



FERAL
Black Cat Fever
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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

Feral



BLACK CAT FEVER

Desiree Holt

Dedication

As always, to my secret hero, who lives forever in my heart.

Chapter One

Darkness had settled over the city like a thick cloak, scudding clouds hiding all but the hazy image of the full moon. It was hot for October in Texas, but the fall weather was always unpredictable. And anything could happen on Halloween, weather-wise or otherwise.

Dea Russo leaned closer to the mirror in her bathroom, applying an extra layer of eye liner to her lids. She had to look her very best tonight. More than her best. Once again, it was the night for her to find her mate, and once again, she prayed for the success that had eluded her so far. At thirty-two, she was beginning to despair of ever making the connection.

"The time has not been right before," Zia Stella had said just that morning when Dea had been complaining that she'd end up being an old maid. An old cat. Maybe someone's familiar.

"Maybe he's just not out there," she protested.

"Dea. Bambina. It must be the right one."

And that had been the problem. Year after year. For her kind, her breed of shifter, there was only one night to find one's mate. Halloween. And the mate must also be a shifter of the same kind. No crossbreeding, she'd been warned. Others had tried it with disastrous results. The pack wouldn't stand for it, anyway. Especially not with her. The daughter of the alpha.

"You know the story," Zia Stella had told her over and over again. Since the death of her parents, her Zia and Zio were her closest family. "We came here from the Old Country in a small boat more than three hundred years ago, on the special night. There were not that many of us. Maybe two dozen. That was all that was left of a once-large pack. The moon was full when we landed and lit the way for us as we found places to hide before dawn. We had barely escaped massacre by other breeds and swore a solemn oath to keep the race pure."

"You are the one to carry on," Zio Rigo always reminded her. "The power passed from your father to you. The future of the pack depends on the proper selection of your mate."

Yes, yes, yes. She could recite it by heart now. The problem was, she hadn't been tempted by anyone at all, panther or mixed. So they were still without a permanent leader.

"It must be soon," Zia Stella reminded her. "As the daughter of the alpha you must join with the one who will then be our new leader. Zio Rigo grows old and tired waiting to step out of his temporary role."

"And if I don't find the one supposedly out there waiting for me?" she asked. "What then?"

Zia Stella had given her a sly grin. "You will. I feel it. Here." She clasped a fist to her chest, tapping her breast three times. "I think tonight will be the night."

Dea had wondered at her Zia's words. "What do you know that I don't?"

"Nothing." She shook her head. "It is only what I feel. But time is running out, bambina." She frowned. "And be careful of that Dane Maguire. He is up to no good."

Although the big cats did not group together in the way of wolves, living pretty much apart from the others except for their mates and their offspring, they were still a confederation that was connected and relied on strong leadership. There were some who would subvert the rules of the pack to change it. Those hungry for power. She knew that. Women who would kill her to make a better place for themselves. Males who would breed with her forcibly to create the next alpha. Dane Maguire was the worst. He dogged her throughout the year, sometimes seductive, sometimes threatening. But always present. Always a silent menace.

"I feel a threat when he's around," she'd told Zia Stella.

The older woman nodded. "He is not for you. He is dangerous and a mixed breed. You have the power, Dea, and he wants it. He cares nothing for the welfare of the pack, only for the position as ruler."

The man, an unholy mixture of panther, lion, wolf and human, was known for his uncontrollable anger and his thirst for ultimate control. It was rumoured he wanted to amass an army of shifters to kill those who had been responsible for his genetics. He also wanted a mate that would help purify his hybrid strain. He had taken and tossed aside at least four mates, a severe breach of the rules. Mating was once and for life. Now the women he'd discarded were shunned by the pack. Only the force of Zio Rigo's authority kept the shifter at bay. But one of these Halloween nights, Dane's thread of control would snap and they would all be doomed to hell.

"Why doesn't someone do something about him? Zio Rigo, for instance. He can banish him from the pack."

“Pah!” Zia Stella flapped her hand. “That one, he cares nothing for the rules. He would just come back and make deadly mischief.” Then she smiled, secret knowledge in her eyes. “But the right male will take care of him. I promise.”

She refused to say anything beyond that, and the conversation had ended, although the words replayed in Dea’s mind all day long.

Every Halloween, Dea had donned her black finery, put on her makeup just so and set out for *Le Chat Noir*—The Black Cat—the club that only appeared once a year. On October 31. And every year she sat in the club, patiently studying each male in the crowd. Wondering if that night would be the night. If someone would approach her and she’d *know*. Wondering *how* she’d know.

Tonight she’d chosen a stretchy black dress that barely skimmed the tops of her knees and hugged her hips and breasts like a second skin. Little spaghetti straps held up the dress and left her shoulders bare. She sprayed on the special perfume she’d had blended at a place in New Orleans, hitting every pulse point and spraying extra behind her ears. Her hair, washed and brushed to a glossy shine, tumbled below her shoulders in thick curls. She ran her fingers through it, then shook her head to give it a more casual, tousled look.

Saying a silent prayer that tonight would be successful, Dea finished applying her lip gloss and took one last look at herself in the mirror before hurrying out to her car. As she climbed behind the wheel, her cell phone rang. She looked at the readout. Zia Stella. Of course.

“I’m on my way, Zia,” she told her. “Leaving the house right now.”

“Remember, tonight will be the night,” the older woman told her.

“Oh?” Dea chuckled. Remembering the morning’s conversation. “And exactly how do you know that?”

“You’ll see. Just be sure to smile pretty.”

Before she could say anything more, the call was disconnected. Dea frowned. There was something going on she didn’t know about. It wasn’t like Zia Stella to keep things from her. Then she shrugged and pulled out into the street. Whatever was going to happen, would happen. Apparently, the forces of nature were already at work.

Children in costumes were scrambling for the final Trick or Treat visits in the neighbourhood. Every kind of ghost, pirate, witch and goblin danced up and down the sidewalks, shrieking wildly at each other in glee. Older kids, still too young to give up the

costumes, ran wildly in the roads, screaming at the top of their lungs. Dea navigated very carefully around them and wondered what they'd think if they knew what Halloween was really all about.

She could feel the special magic in the air as she drove through the darkened streets. The aura that always came out on Halloween as soon as the sun set. Because the night was so warm, she rolled down all the windows in the car and let the night breeze dance across her cheeks and ruffle her long black curls. The haunting moon continued to play hide and seek with the clouds, puffs of gossamer blown back and forth across its silvery surface by the whisper of the wind. Dea knew all the breeds would be out hunting tonight. That's what Halloween was about. Already she could catch vague hints of the many scents blown by the breeze into the night air and felt an electric charge surge through her blood.

Halloween. The night when all the otherworldlies came out. When angels battled demons and the sexual desires of the breeds was at their peak. Already, she could feel a heaviness in her breasts and a throbbing in her cunt, so intense she had to squeeze her thighs together to contain it.

The lovers she'd taken to slake her thirst for sex had been exciting and inventive, but they always wondered why she never wanted to be with them again. One of them had angrily called her the Queen of One Night Stands. Hurtful, but probably true. But with each year the intensity of her sexual desire grew and she knew this year her mating sense was at its absolute peak.

Please let tonight be the night.

The parking lot at the club was jammed when she pulled into it, barely finding a spot way in the back. Walking carefully to the door on her four inch heels, she wondered as she always did where the club disappeared every year except for this one night. She had asked often, but no one ever wanted to answer her. Another pack secret, she thought. For three hundred and sixty four days, the lot stood empty, surrounded by a chain link fence and ominous Keep Out signs. Someone—Dea had a feeling this was the only cooperative effort among the breeds—paid for security around the clock. But who was responsible for the other-worldly magic that brought it to life every Halloween? Maybe if she found her mate tonight she'd also find the answer.

The moment she opened the door, sound washed over her—the low hum of voices, the music from hidden speakers, the clink of glasses. *Le Chat Noir* was not your usual bar,

raucous and noisy with people shouting over each other. No, everything here was understated, sensuous, seductive, geared to its sole purpose for the night—to allow people to mate.

