, but when she brushed him away, he deliberately straddled her body and his tufted tail brushed her mouth, and they all moved away abruptly.

She shivered in excitement, understanding now. They were leaving her on the floor to begin her own transformation and she instantly realized when Marcus nipped at her ass he had claimed the first ring of pleasure.

And just like that, she belonged to the pride.

"She was like the current dragging back and forth under the wide open sea unsure of which way to go, but realizing her path was already determined and etched in grains as fine as sand...."

— Michael Mahoney.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Two hours later...

Jason carried her to the bed. Lowering his lips to hers, he professed his endearment. "I'm in love with you," he whispered. "I've been in love with you since the day I first saw you."

She kissed him lightly on the lips. "I don't understand."

"You're my mate," he said. "When I discovered there were four more men in your life, I could barely contain the enthusiasm knowledge brought. See, you have an...illness. And because of your human...illness, a coalition of lions are required to take you and handle your volatile shifting periods."

She didn't know what he was talking about. *Illness? Absolutely not.* She was as healthy as a horse, or a lioness, which was actually the case. Rather than argue because no one ever won when matching wits with Jason, she listened, eager to

discover more.

"When you're in heat, you'll mate with any lion, often searching outside of the pride when the coalition is unavailable. Without the pride, the long mating periods would leave you exposed to men who only want your body and lions that could potentially kill you."

She hated to tell him, but she hadn't noticed a lot of lions parading around Nashville or pulling up a chair at the *Bluebird Café*.

"As a shifter, you'll mate as a lioness as well as a human and the pride will service you while you're in heat."

"Twenty to forty times a day?"

"Yes," he said, grinning. "I thought you'd like that part most."

"I still don't understand. Why didn't you tell me about this from the beginning?"

"We couldn't put you at risk," Jason said. "We'll never put you in danger."

She was confused. What risk?

Simon reached for her when Jason pressed her body against the bed. He held her hand and brushed his lips up and down her arm. Her nerve endings were sensitive and Simon's mouth made chill bumps scatter across her flesh, tickling her all the way to the bone. Michael moved closer. Jordan observed, his cock in hand, eyeing Michael with a lust-filled stare. Marcus knelt on the bed next to

her cheek.

"I can't have sex with all of you at one time," she told them.

Jordan chuckled. The negotiator from within came out and he was ready to take control, show her the plans he'd made well in advance. "Positioning has been decided," he said. "Remember when Jason explained the five rings?"

She didn't consider Jason's words a full explanation. If anything, he danced around too much information until she was certain she knew no more about this little gang bang than she did at the start. Of course, she guessed and imagined, somewhat accurately, about the metaphorical meaning behind the five rings.

"We want this experience to please you," Simon told her. "We've marked where we thought the rings were when you were in your shifted state, now it's time to claim, or rather activate them while you're in human form."

She shook her head. "Wait a second. I transformed into a lion?"

They laughed. A group chuckle that grew uncomfortable all at once when she studied them with deliberate expectation hopefully locked in her gaze. "Well?"

"You had sex with all of us while you were *a lioness*," Jordan informed. "And you were a little wild cat if I do say so myself." He fingered the

visible claw marks across his chest. She noticed they all wore them, across their torsos, up and down their arms, marked on their cheeks, and even quite close to their groin area. And they wore them rather proudly.

Jordan sat behind her, pulling her body over his when he leaned back. Lubes and condoms were passed around on a silver tray. Her Santas had lost their hats hours ago. Now, Jordan and Jason suited up in a familiar packaging, choosing from a multitude of colors much like the Christmas lights attached to the miniature tree located beside the large four-poster bed.

Simon and Marcus delayed rolling a condom over their erections and there wasn't any question where they planned to fit their gifts. Marcus stayed parallel to her right shoulder. Michael knelt between her parted legs, a condom in hand, but not fitted for size, and Jason straddled her left thigh.

"Penetration," she mumbled. "All five of you are going to—"

Jordan ran his finger over her bottom. She felt the tip of a lubricant tube when he parted her globes.

"No," she said. "I've never wanted to have—" She felt the head of Jordan's dick at her ass. Jason and Michael aimed their cocks at her pussy. "Okay, maybe two or three, but not five. Five

won't work."

Jason winked. "We're all going to take this slow. Don't you trust me?"

Trust, she thought. A man who told her to trust him generally had one thing on his mind. She glanced down at Jason's swollen tip. No doubt, he didn't stand out as different. He was like any other member of his self-serving gender.

