



FERAL

Abyssinian Heat
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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



ABYSSINIAN HEAT

Elizabeth Coldwell

Dedication

For Devin and Perry, my amazing seven-pawed household

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Chapter One

I never thought I would find anyone who meant as much to me as Charlie did. He was always there for me, knowing when to comfort me when I was down, when to entertain me with some silly trick and when to rush to investigate those strange noises that sometimes startle you awake in the middle of the night. He loved me unconditionally, and I would have done anything for him in return.

But no cat lives forever, and when the vet diagnosed an inoperable tumour on his spine, I had no choice but to say goodbye to my companion of the last eleven years. Though his end was quick and painless, I was in floods of tears as I walked home from the vet's surgery, Charlie's body wrapped in one of my favourite T-shirts so I could bury him in my back garden, beneath the cherry tree.

Finn did his best to console me. He had been my on-off lover for long enough to know just how much Charlie meant to me, and when I arrived at the flat, clutching the handle of the cat carrier so tightly my knuckles were white, he was there to fold me in a big hug and let me know everything was going to be all right.

His muscular arms held me close and I let my head rest against his chest, reassured by his solid masculinity. "Let's lay Charlie to rest, then I'll run you a bath," he suggested. "I'll use plenty of that ginger bubble bath you like."

When Finn was in a thoughtful mood like this, I could almost forget about all the times we'd had stand-up fights that ended with me screaming at him to get out and never come back. Things had always been volatile between Finn and me, ever since the afternoon he had accidentally reversed his van into my fence post, smashing it to bits. We had begun by swapping names and addresses for my insurance claim and ended up swapping hot, steamy kisses on my sofa, his big body covering mine as his hands burrowed up under my t-shirt to cup and knead my breasts. Finn had a great physique and a large, circumcised cock he knew exactly how to use to have me screaming with pleasure. Unfortunately, he was just as good at making me scream with frustration with his regular bouts of selfishness. He never seemed to realise that if he stayed out all night, I needed to know where he was—not because I

thought it might involve another woman, but simply because I wanted to make sure he was okay. He would always reply he was sorry and smile one of his sexy, dimpled smiles. More times than was really sensible, I would let that smile persuade me to forgive him.

Now, watching him dig a hole in the soft loam under the cherry tree, I could only concentrate on his better points. He was capable, good with his hands and, with a smudge of dirt across his cheekbone, incredibly hot, too.

I handed him the t-shirt containing Charlie's body. He placed him reverently in the hole and shovelled earth over it, placing a heavy, flat stone on top to stop curious foxes from digging it up. "Goodbye, Charlie, sleep well," I whispered, and let Finn lead me back inside.

"It's stupid, really, getting in such a state about this," I said, following Finn into the bathroom.

"Not at all, Miranda," he replied. "I know just how much Charlie meant to you. You've every right to be upset."

I went in the bedroom to undress, returning wrapped in a soft white bathsheet. True to his word, Finn had tipped a generous amount of ginger bath soak into the water, and its spicy, warming scent was seductively strong in the little room. I expected Finn to slope off to the living room and watch TV once he'd run the bath. Instead, he leant against the wall, arms folded, watching with an appreciative smile on his face as I unfastened the towel and stepped into the foamy water.

"Why don't I give you a neck rub?" he suggested.

I nodded in reply, sinking down under the bubbles.

"Better make sure this doesn't get wet, then..." As he spoke, Finn peeled off his top. Even though we'd been seeing each other for the best part of four years, I never seemed to tire of admiring his body. His job as a builder kept him in trim, hard manual work honing his biceps and giving him a lusciously taut stomach. His skin was tanned from going shirtless in the summer heat, making the scars on his shoulders and back stand out in stark white relief. I'd asked him about those scars in the past and he'd told me they were the result of a fight a dozen or so years ago, but that was all he was ever prepared to say on the subject. I knew there were parts of Finn's past he was keeping from me, things I suspected he wasn't particularly proud of, but deep down it was all part of the attraction he held for me. He'd been wild when he was younger, and I'd done my best to tame him, but something of the

bad boy still lurked just below the surface. It was why we fought so often, and why the making up was all the more exciting afterward.

I knew my friends thought I was crazy to take him back so many times, but they'd never experienced the passionate ferocity of his lovemaking or seen the sweet, tender side he often chose to display. They'd never felt his hands working on their skin, easing the knots that gathered in the muscles with an assured touch. They just didn't know him the way I did. I sighed, beginning to relax for the first time since I took Charlie on his last trip to the vet.

"Mmm, that feels good," I murmured, closing my eyes as Finn's hands moved a little lower, skimming the tops of my breasts.

"Really? So how about this?" His thumbs brushed my nipples, making them perk up instantly. "Do you like that?"

"I love it," I replied, as Finn continued to caress my tits.

"Well, let me take you into the bedroom and do some more things you'll love."

Finn lifted me up out of the bath, not caring that he was splashing water down the front of his faded jeans. I was sure they would be coming off soon enough.

He wrapped the towel round me hastily, and carried me through to the bedroom. Placing me down on the bed, he bent over me and we shared a long, lingering kiss. My fingers tangled in his sleek black hair as our mouths mashed together. Finn never failed to rouse a deep hunger in me, an overpowering urge to have his cock buried in my aching pussy. But this was something beyond simple lust. This was a need to prove that life still went on, even though Charlie was gone. This was something raw and feral, an animal instinct my body couldn't help but obey.

Impatient to have Finn naked, I grabbed the belt of his jeans, fumbling it undone before turning my attention to his zip.

"Whoa, slow down there, sweetheart," Finn said in an amused tone.

"I can't," I replied. "I need to see that big, beautiful cock of yours. I want to feel it sliding up into my pussy, giving me the fucking of my life."

Finn must have realised how out of character my behaviour was. I never used dirty talk and I usually let him take the lead in bed. Now, I was almost ripping the clothes off him and he was clearly loving it. He never wore underwear, so when I pulled his jeans down his cock

uncoiled at once, almost pushing itself into my grasp. I stroked its hot, smooth length, marveling at how quickly it grew fully hard.

Normally, I liked Finn to lick me for a while, getting me good and wet before he fucked me, but today my juices were already flowing freely. I pushed him on to his back and straddled his crotch, guiding his cock into place. Our eyes met, the devilish twinkle in Finn's reflected in my own in the moment before I slowly sank down, taking him all the way inside me.