Silhouettes of cats marched across the top of the walls covered in black velvet. Black cloths draped the tables and orange candles glittered in glass holders. Orange and black streamers wove across the ceiling in acknowledgement of the colour scheme of this holiday. Behind the bar, a tall woman in a black bustier and little else and a man in a tight black t-shirt and jeans hustled to keep up with the drink orders.

The room was already crowded with breeds of every type dressed to the teeth and on the hunt. Dea identified each of them by the shape of their ears and their noses. For the men the muscles bunching beneath cloth stretched tight across broad shoulders hinted at the power lying beneath the skin. For the women the shape of the eyes told her which breed they belonged to. There were a lot of panthers here, some of whom waved to Dea when they noticed her. One couple motioned her to their table but she didn't want to horn in on someone else's mating dance.

Can you say fifth wheel?

The aura of sexual heat permeated everything. Tonight was like a general mating call for all the feline shifters who were still alone. She knew that humans saw Halloween as a holiday for ghosts and witches and hobgoblins, but Dea and the pack knew it was really the night for the black cat.

She was aware that, if pushed and out of necessity, she could choose from black leopards, jaguars, even pumas. Zio Rigo would make an exception if there weren't too many impurities. But she sought the pure black panther, the very best to mate with. Panthers. The generic name for those breeds who had the specific allele for melanism. The black coat. Part human, part black cat, with no other breeds mixed in. And they would produce children who would carry on that purity.

She scanned the tables with a quick glance. They were filled with people whose heads were bent towards each other in low conversation and touching each other with intimate caresses. Lucky, she thought wistfully. All the seats at the bar were already taken so Dea just stood at one end, elbowing in for a chance to order a drink. As she stood there, wedged in between the two occupied end bar stools, a field of electricity sizzled over her and every nerve on the surface of her skin crackled to life.

She turned her head slowly, casually, letting her eyes roam around the room before coming back to settle on the man in the stool on her right. For a long moment, she forgot to breathe. Her breath was trapped in her lungs and her heart nearly stopped beating. Although he was seated, she could tell from the length of his back and his legs that he was well over six feet. His thick, onyx-coloured hair, almost blacker than her own, hung like a fall of jet silk to his shoulders. The fingers holding his glass were long and lean, graceful, and the backs of his hands were dusted with fine black hair.

His profile was sharp, the high cheekbones and strong jaw accented by a neatly trimmed moustache and beard. The scent drifting across her nose was a mixture of the forest and wild musk, stirring the pheromones in her body and sending a gush of her cream to soak the crotch of her thong.

Dea struggled for air. Every sound in the room faded away until she was cocooned in an island of silence with the man next to her. When he turned his head, she felt the heat of his greenish-gold eyes, the sure sign of the panther breed. The smile he gave her was both seductive and feral.

"Hello, Dea." His words startled her, his voice deep and warm, rolling over her like thick molasses.

She blinked. "How do you know my name?"

One corner of his sensuous mouth kicked up in a smile. "I've been waiting for you. What are you drinking?"

"Drinking?" She couldn't stop staring at him.

Amusement chased across his face. "That's usually what people do in a bar, isn't it?"

"Bar?" She couldn't seem to make her mind work, lost as she was in the mesmerising draw of his eyes and the aura of sex that draped over him like well-fitted clothes.

His laugh was a soft rumble. "Let's try this. Would you like a glass of wine? I happen to know they stock a chardonnay reserve that's unequalled."

Dea gave herself a mental shake. "Chardonnay. Yes. Thank you. That would be very nice."

She vaguely heard him give the order to the bartender, and in a moment a slender goblet was set before her, centred precisely on a cocktail napkin. Picking the glass up with deliberate care, she took a large swallow, welcoming the burn of the alcohol as it raced through her bloodstream.

"I think that's supposed to be sipped." His voice held the same tone of amusement. "Are you nervous being here?"

Gods. She could spend hours just listening to his voice.

"Nervous? When a man I've never met knows who I am and tells me he's been waiting for me? Oh, no. Not at all." Then she contradicted her words by taking another huge gulp. Her whole body was quivering from just the man's proximity, the brush of his arm against her body, the feel of his thigh where it touched hers.

"Good." He smiled again, and her bones went liquid. "I'd hate to think I was unsettling you."

It's him! It really is! I just know it.

She forced herself to sip slowly, turning so she could keep her eyes on the magnificent male animal next to her.

"Kyle Donovan," he told her.

She frowned. "Excuse me?"

"My name. Kyle Donovan."

"Oh. Oh! Of course." She set down her wine glass and held out her hand. "Dea Russo."

His lean fingers wrapped around hers, and a bolt of lust shot through her so strongly, her cunt quivered and her nipples turned to hardened peaks.

"Yes, I know." His laugh was a soft rumble. "Remember?"

"Oh, um, yes. That's right." Gods. Could she sound any more like an idiot? "I don't suppose you'd like to tell me what you meant before, would you? About waiting for me?"

His laugh was a soft caress. "That would be giving away all my secrets. But I do think it's rude of me to be seated while you're still standing. Here. Let's do this."

Before she realised what he was doing, Kyle Donovan had lifted her and set her on his lap, a neat trick considering the close quarters and the size of the bar stool. His thighs were hard and muscular beneath the curve of her ass and she could feel the thickness of his cock even through two layers of clothing. The heat emanating from his body very nearly scorched her.

Doing her best to keep her hands from trembling, Dea lifted her wine glass again and took a small sip. Kyle's hand brushed the swell of her breast as he reached in front of her for his own drink. A thunderbolt of pure lust jolted through her. She felt the moisture flooding

her thong with a sudden surge and hoped it didn't soak through her dress and onto Kyle's slacks. That would just be too embarrassing. But his next words dispelled that notion.

"I like a woman who gets hot and wet so easily."

His mouth was next to her ear, his words low enough that only she could hear them. Still, she burned with humiliation and tried to wriggle off of his lap.

"Uh uh." His hand tightened on her arm. "Don't think you're going anywhere."

"Why not?" She held perfectly still now, aware of his erect cock that seemed to have swelled in just a few seconds.

"Because it feels too good. I'm right. Admit it."

"But people will —"

"Dea, nobody is paying the least bit of attention to us. But if it will make you more comfortable, could I talk you into leaving here? The place is getting a little too crowded for my taste, anyway."

You could talk me into anything.

She wet her lips. "Where did you have in mind?"

"I thought we might go to my place. It's a lot quieter." He leaned his head closer to her. "Or did I misinterpret the power flowing between us? Or that wet spot on my slacks."

Her face heated. "N-No. No, you didn't."

"Good. Then let's get out of here."

He tossed some bills on the bar and rose from his stool, towering over her. In her mind, she could almost see his ears morph into the familiar cup shape and his white, even teeth elongate and sharpen. And when he put his hand on her arm, once again her breath caught in her throat and her lungs squeezed.

This is him. I just know it.

"Shall we go? I think you'll enjoy yourself at my place."

Oh, I hope so. I really hope so.

Chapter Two

Dea insisted on following Kyle in her own car. Her intent was to have her own means of escape in case she needed it. What she said was, "The club disappears by sunrise, remember? I don't want my car sitting here alone outside a chain link fence."

"I guess that makes sense," he agreed.

They were standing by the trunk of her car, the pale moon hanging above them like a dim lamp. Kyle put his hands on her shoulders and bent his head. Dea thought he meant to kiss her but instead his lips just grazed her neck, his mouth resting on the tender spot where neck and shoulder joined. She felt the faint scraping of his teeth against her ultrasensitive skin and the brush of his silky moustache and beard, and tried to swallow the moan that bubbled in her throat. Kyle's hands tightened on her for a brief second before he slid them down her arms and took her hands in his.

"Don't think you can run away, Dea Russo." His words vibrated against her neck. "I've been looking for you for a long time."

Her stomach clenched, and the muscles in her pussy tightened as if a giant fist had grabbed them. She was almost afraid to examine all the possibilities that his words sent tumbling around in her brain. Had he been seeking a mate for as long as she had? And did he know about her pack and its need for an alpha? If he turned out to be just an opportunistic shifter she wasn't sure how she'd handle it.

"You will be mine," he whispered, licking the place his teeth had scraped. He lifted their joined hands and pressed them against her breasts. "Your nipples are so hard. Feel them, Dea. Your body already knows it belongs to me."