Jordan didn't press inside her rear passage, but he parted her cheeks and let her feel him waiting there. His lips latched onto her nape, kneading her skin in a highly erotic gesture.

Jason and Michael inched closer to her wet folds and she felt their cocks, anticipating her compliance, maybe just tempting her, teasing her into encouraging them. Marcus ran his hand through his dark hair and Simon rubbed the tip of his dick across her lip. God help her, she was hungry. Dying for the experience and so scared she almost talked herself out of taking the first initiative.

"You've already had unprotected sex with us in the past, but there's a reason for condoms now. The lion's penis scrapes against the female's vagina and when you shift back into your human form, some of the damage can't be undone. During your first seasonal mating, you're more likely to get pregnant, especially since you'll have sex anywhere from twenty to forty times a day."

"I can't get pregnant," she stated flatly.

"Why?" Simon asked, cupping her cheek.

"Because," she said, feeling the presence of every hard dick in the room. "I've had my tubes tied."

Jason touched her leg. "Yes, but after a first successful shift, your tubes are no longer secured."

"Are you sure?" she asked, smiling. She tried to stop the tears from creeping into her eyes. Her ex-husband had required her to have her tubes tied and she'd wanted nothing more than to have a little baby of her own.

"Positive," Simon said.

Licking the tip of Simon's dick, she tasted the pre-cum and came undone. Everything seemed perfect then. Gripping both cocks, she slipped her mouth over Marcus and took him to the back of her throat. Releasing him, she gazed into Simon's appreciative eyes and allowed him to slide all the way to her throat next. They took turns like perfect gentlemen. Enticed by the pleasure she saw she brought them, she almost didn't notice how Jordan's cock was only one slip away from full impalement.

Continuing to suck and release, Lauren pleased two men and waited for Jordan to shift forward. "Ah gods," she screamed, releasing Simon's cock from locked jaws when Jordan finally entered her ass.

"You're okay, baby," Jordan told her, slipping inside the tight space found in her anal canal and this time thrusting hard.

Marcus and Simon moved away when her body went rigid. They suckled her breasts in an effort to help her forget the new intrusion and their mouths brought plenty of pleasure in the process.

"You're doing fine," Jordan assured her, nipping at her shoulder, gripping her waist. "Just relax. Ah yes, darling. This is the beginning of something truly beautiful."

Of course he'd think so. He didn't have a dick in his ass!

Jason and Michael waited. They looked as if they expected a full shift from discomfort into true bliss and as they watched, her body opened up in acceptance. With every stroke, Jordan stretched her and his slow moves prepared her for the next impalement. Her pussy clenched in anticipation.

Now, she was left to wonder whether Jason or Michael would penetrate first and the excitement found in the unknown continued to build. Jordan's strokes galvanized with the kind of dark pleasure she wanted to capture again and again.

Jason's hand caressed her inner thigh while Michael moved his cock closer to her body, the swell of his head positioned and waiting. With a lopsided grin, Michael nudged Jason out of the way with his cheek and dropped his lips over her

clit for a quick, heaven-sent swipe.

A gush of excitement pooled at her opening. She wanted them to take her in every way possible. She longed for, desperately needed, a man stroking her, loving her, locking himself into her body and riding out the longest of orgasms, the hottest of releases.

The kink factor weighed in and Jason delivered another swipe, nearly drawing out her first orgasm when his teeth locked around the little bud. Jordan ground against her ass and his body bumped behind hers with enough force to encourage Marcus and Simon to move away.

Michael's hands roamed over her lower body, one at her hip, the other cupped under Jordan's balls, his fingers twirling into her pussy while Jason pumped his thick cock.

Jason nodded toward Jordan. Simon and Marcus clasped her hands over their cocks, encouraging her to move their cocks in and out of her closed fists. Instantly, they helped her perform hand jobs so rapidly she almost didn't notice when Jason placed his hands flat against either side of her hips and Jordan's. Quick as lightning, he slipped inside her walls, burying himself to the root.

Jason pushed deep inside her pussy, a wicked expression covering his face. "This is what you wanted for Christmas, isn't it, sweetheart?"

Surely he didn't expect her to speak.