He reached up to play with my tits as I rode him, squeezing my muscles hard round his shaft to give him as much pleasure as I could.

"Don't stop," he begged as I pulled almost all the way off him. Leaning forward, I gave him a long, sensual kiss, before sliding back down. I could have teased him like that for a while, but the wild spirit that infected me urged me on to make us both come, soon and hard.

Finn suddenly pinched my nipples. The pain should have brought me up short, but somehow it seemed to fuse with the pleasure I was feeling, turning me on even more. "Oh, Finn, yes," I moaned, amazed at how he'd realised just what I needed. Almost before I was prepared for it, an overwhelming climax was pulsing through me. I threw my head back, eyes closed and senses reeling. Finn was making an odd, growling noise in his throat in response. It reminded me of the sounds Charlie made when he worried at one of his chew toys. Then there was no room in my head for thoughts of Charlie or Finn or anything but the blissful sensations of my lover coming deep in my pussy.

As I lay in Finn's arms in the sweetly drowsy moments that followed, listening to his breathing slow as he nodded off to sleep, I started to believe I might be able to cope without my beloved Charlie, after all.

* * * *

Even before a month had passed, I changed my mind. It wasn't that Finn had returned to his old, unreliable ways. Indeed, since Charlie had gone he had been as loving and attentive as I had ever known him. But I knew I needed another cat in my life. I'd been so used to Charlie curling up on top of my desk while I sat tapping at my keyboard, or stretching out on the windowsill in my study to bask in the sun streaming through the

window. Writers tend to work best when they have a regular routine, whether that's getting up at six in the morning to write because that's when the creative juices flow most strongly, or scribbling the first draft of their story in a notepad in longhand before transcribing it on to their computer. Charlie was part of my routine. When he came to let me know he wanted feeding, nudging my elbow with his head to get my attention, I knew it was time to stop for my own lunch. When he padded his paws down on a random assortment of keys, wanting to play, I took that as a signal I should stop for a while, make a cup of coffee and stretch my cramped limbs. Without him, the words still came, but putting them down on paper felt like more of a chore.

To make up for Charlie's absence, I tried to encourage the neighbourhood stray to become more friendly. I had first seen him stalking birds across my lawn a few days after Finn and I became lovers, and ever since then he had been a regular presence in my garden. Black as midnight and rangy in build, he bore the battered ears and nose of a male who had been in one too many fights over territory. He would sit in the garden on sunny days, going through his elaborate grooming routine. His presence would always infuriate Charlie, who strutted along the windowsill, hissing and yowling. The stray would simply ignore him and carry on cleaning his fur, at which point Charlie would get fed up and come to snuggle in my lap for reassurance.

I'd always put out scraps of food and milk out for the stray, and with Charlie gone I thought he might take advantage and actually come inside the house. But he preferred to stay where he was, watching me warily from the low branches of the cherry tree as I left him saucers of canned sardine or leftover chicken. I wondered whether Finn's presence somehow deterred him, as I never seemed to see the stray on the evenings when the two of us were together. Perhaps those were the times he visited some other kindly soul he had cultivated in the hope of getting tidbits. Whatever the reason, it didn't take me long to realise he was never going to be the constant companion I needed.

One afternoon, on the way back from running some errands in town, I found myself passing the vet's surgery. I couldn't resist popping inside, as there was a notice board in the waiting room that often featured details of cats and dogs needing new homes. Checking it quickly, I appeared to be out of luck. A couple of cats were in urgent need of new owners, but from their descriptions both were elderly and more than a little frail. Having just lost

Charlie, I knew I couldn't risk putting myself through that again so soon. Unfortunately, the only kittens available were being offered by a local breeder by the name of Patsy Baker. They were pedigree Abyssinians, and she was selling them for four hundred pounds each. As beautiful as they looked in their photo, I didn't have that kind of spare cash. Still, something compelled me to jot down her details and take them away with me.

When I got back to the house, the post was lying on the mat. I picked it up to see a couple of bills, an invitation to enter a magazine's grand prize draw – and an envelope from my publisher. I ripped that one open immediately, skimming through the covering letter. It was very good news. A Paris-based imprint had bought the rights to my second novel and was bringing out an edition in French. The check for my advance was enclosed. It was more than enough to pay for one of the kittens whose picture I'd been admiring in the vet's surgery. I reached for my phone to make an appointment to visit Patsy Baker.

That night, lying in bed with Finn, I casually announced, "I'm getting a new kitten."

"Really?" Finn propped himself up on one elbow. His expression was unreadable. "What's brought this on so suddenly?"

"I just miss having a cat around the place. It's nice to have the company when you're not here."

"And after I'd gotten used to not having to share you anymore. Still, if you're sure..."

Before I could reply, Finn had slithered down under the covers, coming to rest so his head was at the fork of my legs. His hot mouth locked on to my pussy, lapping tenderly. *If he thinks this will make me forget about that kitten, he's mistaken*, I thought as his tongue beat a soft tattoo on my clit. Then I lay back and let him lick me till I came, purring with pleasure as I did.

Chapter Two

Patsy Baker lived in an old vicarage on the outskirts of town. We had spoken for a good twenty minutes when I had first called her, and she had quizzed me comprehensively about my experience with cats and what kind of home I could offer. She seemed satisfied with the answers, or so I thought when I finally put the phone down. Even so, I was anxious to make a good impression with her.

The vicarage stood behind high hedges. It was built of the distinctively yellow-hued local stone, with ivy crawling round the front door. Patsy answered the door the second time I rang the bell, wiping her hands on an apron bearing the slogan, YOU MAY KISS THE COOK.

"Sorry, dear, you caught me in the middle of baking," she said as she ushered me inside. "I've just taken the shortbread fingers out of the oven. You really must try one."

"Thank you," I replied, following her into her cosy, if somewhat cluttered living room. I watched her as she bustled around, clearing a space for me on the sofa among piles of laundry that were waiting to be ironed. She smelled of lily-of-the-valley talc and vanilla essence, and with her cloud of white hair and reading glasses dangling from a chain around her neck she looked like everyone's favourite grandma. I had the feeling behind the gentle exterior lay a strong, shrewd woman. The certificates and cups on her mantelpiece, awarded to several of her cats in shows across the country, were evidence of a deep competitive streak.