"Dea, what the fuck do you think you're doing?"

The rough voice stabbed at them out of the dim night. Dea jerked. She opened her eyes to see Dane standing barely a foot away from them, fists clenched, his face tight with anger. She would have moved away from Kyle if he hadn't tightened his grip on her hands.

"I think you'd better get out of our way," Kyle said, without turning around.

"I think not." Dane glowered at them, his face full of rage and menace.

"Please, Dane." Dea tried to force herself to take deep breaths. Only last week, Zio Rigo had told her that Dane had killed another shifter, a combination of human and panther, in a fit of rage. "Just go away and leave us alone."

"Afraid I'll mess up your friend's pretty face?" His laugh was pure evil. "I have every right to be here," Dane spat. "It is Halloween. I have come to claim you as my mate."

"And you know that's not possible." She was more than grateful for Kyle's large body pressed against hers, shielding her. Of course, she could also feel the enormous erection pressing hotly against her body through their clothes.

Kyle turned and faced Dane, whose fists were opening and closing rhythmically. Kyle planted himself directly in front of Dea, a solid wall of protection, balancing lightly on the balls of his feet.

"I think you have your answer," he told the other shifter and took one step towards him. "I suggest, whoever the fuck you are, that you get your ass out of here right now before I take a big bite out of it."

"Oh, yeah?" Dane sneered. "You and how many other cats?"

Dea sensed the tension rolling off Kyle in waves.

"Go away, Dane," she said. "If I call Zio Rigo, you won't like what happens."

Kyle backed up again until their bodies were once again touching. "She's right. Zio Rigo will bring others, and the results won't be pretty"

Does he know Zio Rigo? Is he a pack member I just haven't met yet? Gods, I wish we weren't all scattered so far and wide.

Thick silence enfolded them for a long moment before Dane growled something unintelligible.

"We aren't done," he told Dea. "Not by a long shot. My family has been pack for generations. You should be mine."

"You *family* is an abomination," she retorted. "Go find someone closer to your own kind."

He turned and stomped away, and Dea released the breath she didn't even know she was holding.

"Who is that guy?" Kyle's voice was low and harsh.

"Just someone who thinks he belongs but doesn't."

"I wonder why Zio Rigo didn't mention him?" The question was asked almost abstractedly.

"You know my Zio?"

Kyle smiled down at her, the look hungry and feral. "Dea, why do you think I was at *Le Chat Noir* tonight? Come. We must find out for sure if we are meant to be together."

They wasted another few minutes while he tried again to convince her that driving by herself might not be safe, but in the end he acquiesced. She followed him away from the club as he led her into a residential area. Old fashioned street lamps cast haloes of light into the velvet blackness of the night, creating a mysterious aura. At a stop sign, a black cat ran across the street in front of their cars, tail lifted, its meow loud enough for them to hear.

A sign? An omen?

Then Kyle turned into a wide driveway, and Dea got a look at his house. It stood on a street in the middle of an older neighbourhood, framed by huge oaks and sycamores, rising two stories and distinguished by its stone facade and many mullioned windows. From the outside, it looked very impressive, and Dea wondered exactly what the man did for a living to afford a place like this. Kyle must have pushed a remote button because the wide door slid up smoothly, and he pulled into the spacious garage. Parking at one side he got out and motioned for Dea to pull into the empty space beside him. When she came around her car he reached for her hand and led her inside, the feel of his touch both comforting and dangerous.

In the wide foyer, a candle burned in a hurricane lamp, casting shards of light on the side slate floor and the creamy walls. Kyle tossed his keys on a small table, then without warning pulled her into his arms and took her in a kiss that was so hungry, so predatory, that her knees went weak, and her blood heated in her veins.

His tongue was long and rough, pushing past her lips to lick her inner surfaces. Scraping the roof of her mouth. Licking her tongue. Closing his lips around it and sucking it into his own mouth. Again, the silk of his beard and moustache caressed her skin, like the touch of a sensual feather. Dea had never been kissed that erotically before, or with such sensual demand. She had to clutch his arms to hold herself upright, and even then, it was a struggle. Every nerve in her body seemed to concentrate on what he was doing to her mouth.

By the time he lifted his head she was panting for breath.

"Delicious," he purred. "But I want my mouth on other parts of your body, too."

He lifted her in his arms as if she were weightless and strode up the curved stairway, down a short hall to a doorway at the end. When he crossed the threshold a lamp on the nightstand came to life.

"How did you do that?" she asked.

"Sensors. I don't like walking into a completely dark room." He grinned. "Foolish, right?"

"No. Just...unusual.

All members of the pack had excellent night vision, so she wasn't quite sure how to take his answer. Then her brain shut off as Kyle's hands began to remove her clothing bit by bit. The rasp of the zipper on the dress sounded unusually loud in the silent room. The whisper of the fabric as he slid it down her body was almost as loud, or maybe it was the pounding of her blood in her ears she was hearing. Kyle trailed his mouth slowly along the column of her neck, feathering kisses until he reached that spot on her shoulder again, his moustache tickling her. This time, he bit just a little harder, the scrape of his teeth sending a fresh flood of cream to her pussy.

He moved his mouth to the hollow of her throat, sucking at the pulse beating so violently there.

"I smell your scent," he told her in a low, deep voice. "And feel the beat of your heart. You want me as much as I want you. Admit it."

"Y-Yes. Yes, I do."

Now his tongue drew a line across the upper swell of her breasts. "You're going to be mine, Dea . It is fated."

Oh, gods, I hope so.

By the time he finished licking the upper slope of her breasts, she was shaking with need and wishing he would hurry. Do more.

When he closed his lips over one very hard nipple, little sounds of pleasure echoed from her throat. Again, he used his teeth, dragging them across each hard bud in turn then soothing with a lick of his tongue.

Her dress had fallen to rest on her hips. Now Kyle knelt in front of her, his hands pushing the dress down to her ankles as he moved. His mouth sucked on her navel while he reached down and lifted first one foot then the other from the thin black material before tossing it carelessly to the side.

Standing before him in just her thong and high heels, Dea balanced herself on his shoulders as his mouth moved even further down her body. His fingers pulled aside her thong his teeth tugging at the soft pubic curls until he reached her already swollen and throbbing clit. When he closed his lips over it she sucked in her breath and tightened her fingers on him. Her own scent drifted up to her as even more liquid seeped from her body.

"I smell your heat." He spoke the words with his mouth hovering over her clit. "I want to just throw you on your back and fuck you until you scream my name, but I'm going to go as slow as I can."

"It's all right," she gasped. "You can hurry."

"Not even if you beg." She could hear the feral smile in his voice. "I plan to learn every inch of your body, one slow lick at a time."

"Oh, gods." She threw her head back, eyes closed, as he tugged in her clit with his teeth.

Dea tried to spread her thighs to encourage him to dip further down, but he seemed intent on wringing every drop of response from that hard bundle of nerves that he could. He held it lightly in his teeth while the tip of his tongue flicked over it again and again. With each pass of the tip of that rough tongue over her hot flesh, the walls of her cunt quivered and contracted. What was he doing to her? She wanted him inside her, filling her. Wanted to feel his cock, to feel the ring of flesh around the head swell and lock him into place.

But his grip on her hips was like iron, the strength of it immobilizing her even as liquid soaked her cunt and her entire body trembled. Again and again, he stroked her, his teeth still holding that tiny bud, until without warning a climax crashed over her, shaking her body with the force of it. Kyle's busy tongue never stopped moving until the last tremor subsided, leaving her weak and spent.

But if she thought he'd give her a chance to catch her breath, she was mistaken. He slid his hands lower, to her thighs, and tugged until she widened her stance. She cried out when she felt the first stroke of that long, rough tongue tracing her slit from end to end.

"Kyle!" she cried. "Have mercy!"

"Later," he rumbled. "When you can barely take a breath. When my stamp is on every bit of your body, inside and out. Then I'll have mercy."

He shifted his head enough so his tongue could follow the crease where hip and thigh joined, first one, then the other. No, he wasn't giving her any mercy at all right now.