Jordan thrust inside her ass. Marcus pressed harder and harder into her hand while Michael held himself at the base until his body apparently required some of the action. Moving next to her cheek, he tilted her chin, forcing her to turn her head to the side where he rubbed his engorged penis over her lips until soon the salty taste of his cum leaked onto her mouth. Pressing himself between her lips, he slid across her tongue until her throat was well coated with his salty and very masculine taste.

"That's it, baby. Suck. I'm almost done, lover. Let me have what I need," he cooed, stroking her cheek while Jordan and Jason continued to fuck her. Marcus and Simon kept their hands locked over her long fingers until they rocked in tandem, moving so quickly, they held onto each other's broad shoulders forming a tent over the bodies under them.

Jordan and Jason's pace changed. They fucked her in a pronounced rhythm. Jason's breathing changed and he eyed the tips of the dicks she held in hand. As if his piercing gaze inspired their release, the two men lost their ability to hold back. Masculine cries filled the room until her stomach was coated with the sticky aftermath of their pleasure.

Marcus eyed Michael's cock after Michael

withdrew from her mouth. Leisurely, he caressed her stomach, encircling her breast with the clear substance they left in the wake of their orgasms.

After Marcus slipped from the bed, Jason dipped his head working to claim the breasts he wanted lavished. His tongue danced between nipples, twirling over and under the fullness of each nipple as if he promised to adorn them with the most explicit admiration. He devoured her then. His mouth, tongue, and teeth involved in what brought complete oral entertainment when he moaned and groaned against her flesh.

Jordan's cock stamped its place deep inside her passage. "Relax, Lauren. I can't come unless you relax!"

Those were his famous last words. Like a rocket launch, his cock zipped into her ass with a higher rate of speed. His release warmed her, nearly prepared her for her own while Jason's knocked the wind out of her. His heavy balls slapped her bottom after Jordan's diminished size made for a much more comfortable screw.

Tightly, they rocked her back and forth. The timing of their releases neatly orchestrated, they screwed themselves into her channels and clutched to the pleasure as their orgasms arrived. Without resistance, she gave in to her passion, pulling Jason to her when she came and draping her arms over his hairy back.

When Jordan and Jason left her body, Simon pulled her to him. He slid the colorful rubber over his length and fingered her moist center. A sideways grin formed his lips. Then, he entered her for the first time. At the same moment, Jordan literally pounced on Jason. To her delight, she watched the men fuck in their human form. Jordan draped his leg over Jason's shapely thigh and penetrated from the front, pressing Jason's knee to his chest as he thrust between his globes.

Watching two of the men she loved love one another made her lust all the more pronounced. She locked her legs around Simon's waist, but this time, her head tilted to the side.

She admired the way Jordan pumped his cock into Jason's ass, slow and easy, taking his time to ensure the build-up arrived at a good time, a nice pleasure waiting to engulf them. Wrapping his hand around Jason's thick size, Jordan's mouth opened. Pushing himself higher and higher into Jason's ass, both men screamed.

Gasping, Lauren eyed the white creamy substance working around the point of penetration, encircling Jordan's cock. Her mouth watered as she watched Jason's cum spray high across his belly, soaking Jordan's thick knotty knuckles. "Simon," she whimpered as he thrust higher and higher into her pussy. "Oh my God, this is better than one on one, isn't it?"

She noticed he eyed Jason's cream-coated belly. "Ah yes, baby. It's much better."

Her orgasm ripped through her body, spinning into her vagina, sending a wave of heat between her legs. She jerked in his arms. "Simon!"

"I'm here," he said. "I'll never leave you."

He placed his palms on either side of her head and fucked her like a wild man, his eyes changing from a man's gaze to the eyes of the lion and back to a man's again. Apparently unable to gain full control over his shifts, he roared so loud the others moved closer to observe.

Simon knew what she needed. He was a lion who wouldn't abandon his lioness when she needed to copulate. Her needs weren't average and her pride must have realized her desires would take the strongest of coalitions to sate, if not tame, her.

*"She was a victim placed at circumstance's door.
A woman who held her head high as she searched for
pride.*

*Lauren Duran was there for a reason, for a purpose
larger than anyone understood.*

*So they acted as men and did what anyone else
would in their position.*

*They made her crazy... and they made the diagnosis
stick.*

Then, they brought her forward and loved her..."

—Fran Conway, Broken Dreams Recovery Center

CHAPTER TWELVE

Christmas Day...

“Lauren Duran,” the intercom rang throughout the corridor. “The doctor will see you now. Lauren Duran. Please proceed down the hallway to Dr. Simon Warner’s office.”