"Tea or coffee?" she asked.

"Tea, please." For the first time I noticed the wicker basket beneath the room's low bay window. Three kittens lay curled in a tangle of paws and ears, sleeping soundly.

Patsy saw me looking in their direction. "They'll wake up soon enough, now there's a guest here." Sure enough, in moments one of the three stretched out its limbs, before tottering to its feet and giving its head a shake. I didn't think I had ever seen anything so cute.

"Pick him up if you like," she said. "Get to know him a little. I've got two girls and a boy, and I plan to keep one of the girls for breeding, but either of the others is available."

With that, she went to make the tea, while I scooped the kitten into my arms. He did his best to scamper up to my shoulder, claws catching in the wool of my sweater. I held him securely, tickling him under his chin. His coat was reddish-brown, distinctively ticked with darker hairs, and his eyes were a shade somewhere between honey and gold. He yawned, showing tiny, needle-sharp teeth.

One of his sisters had woken and was scratching herself behind the ear with her back paw. The other slept on, oblivious to the excitement. It didn't matter. In the few moments I had been holding the male kitten, I had made my decision. He was the one I wanted to take home.

At that moment, Patsy came back into the room, carrying a tray containing two mugs of tea and a plate of home-made shortbread.

"I see you've bonded already," she said, smiling at the way the kitten was trying to chew my hair as he nestled on my shoulder.

"He's just the most gorgeous little thing," I replied, taking my seat on the sofa once more while Patsy made herself comfortable in an easy chair. "I'd love to have him, if you're happy with that."

"Of course. If I hadn't thought you could provide any of my kittens with a suitable home I wouldn't have invited you here."

I set the kitten down on my lap so I could help myself to a piece of the crisp, buttery shortbread. Immediately, he scrambled down to the floor to chase his sister under the piano. They batted at each other with their small, soft paws for a moment before resuming the chase.

"So it's the boy you're taking," Patsy said, making it a *fait accompli*. "If you've thought of a name for him, let me know, so I can use it on his registration certificate."

I'd been mulling a few over in my head on the way to the house. Poppy or Ruby for a girl, Max or Eddie for a boy. Maybe even Lucky, given that a stroke of unexpected good fortune had brought me here. But in the end, I chose something entirely different.

"Tadhg." As soon as I said the name, it felt right on my tongue. "It's Irish. It means 'poet', 'storyteller', something like that." And it didn't sound so very different from 'tiger'. It seemed to suit the fiercely beautiful kitten.

"Tadhg." Patsy mulled it over for a few seconds before declaring, "Yes, I like it, it's different. Now, tell me a bit more about what it is you write..."

So we sat, sipping tea and munching shortbread while I explained the plot of my latest novel to her. All the while, Tadhg regarded us from his seat on the windowsill, as though he understood every word I said.

* * * *

I had to wait a couple of weeks longer before I could collect Tadhg. He needed to have one last vaccination, then he was mine.

In the meantime, I bought a new cat bed for him, along with a selection of toys to replace the squeaky mouse and pink sparkly rubber ball that had been Charlie's favourites, and that I had, somewhat superstitiously, buried alongside him. Somewhere, I was sure, Charlie was playing happily with them.

"He's not even here and you're already spoiling him," Finn commented as I stocked the freezer with chunks of rabbit – the kittens' favourite food, according to Patsy.

"Don't complain," I retorted, planting a soft kiss on his cheek. "It's not as though I don't spoil you, too."

When I went back to Patsy's to pick Tadhg up, one of the girl kittens had already gone to her new home. Tadhg snuffled round my feet, clearly happy to see me, though his mood changed to one of anxiety when I placed him in the cat carrier.

"It's all right, boy, I'm not going to hurt you," I soothed him, but he still continued to squeak piteously as I loaded him into the car, stowing his carrier in the footwell on the passenger side.

Once we were home, he finally settled down, completing a swift circuit of the ground floor to discover where I'd left his food before making a nest for himself in his cat bed. He slept for most of the day, until the sound of a key in the lock announced Finn's arrival.

Gently, I lifted Tadhg into my arms and took him to meet Finn. The reaction wasn't quite what I'd been expecting. As Finn reached out a finger to stroke the kitten behind his ears, Tadhg's hackles rose, and he gave a tiny hiss. In return, something flashed in Finn's eyes, as though he had seen a threat and was responding in kind. Then Finn shook his head, apologising for not being in the best of moods. "One of the lads missed his footing climbing the scaffolding this afternoon and took a nasty fall," he explained. "He's not too badly hurt—fractured his elbow, that's all—but you never want to see any of your mates being loaded into an ambulance."

I set Tadhg down carefully on the floor, and went to pour wine for Finn and myself. We curled up on the sofa companionably, Finn's arm round my shoulders, Tadhg sprawled out on my feet. The arrangement made me think the kitten's initial distrust of my boyfriend was just a reaction to being in a new and unfamiliar environment. I didn't realise there was something far stranger behind it.

* * * *

Tadhg quickly developed his own routine, adopting spots where he liked to sleep. I would find him on the end of my bed, positioned in just the right place to catch the last rays of the afternoon sun. Other times, he would snooze in my study, paws and ears twitching as he dreamed.

He was inquisitive and fearless, always wanting to jump to the highest point he could reach in any room. He loved to scrounge hair bands from my dressing table and take them away to play with, chewing and tossing them in the air. I could watch his antics for hours, though I never forgot I was working to a deadline. I couldn't see Ruth, my editor, being too impressed if I delivered my manuscript late and claimed it was because I'd been watching my kitten trying to climb the curtains in my bedroom.

Meanwhile, Finn was going through one of his unreliable phases. A couple of times he let himself in at three in the morning, without telling me where he'd been. I found betting slips crumpled in my waste basket, and a cocktail napkin with a phone number scrawled on it in what looked like a woman's handwriting. I would have continued to ignore this behaviour, until the night of my birthday. He'd promised to take me out to dinner, so I put

on the little black dress I knew was his favourite and piled my blonde hair up, letting a few fine strands frame my face. I sat waiting for him in the wine bar on the high street, nursing a glass of Chardonnay for the best part of an hour, before finally accepting he wasn't going to show. When I rang his phone to find out where he was, it was switched off.