Kyle wondered if Dea had any idea the extreme control he was using to keep himself in check. He'd resisted every effort of Rigo Russo to introduce him to the man's niece since finding his way home to the pack two years ago. Only Rigo and his wife, Stella, knew that a rebel pack had killed his father, the pack alpha before Dea's father, as well as his mate, and kidnapped Kyle when he was just a cub. But he'd known from his earliest childhood that he was a mismatch to that group of bloodthirsty cats. Twice, he'd tried to escape, only to be tracked, returned, and painfully punished.

But when they tried to forcibly mate him with the alpha's younger daughter he killed the two guards who had come to get him, slashing their throats with his teeth and barely managing to get away. He travelled mostly in his cat form, seeking other shifters and listening to their tales. When he'd heard over and over about the orphan cub who had been kidnapped, he knew he was the one they'd talked about. Using every skill he could muster, he'd dragged the information from them about his real pack and who was leading it.

Because of the nature of the way the Russos, the story of his heritage, and Rigo's need to find the right mate for Dea. The previous Halloween, he'd scoped out the scene at *Le Chat Noir*, then spent the past year watching Dea. No matter how insistent Rigo was, Kyle had to be sure mating with Dea wouldn't be a mistake.

Now he knew it not only wasn't a mistake, it was foreordained. And tonight it would happen.

But not until he'd wrung every drop of response from her that he could. Taken her to a higher and higher plane, made her scream for him. Beg him. Cry out her need.

Gods, she tasted delicious. Like honey and peaches, with a feline musk that made his cock want to do a little begging of its own. Her pubic curls were so very soft, like the long hair framing her face and falling down her back in a cascade of silken strands. Her little clit was so hot right now he was afraid if he touched the tip of his tongue to it he'd get burned. The orgasm he'd given her had made her weak but at the same time heated every erogenous zone of her body.

And she was so wet. His long tongue lapped and lapped at her slit, her pink lips, the fold of flesh protecting the opening of her cunt. He lapped and lapped, sucking up every bit of her juices even as more cascaded onto his tongue. She was just so damn responsive, the more he licked, the wetter she got.

On impulse, he slid just the tip of one finger into her pussy, gathered her cream, and painted the flesh leading back to the very tight ring of her anus. When he pushed the finger past the sphincter muscle she cried out. Oh, yeah, really tight. He'd bet his left nut Dea Russo still had a virgin ass. And that was where he'd claim her. Make her his.

As his tongue worked her, sliding around that precious opening, teasing her, tormenting her, he kept one finger inside her ass just to the knuckle. But it was enough for the tremors to begin again. For her to beg and plead with him.

"Please, Kyle. Oh, gods, please, please, please."

"Please what?" His low laugh rumbled against her flesh.

"F-Fuck me. Now. Oh, please. I beg you."

"Oh, you'll beg me, all right."

Then he stopped talking, extended his tongue to its full length and plunged it into her slick channel. He barely had to move it. She was so ready that after two strokes she came again, crying, shivering, bucking in his grip. Her liquid poured into his mouth like the finest reserve wine.

When at last she was gasping and shivering, her fingers digging into his shoulders, he rose to his feet, yanked back the covers on the bed and lowered her gently to the sheet. Arranging her with her thighs spread wide and her arms over her head, hands on the pillows, he devoured her with his eyes while he removed his own clothing. Her skin was flushed pink, her nipples a dark rose. Her mouth was partly open, the lips swollen from his kisses, and her eyes were heavy-lidded with heat, despite the orgasms he'd just given her. He'd had many women in his life, in both human and cat shape, but none had fired his very core the way Dea Russo did.

He wanted to take her as cat. As panther. As the animal he could be. But this wasn't just a one-time fuck. Now that he'd finally met her and tasted her, he wanted her forever. Rigo had warned him she could be stubborn. He just had to convince her they were meant to be mated. And being the pack alpha didn't factor into it. Regardless of what Rigo needed. He wanted Dea for herself. If the leadership came with it—and only she could confer it—well and good. But she was going to be his, no matter what.

He tossed his clothes onto a nearby chair and stood at the side of the bed, studying every inch of her. He bent down and ran his finger along the length of her slit, then pulled the lips apart so he could stare at the slick dusky flesh. His cock, already swollen to painful

proportion, seemed to swell and harden even more. He didn't have to look to know that pre-cum was seeping from the slit.

He wet his finger with her cream, then moved it to the head of his erection, mixing her liquid with his own and spreading it over the hot, bulbous head. Oh, yeah. Fucking Dea Russo was going to be better than any wet dream in the world.

Through the open window the breeze disturbed the drapes that were just partially closed and in the distance he heard the wail of a cat.

Time to set the scene.

Chapter Three

Dea could hardly breathe, her eyes fastening on Kyle's magnificent cock. Long and thick, with a plum-coloured head, it rose from the nest of black curls surrounding it. It had aropy vein so thick she could actually see it pulse with the blood running through it. Surrounding the head was a thick ring of flesh that would expand to lock it into place once inside her. It would not release until the last drop of cum had been wrung from both of them. Even as spent as she was, she felt the heat of carnal lust reaching through her at just the idea of that cock inside her cunt, fucking her.

Kyle moved to the armoire against one wall, opened the doors and began gathering things. On the nightstand he set two candlesticks, one with an orange candle, one with a black one. He repeated the procedure on his dresser and again on a little table next to the chair where he'd thrown his clothes. Back to the armoire, then to the nightstand, where he placed a black panther in blown glass in the stance of a hunter. And finally another, also blown glass, that showed a male panther mounting his mate. Dea turned her head to get a better look at it and sucked in her breath at the quality of the work. The sleek muscles were well-defined and the power in the legs implicit.

The graceful lines of the glass figurines seemed to be extensions of the lines of Kyle's own body. She took in the well-defined muscles, the flat abs, broad shoulders, muscular legs. Black hair formed a thick pelt on his chest and dusted his arms and legs. A medallion hung from a chain around his neck, hammered silver with a big cat etched on it. She could almost see the panther emerging from him.

Would he take her as the cat? Would tonight be such that he would claim her as his mate? She knew the person she chose would become the new alpha. When her father had become the alpha, he had made it known that the power passed to her. In truth, she could have assumed the position herself, but she'd chosen not to. Instead, she'd waited all this time for the right man beside whom she could comfortably stand. A man who did not think his own power came from crushing hers. A man with whom she was so sexually attuned that just a touch or a glance could convey messages.

She tugged her lower lip between her teeth, praying she'd made the right decision tonight. That Kyle was the one.

When he had everything placed to his satisfaction, he moved to the bed and straddled her. He closed his fingers over the medallion and brought it to his lips, kissing it once and uttering a silent incantation. Then he reached over into the drawer of the nightstand, removed a pair of handcuffs and dangled them in front of her.

Dea stared at them, fascinated.

"These are not to hurt you," he said in his deep voice. "Nor are they a punishment. But I want you to keep your hands very still while I take my pleasure." His eyes burned into her. "And give it right back to you. All right?"

She nodded, so aroused by the images in her mind that she was beyond speech.

"All right, then."

He locked a cuff around one wrist, threaded the links through the spindles on the headboard and fastened the other cuff in place. With her arms pulled back, her body arched and brought her breasts into sharp relief.

Kyle ran his hands over her, touching her everywhere. And where his hands went, his mouth followed, his tongue leaving a liquid trail of fire. He drew a wet line between her breasts before turning his attention to her nipples. While he kneaded one breast with his fingers, his mouth pulled and sucked on the other, flattening it against the roof of his mouth. Little shards of electricity sizzled from her breasts through her body to the very core of her pussy. Unbelievably, she felt herself get wet again. No man had ever been able to arouse her as quickly or as often as Kyle.

Long, erotic moments later, he switched his attentions, shifting his legs so he moved down her body. He placed hot, wet, open-mouthed kisses along the insides of her arms, beneath her breasts, down her stomach until again he was at her cunt. But this time, he slipped his hands beneath her ass and lifted her to his mouth, plunging his tongue inside. No teasing, no preparation, just a thrust of the long, rough flesh that scraped her inner walls deliciously as he probed and pushed.