Lauren rolled over on her side and stared at her wooden bedside table, the only furniture in her small psychiatric hospital room other than her bed. She smiled when she spotted what looked like a small box wrapped in red, adorned with green and silver ribbons and a matching bow.

“It’s Christmas,” she reminded herself, scooting up on her mattress.

“Lauren?” A nurse appeared in the doorway. “Dr. Warner is waiting to see you.”

“But I’m not dressed,” she said, standing.

“Hon,” the nurse said. “We go over this every day. Here at *Broken Dreams Recovery Center*, you don’t have to dress to see the doctor. You can go to

his office in your pajamas. Just put your robe on and you'll look fine. He's only on this floor for a few minutes. Since he's working on Christmas day, play nice for him."

"Oh," she said, reaching for her terrycloth red and white robe. "I'll be right there." Playing nice sounded like a wonderful way to start her Christmas morning.

The nurse nodded toward her bedside table. "Who sent the present?"

"I'm not sure," Lauren said. "It was here when I woke up this morning."

"You'll have to open it under supervision," she said. "Just take the package down to Dr. Warner's office. He'll let you unwrap your gift there. Merry Christmas, Lauren."

"Merry Christmas, Nurse Hoffman," Lauren replied, following her down the hallway.

Dr. Warner stood when she entered his office. He looked too young to be a psychiatrist. He could've easily passed for a GQ model with dashing blue eyes, high cheekbones and beautiful full pouty lips.

"Good morning, Lauren. How are you feeling today?" he asked, his gaze holding hers until she took a seat.

"I'm fine," she said, twirling the small red box between her hands. The soft sounds of several thumps alerted her to the fact that something

puzzling rolled around in the tiny gift box. She shook the present again.

"One of the nurses mentioned you received a gift from an anonymous friend. Why don't you go ahead and open it now?"

Lauren pulled her robe closer together, staring at the doctor in awe. She wasn't sure why Simon pretended he wasn't her lover, why he seemed hell bent on playing the patient-doctor role all the way to the extreme, even behind closed doors.

"Lauren?" he asked. "Is everything alright, dear?"

She started to unwrap her package. "Did you have a good time last night, Dr. Warner?"

"I did," he said. "My girlfriend and I went to a Christmas party. It was...unusually pleasant."

"I see," she said. She crumpled up the gift wrap and handed it to him when he reached for the colorful paper.

"And how about you, Lauren? Did you have a good Christmas Eve?"

"Yes," she said. "I had a nice time, too." She sat on the long leather sofa and pressed her knees together. She could still feel the ramifications of some pretty intense fucking. She closed her eyes, the memories of her Christmas Eve vividly imprinted in her mind.

"Are you all right, Lauren?"

"Yes," she said, removing the small lid and

staring straight ahead once more. "I was just thinking about the way I spent my Christmas Eve."

"Would you like to tell me about it?" he asked, taking a seat next to her.

"I don't think you want to hear about it *here*," she said, lifting the lid away from the tiny box.

"Why don't you try me?" he asked, patting her hand and gazing into her eyes.

One touch and she was toast. "I had sex last night." She leaned back against the soft cushions. The heat of her arousal burned her to the core and she reached between her legs.

The doctor didn't respond even when her fingers slipped under the band of her panties. The psychiatrists rarely paid attention to her explicit behavior when she sat in their offices, except for Dr. Simon Warner, and his reactions varied.

His brow furrowed and beads of sweat dotted his forehead. His fixed stare finally settled on her crotch. "With who?"

"Five men," she said. "All of them claim to care deeply for me." She pressed her palm against her mound, tossed her gift to the side and watched him.

"Lauren," Dr. Warner began. "We've been over this before, doll. You can't have sex with the other patients."

"They weren't patients," she persisted, sitting

forward all at once and vacating the option of fingering herself. She grabbed her little box again and pulled back the tissue paper inside. "They're doctors."

"Do you know them?"

"Yes, you know I do," she said. "They're on staff here."

Dr. Warner gave her a stern glare. "You're fantasizing, Lauren. It's all in your head. Remember, we've talked about your hallucinations. Some of them are very vivid."

"No!" she said. "What happened between me and you is not in my head! I still remember every touch, every sweet caress, and oh God, I do remember the fucking, the way you made love to me, Dr. Warner."

The doctor stared at her in disbelief. "Lauren," he said steadily. "You know I did not have sex with you."