The fight we had when he finally turned up at the house, close to midnight, was the most spectacular ever. Finn gave me some excuse about running into an old friend and forgetting the time. I knew he was lying. I could smell perfume and something muskily female clinging to his skin, and if he'd been catching up on old times he'd clearly been doing it in bed. Finally, I'd had enough of his lies. I called him all the names I could think of, gathered up the clothes and possessions he kept in my bedroom and threw them at him, yelling at him that I never wanted to see him again. He kept trying to tell me there was a simple explanation, but I didn't want to listen any longer. Determined not to weaken in the face of his undeniable charm, I pushed him out of the front door, slamming it in his face as he turned to plead with me not to do this.

He stood outside for a few minutes, calling my name and begging me to open the door, but I ignored him, even though I knew he was probably waking the neighbours with his noise. At last, he gave up and went away. I crawled into bed and pulled the covers over my head, giving in to the tears I had been fighting back ever since the moment it had dawned on me that Finn had stood me up. Tadhg, sensing my unhappiness, nuzzled at my face for a while, then curled into a ball beside me, as though seeking to protect me from Finn's return.

From that night on, Tadhg slept on the pillow. Even if he wasn't there when I went to bed, I would find him when I woke, curled in a ball with his paw over his nose and tail wrapped round himself.

Finn left messages on my phone, asking for a second chance, but I simply deleted them. Having changed the locks, I was determined not to do anything to encourage him. Even though I missed him, I knew he wasn't worth the aggravation he caused me. I wanted an exclusive relationship, and Finn either didn't or couldn't play by those rules.

With Finn gone, the scarred black stray began to venture into the garden once more. I would catch him sitting on the lawn, gazing into the study, while Tadhg stood guard on the windowsill. I still left food out for him from time to time, but he seemed more interested in conducting his staring contest with Tadhg.

I didn't worry too much about the stray. I was more preoccupied with the recurring dream I'd experienced ever since Tadhg had begun sleeping on my pillow. I'd always kept a notepad by my bed, often waking a protesting Finn by switching on the bedside lamp so I could jot down the details of my dreams before I forgot them. Indeed, a couple of my best story ideas had grown out of something I'd scribbled down in the middle of the night.

Now, however, my dream ran on a single track, with a distinctly sexual undercurrent. It was as though, every night, a handsome man wrapped me in an embrace, murmuring gentle words of love into my ear. I never caught sight of his face, and the dream always melted away in the moments before I woke to see Tadhg, head cocked to one side and regarding me with an expression that told me he was ready for his breakfast.

I continued to believe it was just a dream until the morning I woke earlier than usual, roused by a car alarm blaring in the street outside, and realised I really did have an arm flung over my body. A hand cupped my breast possessively, and a broad chest was pressed against my back. What was happening? Had Finn somehow let himself into the house, despite my efforts to keep him out?

But as I struggled out of the grasp of the sleeping intruder, I quickly realised this wasn't Finn. This man had red-brown hair, spread out on the pillow around him. The sheets barely covered him, and I had a perfect view of the smooth, lightly tanned expanse of his back, all the way down to the taut cheeks of his ass. *Whoever he is, he's gorgeous*, I thought, then I pulled myself up short. He must have broken in. He was more than likely dangerous. I needed to call the police.

I was reaching for my phone when he stopped me. "Hey, Miranda, don't be afraid."

I turned to look at him, wondering how he knew my name, and found myself staring into eyes of a strangely familiar shade, somewhere between honey and gold. This man had a proud set to his face, one I would have described as leonine. He answered my question before I could ask it.

"Miranda, it's me, Tadhg."

I gaped at him. What he was telling me was impossible, yet on one level it made sense. It explained why the kitten hadn't come running when he'd heard me stirring, and why the colouring of this handsome stranger so closely matched that of a prize-winning Abyssinian cat.

"You're joking, right?" I said, my hand still hovering over the phone.

"Not at all." Tadhg sat up, using a fistful of bedsheet to cover his groin. For a moment I caught myself wondering how big his cock might be, and whether the curls at its base were the same shade as those on his head. "I know this is going to be difficult for you to understand, but I'm a shifter. I have the ability to transform from man to cat and back again."

"Oh, come on," I snorted, feeling as though I'd suddenly been parachuted into an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. "You really expect me to believe that?"

"I promise you it's the truth," he replied. "Some of us live mostly in human form, others mostly as domestic cats. It all depends on what most suits our circumstances." *That sounds like the way a cat would operate*, I thought, suddenly intrigued despite the unlikely nature of Tadhg's story.

"Are there a lot of you – shifters, I mean?" I asked.

"More than you might think," Tadhg replied. "We've become very good at concealing our true natures over the centuries. I don't know whether I would have ever revealed my human side, if I hadn't become so attracted to you."

"So this is the first time you've shifted?"

Tadhg shook his head. "For the past few weeks, it's been pretty much every night. I didn't know how you'd react if I changed during the day, but I reckoned I'd be safe doing it when you were asleep..."

Things began to fall into place. All those nights when I had dreamed someone was holding me in his arms, it had really been Tadhg.

"I have to admit I'm having a few problems believing all this," I said.

"I'm sure you are. This is why I decided it was safer to live under your roof as a cat." Tadhg sighed. "I just never counted on falling in love with you. More than anything, I want to be your lover. Every night I lie here, holding you in my arms, my cock hard with the thought of what it would be like to make love to you."

Had I ever heard such a passionate declaration of love from Finn? I really couldn't remember. He'd often told me how attractive he found me, how hot I was, but the word "love" had almost never cropped up.

Tadhg stroked his fingers through my hair. "Miranda, let me show you just how much you mean to me."

He brought his face close to mine, lips slightly parted. I didn't quite know how I'd found myself in this position, about to be kissed by someone who claimed he spent most of his time as a domestic cat, but I had no objections, not even a moment's hesitation as our lips met. I let his tongue explore my mouth in a series of long, increasingly intense kisses. When he slid the shoestring straps of my nightdress down over my shoulders, I didn't protest. I opened my eyes to see him gazing at my full breasts, his mouth curving upwards in an approving smile.