Dea tugged on the handcuffs, twisting her body as Kyle plundered her with his mouth. The quivers began, again. Deep inside her, a pulse beat insistently in its demands as it grew stronger and stronger. But when it would have crested and taken her tumbling down the

other side, he pulled back, slipping his tongue free of her flesh, licking his lips as his hot eyes burned into her.

"Please," she begged. "Kyle, please. Don't stop"

His laugh was low and rough. "Oh, I don't intend to stop any time soon."

Lifting her to him he again thrust his tongue inside her welcoming channel, fluttering it against the slick walls of her cunt, seeking out the sweet spot with the tip and flicking it again and again. Her body tightened, her inner muscles clutching at his long, thick tongue, revelling in the roughness of its surface.

His long fingers kneaded the muscles of her ass as he ate at her, his teeth lightly scraping her pussy lips as he fucked her with his tongue. He thrust into her harder, faster, but it wasn't enough. Not nearly enough. Twice he had brought her to the edge of release, only to ease her back down then begin all over again. She was a seething mass of sensations, reaching for the elusive precipice which he kept always just beyond her reach.

She moaned, beyond coherent speech now, bucking beneath the insistent lash of his tongue. When he withdrew yet again, she cried out in frustration, but in a moment she felt two long fingers inside her, rubbing her pulsing flesh, coating themselves with her cream. When those slipped out she wailed and bit her lip. But in another moment he replaced them with his tongue again. This time, as he resumed the familiar motion, he balanced her with just one hand. The other stole down to the cleft of her buttocks and when he raked his teeth over her outer lips again he thrust one finger, slick with her juices, inside her rectum.

That was all it took. Dea screamed, and came and came and came, convulsing and shuddering, impaled on finger and tongue, icy heat racing over her as her body shivered and shook.

When at last he lowered her back to the cool sheets, she was trembling and her body was covered with a fine sheen of perspiration. And she had yet to take his cock inside her!

Kyle bent low over her and pressed his mouth to hers.

"Taste yourself on me," he murmured against her lips. "Sweet. So sweet."

He pushed his tongue inside her mouth and carried the slickness of her juices with it. Dea felt another burst of lust as she sucked on his tongue. Kyle cradled her head in his hands, taking the kiss deeper and deeper until he finally sat back and let her breath.

"My Dea." The sensual heat burned even brighter in his greenish-gold eyes. "After tonight, you will most definitely be mine."

She wanted to tell him yes, she would, but she couldn't bring herself to do so until the final act of mating. Both as human and as cat. But gods, what would she do if he disappointed her?

No. Don't think of that. All the signs are there. Even the connection to Zio Rigo.

Kyle removed the handcuffs, opened the nightstand drawer, dropped them inside and removed a small bottle. Uncapping it, he poured a small quantity of what looked like oil into the well of his palm. He rubbed his hands together, then massaged each of Dea's wrists with a fragrant mixture.

"Don't want to damage that delicate skin." He gave her what she'd come to call his panther smile.

"Thank you."

"Don't move," he told her, levering himself off the bed.

Dea felt limp and buzzed at the same time. A series of shattering orgasms still had not satisfied the lust burning inside her. Again, she imagined how Kyle's cock would feel inside her, and her body stirred in response.

She heard the sounds of water running, then Kyle was back again. He stretched out beside her and pulled her against him, running a hand lightly over her arm, down her hip to her thigh.

"When I fuck you completely," he said, his voice solemn, "you will know then who your mate is. Don't doubt me, Dea. We are fated."

They lay facing each other, his heated cock thick and pulsing against her body as he continued to caress her with his long fingers.

"And when will that be?" she asked, wondering if they would ever get to it. She had never wanted a man inside her as badly as she wanted this one.

"Soon, my little kitten. Sheath your claws for me. You will need them at the right moment." He sat up and smacked his forehead. "I'm a terrible lover. No wine. How can I carry on a proper seduction and mating with no wine?"

Dea laughed. "Hurry. I'm running out of patience. For everything."

Kyle padded out of the room completely naked to get the wine and glasses. Dea licked her lips at the sight of his tight-muscled ass and the graceful movement of his body. But he'd been gone only a few minutes when she heard a loud pounding on the front door and the insistent ringing of the doorbell.

Dea swung her legs over the side of the bed and hurried to the bedroom door. She could see down the hallway and downstairs to the foyer. Kyle had grabbed a pair of shorts from somewhere before striding to the door and opening it.

Dea sucked in her breath when she saw Dane standing on the front porch outlined against the moon, a fierce look on his face, hands fisted at his sides.

"What the fuck do you want?" Kyle's voice carried all the way up the stairs.

"I want Dea." Dane tried to take a step forward, but Kyle blocked his way. "And I want her right now."

Torn between fear and anger, Dea yanked the top sheet from the bed, wound it around herself sarong style and slowly descended the staircase. When Dane looked up and saw her, she returned his look with a glare.

"Dea." Kyle knew she was there without even turning. "Go back upstairs. I'll get rid of this jackass. Go back to the bedroom."

"Tell me you haven't fucked her yet," Dane said angrily. "If you did, I'll have to kill you."

"Dane!" Dea was shocked. She'd known about this side of him, but subconsciously she'd always thought Zio Rigo had exaggerated. "Why are you here?"

"I'm tired of waiting, Dea. We are meant to be together. I am meant to be the alpha. Stop screwing around, get your clothes and come with me."

"Are you crazy? I'm never going to be with you. Go away and leave us alone." She'd reached the bottom of the stairs and now stood there resting one hand on the knob of the banister. "Don't embarrass yourself anymore than you already have."

Anger slashed across his face. "I'm not leaving without you. I will take you to Zio Rigo and insist he give us his blessing."

"Dea." Kyle's voice was firm, commanding. "Go upstairs. Right now. I'll deal with this."

She backed up two steps, tripped over the bottom of the sheet and grabbed for the banister.

"Stay, Dea." Dane's rough voice. "I'm taking you with me."

"I'm going to ask you nicely one last time to leave," Kyle told him. "After that, the claws come out."

"Then you'd better bring them on because I'm not leaving."

Dea saw Kyle tense, then deliberately relax his body. He opened and closed his hands and in a moment his muscles elongated and shifted, his body changed, the shorts he was wearing ripped apart and the panther began to emerge. Where before the fine black hair had been a dusting on his skin it now thickened into a sleek pelt. As he dropped to all fours, his nails became sharp, retractable claws, but he wasn't retracting them now.

At the same time, Dane had stripped, leaving his clothes on the front porch, and gone through his own change. But rather than emerging as a sleek black cat, he had the thickness of a lion and his tail was adorned with a small bush of hair. The other alleles in his system were at work, also, and what eventually emerged was to Dea's eyes a monster. Something to be afraid of. With one powerful thrust of a large paw he slammed the door shut and drew his lips back mockingly.

"Kyle!" She heard the fear in her own voice. "Be careful. Please."

One swish of the sleek tail told her he'd heard her. She was overcome with the desire to shift herself and help, but she knew Kyle would resent it if she did. He needed to do this alone.

Biting her lower lip, she watched the two cats face each other, the one a monstrous hybrid, the other the lean and muscular panther. A growl rumbled low in Kyle's throat as he backed up, drawing the other cat into the big foyer. Dane stalked forward, advancing on Kyle, big shoulder muscles bunching as he prepared to leap.

But Kyle was too quick for him, leaping to the side so that Dane lost his balance and skidded on the slate floor. Kyle drew back his lips in a feline sneer and batted at the other cat with his paw, his long retractable claws raking the other cat's fur and leaving streaks of red blood. Dane hissed and struck out at Kyle with his own paw, but Kyle was too nimble for him. Dane might have been bigger and bulkier but he didn't have Kyle's lithe grace.

Dea clutched the rail, chewing at her bottom lip and wondering frantically what she could do to help.

"*Nothing.*" Zio Rigo's voice sounded in her head. "*Kyle must defeat the other. It is ordained.*"

So she crouched on the stairs and prayed silently, calling on all their gods.

The two cats circled each other, eyes glowing with feral hunger, sniffing the air. Scenting each other. Low snarls rose from their throats, the signal that the real fight was about to begin.

Then Dane leapt at Kyle, landing heavily on him and bearing him to the floor. Dea was too frightened even to scream as Dane pinned Kyle with his paws and lowered his head to the other cat's throat.