"Yes, you did," she stated firmly. "You and Dr. Mahoney, Dr. Scott, Dr. St. Johns, and Dr. Lory."

Dr. Warner went to his desk. He scribbled something on his notepad and then looked up again. "I'm going to change your medications and we'll talk again in a few days."

"Sure," she said. "Later works for me, too. I have nothing but time to kill." She returned her focus to the opened present in her lap. There, in the center of the box, she found five golden rings.

"Doctor?"

"Yes, Lauren?"

She held the box up and asked, "Do you see this?"

Dr. Warner peered into the box. "What do you have there, Lauren?"

"Five wedding bands."

"Are they silver or gold?" the doctor asked.

"They're gold."

"Ah," the doctor said. "Perhaps it's a sign then. Today is Christmas, you know. Five golden rings are befitting for the dream you described."

"But it wasn't a dream."

"A fantasy, perhaps," he suggested.

She eyed the jewelry and then glanced at the perpetual erection Dr. Warner had whenever they met behind closed doors. "You don't see the rings?" She noticed Dr. Warner studying her for a few moments.

"I'll tell you what, since it's the holidays, we'll put aside all the reasons you're here—your sex addiction, your hallucinations, and the various symptoms you've experienced with your multiple personality disorder. Today is Christmas and if you see five golden rings, I see them too."

Lauren felt the tears burning her eyes. "The rings *are* in this box."

"Why yes, they are," he said. "Why don't you put them on?"

She fingered the gold bands. Then she placed them back in the box and covered the beautiful jewelry with the lid. "Maybe some other time," she said, standing. Reaching for the doorknob, she turned to face him. "Dr. Warner, will you be here tonight?"

He placed his large palm on her right shoulder. "How many times do I have to tell you, Lauren? I'm always here and I'll never leave you."

"I know you won't, Dr. Warner. And we both know why, don't we?" She started to leave the office. With her back to him, she wiggled her hips saucily, sensing his gaze on her bottom. Swiveling around, she caught him red-handed, but didn't bring the gawking to his attention. She knew he'd tell her it was another figment of her overactive imagination. She gnawed at her bottom lip and said, "Merry Christmas, Simon."

"Merry Christmas, Lauren."

She searched his expression one final time. Sure, she experienced the occasional hallucinations, like when she thought she worked at the hospital as a psych tech. But there were also some unexplainable and explicit memories she recalled after spending time with the hospital's psychiatrists, never mind the creatures they became when they shifted into their extraordinary and beautiful lion forms.

Those memories were too graphic and allowed for only one explanation. They were embedded in

her mind, lurking in her senses, because they occurred in real-time. She knew the doctors intimately. She harbored their deepest confidences, every last one of them and she was their dirty little secret.

Clutching the box, she left his office and ran for her room. She'd received five golden rings for Christmas, and those little bands were symbolic. The jewelry proved they'd shared her. On Christmas Eve, they had showered her with affection, gave her their attention, and professed ongoing adoration. She realized they would never admit they spent their days off with her, even though they arranged for her free passes through Fran Conway, the receptionist.

Lauren blamed herself. She'd pursued each doctor since arriving at the *Broken Dreams* facility, even explicitly describing a recurring fantasy—five men ravaging her body.

Maybe she was crazy, a tad bit nuts. Still, she'd always been able to rationalize most things, even in the shadows of her troubles.

Christmas had arrived early, and she had already experienced all the joys of the holiday. It was the season of giving, so she gave, but in turn, she also received. The holidays had provided her with quite the surprise. She'd enjoyed what every sex addict in the recovery center wanted—memorable sex without the strings attached to

bind.

Dr. Warner had even helped her manage any possible guilt. *Christmas Eve never happened.* He'd helped her create an illusion, a beautiful one she'd never forget. She released a relatively dramatic sigh. Being insane certainly had its advantages.

She closed her eyes and remembered the previous night, the way her men had loved her. Yes, she had experienced a Christmas to remember. She had a very good feeling, thanks to the beautiful gift she'd received she would see her doctors and the lions towering over her again soon, probably that very Christmas Day.

Later, when she walked into her room and closed the door, she heard a familiar sound. The first of five roars rocked the building. Her lions were hungry and they were coming for her.

They were coming for her soon.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Destiny Blaine is an erotic romance author who writes in various genres. Visit her website at www.destinyblaine.com for more information.