"Miranda, you have a truly beautiful body," Tadhg said reverently. I knew it wasn't the first time he'd seen me naked—he had sat on the edge of the tub as I bathed, batting at the foamy bubbles with his little paw—but it was the first in his human incarnation. The adoration in his golden gaze made me feel deeply desired and very special.

He bent his head to suckle at my nipple. I breathed in the scent of him, hair slightly perfumed with the peppermint and nutmeg pillow spray I liked to use. Tadhg laid me back against the pillows, his hand roving over the soft curve of my belly, down to the top of my thigh. His fingers weaved spidery patterns there, gradually encouraging me to open my legs.

My whole body was suffused with desire, pulsing hotly through my veins. As Tadhg's fingers buried themselves in my pussy, I reached for his cock in return. My hand closed around it, finding it already almost fully hard and ready for me.

"Aah, yes," Tadhg hissed, as I stroked up and down the temptingly thick shaft, picturing the moment, not so very far away, when I would be impaled on it.

His thumb was resting against the entrance to my ass, not attempting to push its way inside, just reminding me there were so many ways he could fill me if he chose. I knew there would be time and opportunity for us to explore all the possibilities—if not now, then in the future. Even in these few short moments we had spent together, I knew we had the capability to create a powerful, lasting bond. My lover might not have been entirely of this world, but my heart was his, if he wanted it. With Finn, the initial attraction had been almost purely physical—in truth, our relationship had never really progressed much beyond that stage—but my feelings for Tadhg, I was astonished to discover, ran much deeper. Or maybe I shouldn't have been so surprised. After all, on one level I had been in love with Tadhg almost since the first moment I had seen him in kitten form, sleeping with his siblings in the basket in Patsy Baker's living room.

Tadhg had a couple of fingers working in my hot, slippery depths by now and I knew I couldn't wait any longer. "Fuck me, please," I begged. "Make me yours."

"Anything to oblige," he murmured, flipping me over so I was lying on my front and stripping my nightdress the rest of the way off me. He arranged the pillows under my middle, using them to raise my ass up into the air. Something in his animal nature was telling him to take me from behind. I was a little disappointed at first, as I'd wanted to be able to gaze into his incredible eyes as we fucked, but those feelings faded away as I felt his cock nudging its way up into me. In this position, I could feel every last inch of him, hot and imperious. I pushed my ass back at him as he started to thrust, letting him know I wanted him to fill me to my very limit. His hands were on my breasts again, pressing them together, his fingers twirling my nipples. Every nerve from my scalp to my toes seemed to be part of a tightly-woven net of sensation, making me appreciate each of his thrusts through my whole being.

My own fingers were at my clit, rubbing around and over the slick bud. Tadhg's sharp teeth nipped at the nape of my neck. I had always been very sensitive there, and those little bites were the last piece in the jigsaw of my arousal. Unable to hold back any longer, I cried out Tadhg's name, my body convulsing against the pillows as I surrendered to a shattering climax. Tadhg followed moments behind, filling me with his hot, virile seed. He stayed buried in me for a long time after he'd come, rolling me on to my side so we could lie together.

"Now do you understand why I had to show you my human form?" he asked.

"Of course," I replied, "and I hope I'm going to see a lot more of it from now on."

"Oh, you will. Trust me."

* * * *

If I thought that revealing his true nature was the only surprise Tadhg had in store for me that morning, I was mistaken. Eventually, I roused myself to go and make breakfast. He followed me into the kitchen moments later, wearing my dressing gown. It was far too short for him, exposing most of his long, lean thighs, but he looked very sexy in it.

"If you're going to spend time as a man, we're really going to have to find you something that fits," I said, handing him the mug of hot milk he'd asked for. "Let me check the back of the wardrobe. I might still have something of Finn's I never got round to throwing out."

"No." The sharpness of Tadhg's tone was almost frightening. "I want nothing to do with anything belonging to that man."

"I'm sorry," I began. "I just..."

Tadhg cut me off in mid-sentence. His hackles were clearly up again. Obviously I hadn't imagined his dislike for Finn, but I couldn't understand what my ex-boyfriend had done to upset him so much.

"Miranda, sit down, please. I need to explain a few more things to you." I did as he asked, wondering where the conversation was heading. "I told you I was a shifter. Well, that's only part of the story. I'm also of royal blood. My family has ruled our society for many hundreds of years." It sounded incredible, but I was sure Tadhg was telling me the truth. The registration certificate Patsy had given me when I collected the kitten from her was evidence of his pedigree, going back four generations, each of them from pure-bred, prize-winning stock. It was easy to see this regal bloodline stretching back endlessly, just as he claimed.

"Okay, but that doesn't explain why you got so angry when I mentioned Finn's name."

Tadhg took a sip of his milk, as though fortifying himself for what he was about to say. "Like all royal families, we have enemies. And Finn is one of them."

"What? How is that possible?"

"He's a shifter, too, Miranda."

"Oh, come on, now you're just being ridiculous." I tried to rise from the table, but Tadhg caught hold of my hand.

"It's true, even if you don't want to believe it. And you've seen him in both his forms."

He paused for a moment, watching as realisation dawned on my face. "Oh, my God. The stray." Tadhg didn't need to say anything. Once I thought about it, it all made perfect sense. It explained why the stray's arrival in my life had coincided almost exactly with Finn's, as well as the scars on Finn's body he had never cared to talk about. Now I knew why he had the urge to roam at night, to seek out other women, to play by his own rules. Did

female shifters come into heat the same way ordinary cats did, and if so, were the likes of Finn compelled to seek them out and mate with them? If that was the case, would that same compulsion strike Tadhg in turn? I had so many questions I needed to ask, but I sensed Tadhg would answer them in his own time.

“Finn and his tribe would like nothing better than to see me and all my line wiped out,” Tadhg continued, “and when you brought me home, he sensed the perfect opportunity. Why do you think I made sure I was always by your side when he was around, or else safely hidden away in some hidey-hole where he couldn’t find me? The best thing you ever did to protect me was throw him out.”

“But I only did that because I finally got tired of him...” I stopped, realising I’d been going to say “tomcatting around with other women”, “cheating on me,” I offered instead.

“Well, I’m glad you did. Even if I hadn’t hoped I might make you mine one day, I couldn’t bear to see him treating you so badly. You know you deserve better.”