But again, Kyle's quickness and grace came into play. Smashing one paw into Dane's eyes he quickly shifted his position and vaulted to his feet. Balanced gracefully on all four paws, he roared at the other animal, a heavy, full-throated sound. His eyes never left Dane as he slipped sideways. Once again, they circled each other, blood from where their claws had drawn blood already staining their pelts. When Dane leapt at him again, Kyle was ready for him. He feinted to the side then raked Dane's side from shoulder to flank with his claws. Dane howled with pain, danced away, then turned back with teeth bared.

He drove for Kyle's throat again, but Kyle clamped his jaws over the other cat's shoulder, shaking his head and tearing at the flesh in the vice of his jaws. They rolled together along the slate floor, snarling and growling, claws drawing blood as they went for each other's throats. The sounds were feral and bloodthirsty, echoing in the massive foyer, chilling Dea as she listened to them. Her knuckles were white as she gripped the banister even harder, willing the fight to be over. Willing Kyle to destroy the other cat.

A shriek of pain, so fierce it hurt her ears, cut through the air, and for a moment her heart stopped beating. Then she stood up and forced herself to look carefully, slowly letting out her breath when she saw Dane on the floor, unmoving, blood gushing from the artery in his throat. Kyle looked up at her, regret for the kill in his eyes, blood smeared on his face. Her dark eyes locked with his golden green ones for a long moment before the air around him swirled, his muscles and bones began to reshape, and finally in place of the elegant black panther stood a magnificent male with lean sinew and dark hair.

Bloody claw marks were visible on one shoulder and again on one thigh, but otherwise he seemed unharmed.

Dea forced herself to look at Dane, now shifted back to his human form. His throat was torn open and blood still spurted from the carotid artery. Kyle stared at the body for a long moment, fingers flexing.

Dea finally shook herself loose from her frozen position, pulled the sheet tighter around herself and hurried down the stairs and over to Kyle. Then, concerned only for the man standing in front of her, she dropped the sheet and threw her arms around him.

"Holy gods." She pressed herself against him, naked flesh to naked flesh. "I was so scared. So frightened."

Kyle's strong arms closed around her, holding her tightly. "I was never going to lose, *cara*. Trust me. I have better plans for the rest of the evening."

But still she clung to him, feeling the ripple of sinew under skin, inhaling the strong scent of his musk, rubbing her cheek against the soft mat of hair on his chest. She wanted to resist when he gently set her away from him.

"Standing here is nice, Dea, but before we go any further I have to clean up this mess. And myself."

"A-All right." But she used his arms to steady herself. The adrenaline that had kept her together while she watched the fight was ebbing, leaving her weak and trembling.

"Dea?" She looked up at him. Deep lines were carved into his rugged face and traces of blood were smeared on his lips. "Honey, I have to clean myself up and make arrangements to...dispose of Dane." His eyes travelled from her shoulders to her feet and back again, and his lips curled in a half-smile. "And you're stark naked. I don't think you want to hang around that way when the cleanup crew shows up."

"Oh!" She bent down, grabbed the sheet and tugged it around her body. "W-Who are you calling?"

"Your Zio Rigo. Of course."

"Of course? Wait. Wait a minute." She blinked. Hard. What was going on here? "You mentioned him before." Nasty thoughts were swirling around in her mind. "Did he send you tonight? Did he set this all up?"

"I will explain everything later. Much later. I promise. For now, why don't you go upstairs, run a hot bath and wait for me in it. He brushed his knuckles along her cheek. "Go on. I'll bring some wine up in a minute." He gave her a little push towards the stairs.

"Are you sure?"

He nodded. "Yes. But go now. Quickly."

Chapter Four

Dea really didn't want to leave Kyle, but she didn't want to hang around with Dane's body, either. Being careful not to trip on the sheet again, she made her way up the stairs, into Kyle's bedroom and his private bath. The size of the room amazed her. Although as large as his bedroom was, she shouldn't have been surprised. The floor was covered with rough-surfaced tiles in black and white. A border ran around the edges and in the centre was a plaque with a black cat on it, pointed to strike.

Part of one wall was taken up with a shower that Dea was sure would hold four people, the clear glass edged with gold trim. On another wall was a long vanity with double sinks and a padded bench pulled up to it. Beneath a huge window was the tub enclosed in a marble surround. It was the biggest tub she'd ever seen and had a number of jets set into it. On one of the broad corners she noticed a collection of glass bottles, each filled with different coloured crystals. Gently lifting the lid on one she inhaled deeply. Lavender. Perfect. The soothing, healing essence. Just what they both needed.

Turning on the faucets, she tested the mixture of hot and cold, then dumped some of the crystals into the water. Immediately, the relaxing aroma of lavender filled the air and once again she inhaled deeply. Sitting on the small bench, waiting for the tub to fill, she heard the sound of a door closing downstairs and the soft murmur of voices drifting up the staircase. Curiosity nearly drove her to see if indeed Zio Rigo had been the one Kyle had called, and if he came himself or sent someone in his place. She strained to hear their conversation but when they moved out of the foyer she lost the sound of their voices.

When Dea looked up and glanced out of the window she saw a thick shadow drifting across the moon, heavier than the wispy clouds she'd seen earlier. For one very brief moment, the moon disappeared completely and an icy shiver danced over her skin. Was that an omen of some kind on this very special night? Surely not a bad one. Dane was destroyed, and before the night was over, she would know for sure if Kyle was *the one*. If he would take his place as the pack alpha with her at his side.

When the tub was nearly filled, she tossed the sheet aside and stepped into the water, letting herself sink slowly until she was seated on the bottom. The liquid heat felt good

against her body, already feeling the effects of Kyle's inventive lovemaking. She splashed water on her face, then leant back, closing her eyes and letting the ambience wash over her.

"Wait until I turn on the jets. It's even better."

Her eyes flew open and she looked up to see Kyle standing over her. He was holding a glass of wine in each hand and was still gloriously naked.

"Did you ever put clothes on to, you know, clean up downstairs?"

He shook his head. "You should know that nudity among the males is a natural thing." His smile was full of mischief. "Even with one's mate in the privacy of their home. Clothes are only to protect the sensibilities of others in public and to maintain decorum with children."

"Does that mean you would expect your mate to walk around the house nude?" she teased.

He handed her one of the glasses of wine. "Can you think of a better way to make sure you're always ready?"

She arched an eyebrow. "Ready for what?"

He bent down and brushed his mouth against hers. "To be fucked. Slide down a little so I can join you."

Dea pushed herself forward, and Kyle climbed into the tub behind her, carefully balancing his glass of wine and lowering himself until his long legs bracketed her body. He slipped his free arm around her waist and pulled her back against him tightly enough that she could feel his thick cock pushing against the cleft of her buttocks. She took a hasty sip of wine to distract herself from the riot of sensations climbing through her. She had questions she wanted answered before they resumed their hot sex play.

"So who came to help you with the...body?" She shuddered slightly, remembering the scene as she'd last seen it.

"Your Zio Rigo and a friend." He bent his head and nipped at her ear lobe. When he spoke his breath was a warm breeze against her ear. "They were quick and efficient. There are no traces left in the foyer, in case you wanted to know."

"What will they do with him?"

"Get rid of him as they have others whose evilness destroyed them."

"Fire," she said. Even as a child she'd had occasion to see the orange flames of the fires that cremated the bodies of those pack members slain because they'd meant harm to others.

"Yes. It is the only way. It purifies the essence of the pack so no trace of evil remains."

"Are you all right?" She'd seen the telltale marks of the battle on his skin.

"I'm good. You know shifters heal very fast. It's one of our special abilities. And you chose wisely with the lavender salts. They will speed up the healing process even more."

"Good." She breathed a sigh of relief. "I have to admit I was terrified when you opened the door, and I saw Dane standing there."

"I had no intention of letting him hurt you. No matter what."

"He could have killed you," she pointed out.

"Not a chance. I had it covered. Knowledge of the fight beats brute strength every time. But I wish I'd known ahead of time how much of a danger he was to you. I would have taken care of him at the club. I gave Rigo hell for not giving me a heads up."

Dea took a slow sip of her wine. "Are you going to tell me your connection with Zio Rigo?"

"After," he breathed into her ear.

"After? After what?"

"After we are sure we are meant to be mated." He raked his teeth along the sensitive flesh of her neck.

Dea shivered again, this time with anticipation.

Kyle placed his wine glass on one corner of the tub, reached along the side and pressed a large button. Immediately bursts of air sent the water cascading into froths of bubbles bouncing gently against her skin.

"Let me show you something." Kyle lifted her left leg until her foot was resting on the ledge of the tub and shifted her body so that one of the jets spurted directly onto her cunt. The effervescence of the bubbles against the sensitive flesh made her womb clench and her pulse skip into a staccato rhythm.

"Ooh," was all she could say.

"Feels good, doesn't it."

The hand pressing her against him slipped beneath the water and found her clit, chafing it slowly as the bubbles bounced against her. The walls of her pussy spasmed as the sensations teased at all her tiny nerve endings. She rocked back and forth with the limited movement he allowed her, a riot of sensations dancing through her body. Kyle kept up a steady movement of his thumb on her clit while his teeth took little nips of her neck, her

shoulder, her ear lobe, his tongue following his teeth at each spot. Little arrows of pleasure stabbed at her everywhere, and all the while the bubbles caressed her wide open pussy. Her clit hummed beneath Kyle's thumb, and his thick, swollen cock prodded insistently at her backside.

She tried to hold onto the rising tide of need, to make it last, to let it simmer inside her, but Kyle was too talented as he played her body, knowing exactly how and where to touch. She clamped her hands onto the arm banded around her, nails digging into the flesh as without warning the climax crested and broke. She tried to squeeze her thighs together but Kyle was too strong for her and too determined. As the spasms shook her, the hand on her thigh slipped downward and pulled her labia even wider. Her pussy clenched, grasping on nothing but air and bubbling water and wanting so much more.

Kyle rocked her as she continued to shudder with her release. At last, the convulsions subsided, but if anything, she felt more aroused. Kyle lowered her leg, gently rubbing her thigh muscles. A gesture she was sure was meant to be calming but instead just ramped up her unsatisfied need. She wanted him inside her. Now. Wanted what had driven her crazy since she'd caught her first sight of him naked. That thick cock plundering her and filling her. Driving her to a plane of pleasure she was sure she'd never reached before.

Kyle had pulled her back against his body and cupped her breasts with his hands, thumbs idly rubbing the nipples.

"Makes you want more, doesn't it."

She could hear the traces of wicked humour in his voice. He'd known exactly what he was doing to her. And enjoyed it.

"And what does it make you want?" she asked, rubbing her buttocks against his shaft.

"You know damn well what I want." His voice was rough, now, with need and lust.

"Then let's see if we can accommodate you."

She turned in his arms and braced herself on her knees, reaching beneath the foaming water to wrap her fingers around his erection. Kyle leaned his head back against the ledge and closed his eyes, slashes of heat colouring his cheekbones. Dea concentrated on moving her hand up and down in a steady movement, watching Kyle's face as the muscles in his jaw tightened and flexed. Reading him to see how close to the edge she was bringing him—slowing her strokes down, then speeding them up.

Her other hand stole between his thighs and cupped the heavy sac of his testicles, rolling his balls with her fingers and lightly pinching the soft skin. Kyle groaned, and hitched his hips as if silently urging her to rub faster. Harder.

"Jesus, Dea." The words hissed out between gritted teeth. "Pump harder. Gods, I'm almost there."

She increased the speed of her rhythm, still rubbing his sac, scratching the tender underside with one nail. One final long slide of her fingers and he erupted, the thick, milky semen dissipating into the froth of the water as Kyle jerked his hips and a growl of satisfaction rumbled low in his throat. His hands moved to her shoulders and his fingers bit into her, gripping her convulsively with each tremor that shook his big body. At last the contractions eased, his muscles relaxed and his lips curved in a half-smile. His eyes opened slowly.

"You have very talented hands, Miss Russo."

She grinned. "We aim to please." Leaning forward, her fingers still wrapped around his cock, she licked the edges of his lips before pushing her tongue inside.

Kyle threaded his fingers through her wet hair, holding her head in place while their tongues danced to a familiar erotic rhythm. He turned her this way and that, accepting her intrusion and giving it right back to her. Her aroused body began clamouring for more. She sucked hard on his tongue, silently begging him for what she wanted.

When they broke the kiss she was gulping air.

"I want you," she breathed. "Now."

"You just had me," he chuckled.

"You know what I mean. Are you ever going to really fuck me?"

He pulled her against him, the water bubbling between them. "Soon, *cara*. Very soon. But first we need to get out of this tub. Look." He gestured at his shoulder with his chin. "My wounds are nearly gone. I'm as good as new again." He winked. "Even better."

Reaching out he depressed the button that turned off the jets and with his toes flipped the lever to let the water drain. Surefooted even on the slick, porcelain surface, he rose and lifted Dea with him, setting her on the thick mat on the bathroom floor. Reaching out, he snagged two towels from the bar on the wall next to the tub. When he wrapped one around Dea, she realised it was warm.

"Heated towel bars?" she asked. "Is there anything this bathroom doesn't have?"

He smiled. "I hope not. It cost me enough. Sit, Dea. Let me take care of you. Tend to you."

He sat her on the bench, plugged in the hair dryer and gently brushed and blow-dried her hair. The sensation of his fingers on her scalp and sifting through her hair, the warm air of the dryer, would have lulled her into relaxation if she hadn't been so damnably aroused. And so anxious to feel his cock inside her body. At last, he turned the dryer off, unwrapped her from the towel and carried her into the bedroom, placing her on the sheets as gently as he had the first time. She reached up to tug him down beside her, pressing her body against his. She was pleased to feel his cock already hardening again.

With her fingertips, she traced the line of his beard and moustache, feeling their softness, remembering the erotic touch of them against her skin. His skin was hot against hers, his hands like small torches as they caressed her back and the curve of her ass. When she brushed her lips against his, beard and moustache rubbed her skin and heat surged through her.

One of his hands found their way between her thighs, his fingers probing at her hungry flesh, finding the wetness in her pussy.

"Gods, Dea," he breathed. "I love how easily you get wet. I can hardly wait to feel my cock slide in between those slick folds and have your tight muscles clamp down on me. I hope I survive it."

Dea smiled. "I could say the same. I just hope I can take all of you."

He swiped at her mouth with his tongue. "Believe me, you will. I promise."

He lifted one of her legs over his thigh, opening her to him, and probed her with his fingers.

"Hot satin," he murmured. "You just might burn me alive."

His thumb set up a rhythm on her now highly-sensitised clit while he stroked in and out of her channel with two fingers, then three. Dea clung to him as he drove the desire in her higher and higher. She was so ready for him. She'd been ready since he'd worked her to a climax in the tub.

"Please," she begged. "I need you inside me. Right now."

"Whatever you wish." His voice was low and guttural.

He rolled her to her back and arranged her so her knees were spread wide and her feet planted on the mattress. Settling himself between her legs, he wrapped his fingers around his

cock and prodded her entry with it. Dea thrust her hips forward, silently pleading with him not to tease her.

"I don't want to hurt you," he growled. "That's why I made you come in the tub, why I've given you so many orgasms tonight with my mouth and my hands. You have to be fully ready for me, Dea. Completely."

"I am," she whimpered. "Do it now."

The head of his cock pressed into her opening, he took his fingers away and slowly, slowly pushed himself inside her.

Dea felt herself being stretched to the limit. She had never had a cock this large inside her, and now she knew Kyle was right to prepare her for him. With what had to be great restraint on his part, he inched forward until he was completely inside her, the head of his cock nudging the mouth of her womb. He moved slightly, pulling back a little then thrusting forward, and Dea felt the ring around the head of his cock swell and lock him inside her.

He linked his fingers with hers and pressed her hands on either side of her head against the pillow. His eyes bored into hers, golden flames dancing in the green irises. No one had ever looked at her before with such blatant carnal desire. More liquid released in her pussy, bathing his cock.

"Ready?" His voice was husky and not too steady.

"Yes. Please. Now."