“Thanks, Tadhg. But I don’t think you need to worry about Finn anymore. I can’t see him finding his way back to me now. To be honest, I don’t even remember seeing the stray hanging around.”

“He’ll be licking his wounds somewhere, I’ve no doubt of that,” Tadhg replied, glancing around the room as though sniffing for Finn’s scent on the air, “but he’ll come back. And when he does, you have to be on your guard, Miranda. If he can’t have you, I’ve no doubt he’ll make sure I can’t, either. He’s dangerous, and he wouldn’t think twice about hurting you if he had to.”

“I’ll be fine,” I replied. “There’s no way I’ll let Finn get close to me again.”

I didn’t realise then how those words would come back to haunt me.

Chapter Three

Life settled into a steady pattern for me in the weeks following Tadhg's revelation. Now that I knew the secret of his nature, he seemed comfortable spending his time in human form. Though he seemed happiest without clothes, we both knew I wouldn't be able to explain why I had a permanently naked man in my home. I did a little shopping on his behalf, buying him a couple of white T-shirts and a pair of faded jeans that clung enticingly to his taut ass. While I was busy writing in my study, he decided he would teach himself to cook, poring over the pages of the dog-eared old cookbook that once belonged to my grandmother. It didn't surprise me that the first meal he presented me with was a surprisingly tasty rabbit casserole.

Most nights, he would make love to me for hours before we fell asleep in each other's arms. Sometimes, sex with Tadhg was fast and ferocious, as though something in his blood was roused. On other occasions, he would make himself comfortable between my legs and settle in to give me serious pleasure, licking me with his wickedly talented tongue to one orgasm after another.

What he loved most of all was to fuck me as the shower beat down on the two of us—our bodies twined together under the spray, as his mouth nipped at my throat and his hands played with my breasts and pussy. He had incredible stamina, never seeming to tire and always making sure I was thoroughly satisfied before he came himself.

I'd had great sex with Finn, too, but with Tadhg I always felt he was fully committed to making sure we both had a good time. More than once with Finn, I'd had the impression he would rather be somewhere else. Or, more accurately, with someone else. Which, of course, had turned out to be very much the case.

Not that I gave much of a thought to Finn these days. My closest girlfriend, Holly, saw him in the same wine bar where I'd waited in vain for him on the night of my birthday and couldn't resist telling me all about it. She claimed he was sitting in a corner booth with two very beautiful blonde girls. "They were so alike, they had to be twins," Holly said, as we sat sipping cappuccinos in a little café just off the high street. "And from the look on his face, he

was going home with both of them. It's such a shame," she added, "because the two of you made such a great couple."

No, we didn't, I wanted to tell her. Not really. We might have looked good together, him so tall and broad, me barely reaching the point of his chin even in my heels, but ultimately, it wasn't about the way we looked. Unlike Tadhg, Finn had clearly never had any intention of letting me know he was a shifter. If I hadn't tired of his unreliable ways, I might have stayed with him for years before I finally became aware something dangerously feline lurked beneath his ruggedly masculine exterior.

"Don't worry, Holly," I told her. "He can sleep with as many sets of twins as he wants. I'm over him. So much so, I'm seeing someone else."

"Miranda Taylor, you're a sly one!" Holly exclaimed, beckoning the waitress over to fetch her another coffee as she prepared to hear all the juicy details. "Who is he? Where did you meet him? And, more importantly, when am I going to meet him?"

"All in good time," was all I replied. I was enjoying being with Tadhg far too much to share him with anyone else. Already the ups and downs of my time with Finn were starting to seem like a distant memory.

So when I did bump into Finn once more, my guard was entirely down and I made mistakes I never would have otherwise.

* * * *

I had agreed to take part in an event at Palmer's, a small independent bookshop in the old part of town. I had spent hundreds of happy hours there as a child, browsing the shelves, lost in the endless worlds and possibilities those books offered. When I had first embarked on my writing career, when everything had seemed so precarious and my decision to give up my secure job entirely the wrong one, I told myself one day I would have a book of my own on those shelves. It had encouraged me to keep going, to make a success of myself. So when Greg Palmer, the current owner and the son of the man who had founded the shop, asked me if I would read from my latest novel as part of National Bookshop Week, I said yes without hesitation.

The reading was arranged for Friday night at seven. Another local author, Marcus Stone, would be there, too, performing some of his comedic poems. I tried to tempt Tadhg to come with me, but it was a cold night and he preferred to curl up by the fire. He didn't say as much, but there was a full moon in the sky and I suspected it was encouraging him to shift back into feline form while I was out.

Greg Palmer was in the shop when I arrived, talking to a gangly, curly-haired man whose booming laugh rang round the small shop. Greg thanked me for coming and introduced me to the other man, who turned out to be Marcus Stone. The poet gripped my hand in a firm handshake as we were introduced, giving off a confident, almost manic energy. He clearly relished being in the spotlight far more than I did.

A couple of dozen seats had been arranged in three semi-circular rows at the back of the shop. The audience members were already beginning to arrive in ones and twos. Bottles of wine stood on the counter, alongside a stack of plastic glasses. Greg poured a glass of red for Marcus. I asked for white, needing something to steady a sudden attack of nerves.

Holly appeared, taking a glass of red wine and finding a seat in the first row. She gave me a little encouraging wave. I was pleased to see she'd been able to attend. It never hurt to have a friendly face in the audience.

When everyone was finally seated, Greg Palmer made a short speech thanking them for coming and emphasising the part bookshops played in encouraging good reading habits. Then he let Marcus Stone take the floor.

Marcus quickly won the audience over, both with the content of his poems and the manner in which he read them. Pacing the floor, arms waving, declaiming the words as though they were the most important things we would ever hear, he had people rocking with laughter and applauding wildly.

I wasn't sure quite how I could follow his performance, but Greg announced there would be a ten-minute interval for more wine and nibbles. When the audience took their seats once more and Greg had introduced me, I began reading to rapt silence.

My latest book, *Distant Silhouettes*, was the story of a woman house-sitting as a favour to a friend and gradually coming to the realisation that the house was haunted by a malevolent spirit. The passage I had chosen to read saw her being woken in the night by strange

knocking noises, and making a circuit of the house to find no sign of any intruder. The round of applause when I was finished was more enthusiastic than I could have expected.