Then he moved, slow at first, then harder and harder, pounding into her so fiercely that her body jerked on the bed and the headboard slammed against the wall. When he stopped, suddenly, she widened her eyes in surprise.

"No," she protested, "Don't—"

He covered her mouth with his, cutting off further words. Slowly he began to move his hips again, timing the in-and-out thrust of his tongue with the pace and tempo of his cock. Dea tried to urge him to increase the pace again, scraping his tongue with her teeth and jerking her hips upward at him, but Kyle was in total control, and not to be hurried. Out and in, with slow, unhurried movements. Pulling out partway, locked into her by the swollen head of his cock, then violently pushing back inside, her cream easing the way for him.

His fingers were locked with hers, holding her hands in place, his mouth ravaging hers with a pressure that didn't allow her to move her head. And he rode her like the sleek cat that he was, building the desire inside her until she was sure she would explode.

Dea had never experienced anything like this before. Her body didn't even seem to belong to her anymore. Carnal pleasure spiralled through her, wiping out all thought, her senses focused only on her cunt where all the heat seemed to rise from and spread everywhere throughout her. Each scrape of Kyle's cock against her sweet spot sent another lick of flame consuming her, until nothing existed except her, this man, and his cock inside her.

When the climax came, it shocked her with both its suddenness and intensity. A giant fist clenched her from the inside out. Kyle's body stiffened, and he pounded into her once more, twice three times, then came like a maniac screaming her name. Dea convulsed, her pussy gripping his cock like a vice as her muscles spasmed over and over. She had no breath left, nothing except these all-consuming spasms that rocked her and rocked her and rocked her.

She had no idea how long she convulsed on the plane of pleasure, only that suddenly she was limp, her bones liquid, and breathing was a problem. Her heart hammered so loudly in her chest she was sure Kyle could hear it, too, and the blood pounded in her ears.

A long time later, he lifted his head and feathered kisses over her face, rubbing his beard and moustache against her face and blowing warm air on her sweat-slicked skin. Finally, he eased himself from her body and tucked her against him. His hands skimmed her back and her ass while his lips placed small kisses along her jaw line.

"We belong together," he said in a voice short of breath.

Dea nodded, unable to form a coherent thought.

"In the morning we must perform one more ritual if we are to be truly mated."

"Morning?" she asked.

He laughed at her frown. "I think we might kill ourselves if we tried it now. So it will have to wait."

They showered and Kyle insisted on changing the sheets on the bed while she sat and sipped what was left of her wine. When they were back in bed and she was tucked up against him, she brought up the subject that surfaced once again.

"Tell me about you and Zio Rigo. I need to know. Now."

"Yes," he agreed. "You do."

And so he told her the story of the murder of his parents, his kidnapping and the years it had taken for him to know who he was and find his way back to his own kind.

"How long have you been back?" she wanted to know.

"A while. I found Rigo almost at once, but..."

"But what?" she prompted.

"He wanted me to wait until Halloween to make myself known to you. I am descended from an alpha, just as you are, and the time for us to meet—and hopefully mate—had to be exactly right."

"But you've kept in touch with him."

"Yes. I have."

She sighed. "People are always keeping secrets from me."

He tightened his arms around her. "But isn't it better that it happened this way? Now, when we are done, we will know for sure, because it happened on the special night for mating."

"I guess so." Her voice trailed off, and she could feel fatigue overtaking her.

"Sleep, my little cat. We will finish this in the morning then we will move on."

* * * *

Dea came awake slowly, eyes still closed, stretching every muscle in her body. Still wrapped in pleasant dreams about Kyle, she wasn't sure she wanted to wake and start the day. She reached out for the man next to her only to feel, instead, a sleek, soft pelt. Suddenly she remembered his last words, and her eyes popped open. Rather than the dark god she'd gone to bed with, next to her was a gorgeous black panther, watching her with his greenish gold eyes. He blinked at her, as if trying to send her a message. And she remembered. This was the final step. To see if they were indeed mated.

She let her fingers trail over his coat for a moment, relishing the satin feel of it and the tension of the smooth muscles beneath it. Then throwing back what remained of the covers, she drew in a deep breath and willed herself to change. In an instant, her muscles stretched, her bones elongated and the shape of her face morphed from human to cat. She took a moment to lick Kyle's face before rising to her paws and leaping lightly to the floor. She turned her head to give him a taunting look over her shoulder.

A soft growl vibrated in his chest and in an instant, he was beside her, nuzzling her face with his. Dea turned to give him access to her body and lifted her tail. Immediately his long,

rough tongue swiped the length of her animal cunt, probing her opening, tasting her liquid that poured into his mouth. She wriggled her ass, silently telling him she didn't need his foreplay. She was ready for him. Now.

Rising on his hind legs, he covered her body with his, his thick, heavy cock probing for access. His claws dug into her shoulders to hold her in place, he growled again, this time a lusty sound, and with a powerful thrust of his muscles penetrated her completely. Dea purred as he filled her and the thick ring of flesh around the head of his shaft swelled at once. She braced herself on all fours, pressing back against him to urge him to move.

Then he did, fucking her with powerful strokes, pounding into her again and again. She clenched around him, growling each time he rasped her sweet spot and drew more cream from her. Now he moved harder, harder, with the frenzy of a true jungle cat, possessing her. Making her his.

Dea held onto the edge of her release as long as she could, so aroused by the violence of the mating that she didn't want it to end. But the spasms quaking low in her body increased their intensity. When Kyle growled fiercely she knew he, too, was close. As the first thick spurt filled her, she gave herself up to the pleasure and let the orgasm take her. At the peak of his release, Kyle clamped his teeth on her shoulder, marking her.

Claiming her.

Finally, exhausted, they dropped to the carpet, still joined, his cock still pulsing weakly inside her. It was a long time before the swollen ring around the head of his shaft reduced enough to allow him to pull free. When he did, he licked her shoulder where he'd bitten her, rolled over to his back, and shifted.

Dea followed seconds later, and they both lay in limp exhaustion, dragging air into oxygen-starved lungs. Then Kyle reached out and tugged her next to him, smoothing her hair back from her damp forehead and feathering kisses over her face.

"We are mated," he said, his voice brooking no argument. "You are mine. Forever."

She smiled at him. "That means you will be the new pack alpha."

"Dea, I want you to know this. With or without the alpha position, I want you. I want us mated. If, as the holder of the power you chose someone else, that's all right. They can have the leadership, but not you."

Dea's heart clenched, and so much emotion swamped her that for a moment she couldn't say a word. She reached her hand up to caress his cheek, her fingers tracing the lines of his moustache and beard.

"You can't imagine how much that means to me," she told him. "But I never would have come here with you last night if I wasn't prepared to hand over the power to you. With only one night a year to accomplish this, I've had to be very careful. There have been...others...who wanted this very badly."

"Like Dane." His voice was tight with anger.

"Yes. Like Dane."

"I would never have let him touch you. You know that, right?"

"Yes. And that's another reason. The way you stood up to him at the club, I knew you would be the right person to lead the pack. And to be my mate."

He hugged her tightly. "I think we should shower and dress, then go to see your Zia Stella and Zio Rigo. And give them the good news."

"They'll be pleased," she smiled. "Very pleased."

"I think so. But first..."

She frowned. "First what?"

"First I want to have breakfast."

He rolled her to her back, lifted her legs over his shoulders and plunged his tongue into her cunt. Raising his head for a moment, he growled at her, "Mine. Always mine. Forever." Then he took her on the ride of her life.

About the Author

Desiree Holt has lived a life of excitement that brings the colour to her writing. She was a summer fishing guide, a summer field hand where she was one of only three women working, a member of a beginning ski team that skied in competition (and no, no broken bones!). She spent several years in the music business representing every kind of artist from country singer to heavy metal rock bands. For several years she also ran her own public relations agency handling any client that interested her. She loves to tell the story of sending a singer up in a hot air balloon singing “Up, Up and Away in My Beautiful Balloon” and stopping traffic for four miles in every direction. Before and between her two marriages she dated enough hunks to fill up two he-man calendars, one of whom taught her to shoot so beware, she’s always armed. She’s kept a fresh look at erotic romance by making sure the sensuality factor in her private life is always high. She’s married to her own personal alpha hero who helps her with that.

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