When the reading finished, both Marcus and I were asked to sign copies of our books. I'd been prepared for that. What I hadn't expected was a copy of *Distant Silhouettes* being thrust under my nose and a familiar voice saying, "Can you sign it, 'To Finn'?"

I glanced up, startled, meeting Finn's green gaze. He smiled lazily at me. "How's it going, Miranda?"

"Fine," I stammered, doing my best to regain my composure. "I didn't see you arrive."

"Oh, I was running late. Just sneaked in as Stone was being introduced. You read beautifully, by the way." He lowered his voice, his tone strangely seductive. "And you look beautiful, too."

I thrust the book back at him. "Thanks, Finn. And thanks for coming." Looking round, I saw that Finn had been the last in line and the shop was emptying rapidly. "Now if you'll excuse me, I think Greg will be wanting to close up soon."

"He might have other things on his mind." Finn gestured to where Greg was standing by the counter, deep in conversation with Holly. From the way their heads were leaning close together, I could tell they were both attracted to the other. In other circumstances, I would have been glad that Holly appeared to have met a potential new lover, but I was more concerned about Finn's continued presence at my elbow.

Ignoring him, I walked over to Greg and Holly. "Thanks for inviting me, Greg," I said. "I've had a great evening."

"Yes, it went really well, didn't it?" he replied. "And if you'd like to come and read again, I'd be very happy to have you back."

"I'd love to," I said, meaning it. "Holly, I'm ready to leave now."

"Okay." Her expression told me she clearly wasn't. She looked over to where Finn appeared to be waiting for me. "You didn't tell me you and Finn were back together."

"We're not," I replied firmly. "I didn't even know he was coming tonight. He just—" *Appeared out of nowhere*, I thought. *Just like a cat.*

At that moment, Finn wandered over to join us. "I was about to offer to walk Miranda home."

I glanced at Holly, frantically signalling with my eyes that was the last thing I wanted, but Holly was oblivious. Either that or she simply didn't believe I had no intention of rekindling my relationship with Finn. How could I blame her, when I still hadn't introduced her to Tadhg? She probably thought I'd invented the hot new lover I mentioned so often but was never seen with.

"Great," she said. "I'd have offered you a lift otherwise, but this means I can stay and get to know Greg a little better."

"Well, that's settled, then," Finn said. He smiled the easy, charming smile that had always helped me forgive his worst excesses. "Come on, Miranda, let's get you home."

He gave me a moment to collect my bag and coat, then gently steered me out of the shop.

"Finn, there's no need to do this," I told him. "I'll be fine on my own."

"And if I let you do that, and something happened to you? I'd feel terrible, knowing I'd put you in danger."

A little voice at the back of my head was telling me the only danger in this situation would come from Finn, but I ignored it. I was sure Finn didn't pose any threat to me, despite what Tadhg had said. Even though I knew some dark, feline part of him lurked beneath the surface, he had never tried to hurt me. And I had Tadhg waiting at home for me.

We fell into step on the deserted pavement, heading in the direction of home. As we waited to cross at the lights, Finn let his hand rest gently in the small of my back. Immediately I stepped away, wanting to set a clear physical boundary. He appeared to respect that, and did so until the moment I stood on my doorstep, reaching in my bag for my key.

I unlocked the door, pushing it open a little way. That was when Finn raised the point of my chin with his thumbtip. "So, is this where we say goodnight, Miranda, or –?"

Before I could answer, he pressed his lips to mine. I almost pulled away. Then I relaxed into his embrace. A farewell kiss couldn't hurt. One last kiss, to wipe away the sourness of the way we had parted...

Finn broke the kiss abruptly, pushing past me into the house. I almost staggered into the hall as Finn called out, "Tadhg! Tadhg Pureblood. Show yourself!"

"Finn, what are you doing?" I yelled, clutching at his arm. "Get out of my house. Now!"

"No, Miranda." The charm and softness was gone from his voice. I could hear the battered feline streetfighter that lurked beneath the surface, and it frightened me. "You threw me out once. It's not going to happen again. Not till I get what I came for."

"I said get out!" My anger was directed as much at myself as it was Finn. I should have insisted on walking home alone, as I'd intended. Instead, I'd made myself—and Tadhg—vulnerable to whatever Finn had planned.

Tadhg appeared in the living room doorway. His feet were bare and his hair ruffled, as though he'd just woken up. As soon as he saw Finn, his hackles rose. It reminded me of his reaction the day I first brought him home, when he had treated Finn as some kind of threat. Then, I had thought it was all in my imagination. Now, I knew that threat couldn't be more real.

"I'm sorry, Tadhg," I began. "I didn't want him to come with me, but —"

"But she's weak," Finn sneered. "And she's still in love with me."

"That's a lie." I glanced over at Tadhg. "You know he's lying, don't you?"

Tadhg nodded. "It's no more than I'd expect from a sneaky, conniving Longpaw."

Finn reacted to the mention of his clan name by lunging for Tadhg. The two men grappled with one another, Finn slamming Tadhg up hard against the wall in the hallway before Tadhg broke the hold and swung a punch that caught Finn firmly in the stomach. Winded, he crumpled to his knees.

I pulled my phone out of my pocket. "I'm calling the police," I said.

"No, you don't," Finn huffed. His arm shot out, grabbing my ankle and pulling me down to the carpet. The phone fell from my grasp. I tried to reach it, but he kicked it hard, so it went spinning away under the door of the hall closet.

On hands and knees, I started crawling into the kitchen as Tadhg and Finn traded blows. There were cook's knives in the drawer. If Finn came after me again, I would feel better with one in my hand.

The two men didn't seem to notice I had gone. Finn had taken a punch to the nose, and a thin trickle of blood escaped from his nostril, while Tadhg's eye was beginning to swell shut. I had to do something, because the mood they were both in I was sure they wouldn't stop fighting until one of them was dead.

I heard Tadhg cry out, and turned to see what was happening. He was curled in a ball on the floor as Finn aimed a couple of vicious kicks at his ribs. Things had gone far enough. I kicked off my shoes, not wanting to be hampered by their silly spike heels. I pulled open the drawer, my fingers closing around the smooth plastic handle of the carving knife. Finn heard the rattling of metal and dashed into the kitchen. Trying not to let him know how terrified I was, I brandished the knife at him.

"You silly girl," he sneered. "Do you really think I'm afraid of you?"

He caught hold of my wrist, squeezing and turning till fierce pain shot up my arm and I dropped the knife.

"Now to finish it." He snatched up the knife and dashed back into the hall, expecting to find Tadhg where he had left him, weak and vulnerable. Instead, Tadhg had gathered up his reserves of strength and was waiting for him, crouching like a martial arts fighter, hands twisted like claws. His beautiful golden eyes blazed with anger.

The two men circled warily, each waiting for the other to make the first move. At last, Finn lunged at Tadhg, bringing the knife down. Tadhg feinted, and the blade caught in the wooden doorframe. Exasperated, he tugged it free, then went after Tadhg again. They fell to the floor, rolling over and over. Unearthly hisses and growls emanated from the two as they fought, each one a reminder that feline blood ran in their veins, rousing them to animal fury. I hid my face in my hands, afraid of what might happen. I needed to find my phone, but I knew that if I tried to pass them, Finn would have no compunction about stabbing me.

"Any last words, Tadhg Pureblood?" I heard Finn say. I peeked out from between my fingers to see he had pinned Tadhg to the floor and was holding the knife to his windpipe.

"Go to hell," Tadhg spat. He reached up, trying his best to push the glittering blade away from his throat. For a moment, I thought it was inevitable that Finn would deliver the fatal blow, but I had underestimated Tadhg's fighting spirit. From somewhere, he dredged up the last remnants of his strength and managed to roll Finn on to his back. They tussled for a moment, exchanging curses, then the knife was brought forcibly down. Only it was Tadhg who held it, and when it came down, it did so straight through the palm of Finn's hand.

"Feel lucky I didn't pierce your worthless heart," Tadhg hissed. He turned his attention to me. "Miranda, get your phone and call the police."

"No, don't." Finn suddenly sounded lost and scared, his brash swagger completely vanished. "Let me go, please. The Longpaws won't trouble you again, I swear."

As he continued to plead for his life, I hunted in the closet for my phone, finding it in a pile of old bedlinen. My fingers hovered over the keys, ready to dial the police.

Something in Tadhg seemed to soften, because he pulled the knife blade from Finn's hand. "Go on, get out," he said. "Show your scar to the rest of your clan as a warning. Let them know what will happen if they trouble us."

Finn retreated, cradling his bleeding hand. I ran to push the front door shut behind him. For a moment, I thought I saw a large black cat limping down the path, but the shape was quickly swallowed up by darkness. I slid the door chain into place, reminding myself to never be careless about my security again.

Tadhg pulled me into an embrace, holding me tight as though he couldn't bear to let me go. His lips brushed my hair, murmuring soft endearments. I could feel his cock hardening, trapped between our two bodies.

"Come on, let's go upstairs," he whispered, desire dripping from every syllable.

"There's no need," I replied, sinking to my knees before him. Popping open the fly buttons of his jeans, I reached inside, bringing his swelling cock out. It pulsed gently in my hand, eager to be buried inside me.

I smiled up into Tadhg's eyes in the moment before I wrapped my lips around his tight red crown. He was my lover, my protector, and I wanted to show him just how grateful I was for defeating the duplicitous Finn.

"That feels amazing," Tadhg sighed, relishing the feeling of being cocooned in my mouth. My nipples were tight points, pushing against my clothing, and my pussy was getting damper by the minute, but for the moment my whole focus was on Tadhg's pleasure.

My tongue moved in figure-eights over his cockhead, licking up the drops of salty juice that gathered there. My hand cradled his balls, heavy with the promise of life. I was attuned to every movement, every little sigh or groan that told me how much Tadhg was enjoying what I was doing.

When I looked up again, his eyes were half-closed. He seemed lost in a world of private sensation, senses stimulated almost beyond endurance by the feel of my tongue and fingers.

"Let me fuck you," Tadhg begged. "Miranda, I want you so badly."

Happy to oblige, I dragged him down to the floor with me. On the same patch of carpet where he and Finn had battled for their lives, our bodies now twined together with loving intent.

I dropped kisses on his cheek, where Finn's sharp nails had scratched it, and the half-closed eye Finn had blacked. Unlike Finn, he wouldn't carry a lasting scar from their encounter, but I was determined to kiss all his hurts away.

Tadhg soon grew impatient for more meaningful contact. He made short work of the pretty floral dress I'd worn for the reading, unzipping it and tugging it roughly off me. He didn't bother to unfasten my bra, just pulled my breasts from the lace-edged cups so he could feast on my nipples. As he licked them, his fingers buried themselves in my panties, teasing my clit.

"So lovely," he whispered, as my body arched, pushing upward in search of stronger stimulation. "I'm so lucky you chose me."

"But if I hadn't taken you, you might have gone to a home where Finn couldn't find you."

"Oh, Finn would have found me, don't you worry about that," Tadhg replied, "and I might have been with someone who didn't know about my true nature, who wouldn't have fought for me the way you did." He traced a finger over my lips. "But let's not talk about that now. Just kiss me."

I did as he asked—a long, deep kiss that left me molten inside. Everything that had happened from the moment Finn had pushed his way into the house was beginning to feel like a distant dream. Only the feel of Tadhg's body, hard and insistent against my own, was real.

Tadhg grasped the waistband of my panties, pulling them down without ceremony. As I spread my legs, my pussy opened for him, blooming like an exotic flower. Finn's cock nudged its way between my wet petals, meeting no resistance. I lay sprawled beneath him, hands flung over my head in a posture of abandon. Tadhg gripped both my wrists in his, staring into my eyes as he began to thrust. I felt as though he was taking possession of me in a way he never had before, and I knew I was his for as long as he needed me. Just as he knew he was mine.

His strokes were slow and determined, his gaze never leaving mine. No more words were necessary, as he steadily gathered pace. We were working in perfect rhythm now, his cock hitting the places inside me that made me gasp and buck beneath him. We ground together, the friction making my clit tingle and drawing me ever closer to an all-consuming climax.

We had gone to a place where time no longer had any meaning, where all that mattered was Tadhg's sweat-slick, half-clad body moving against mine. His movements were growing faster, ass cheeks clenching tightly, and I knew he couldn't be far from coming. I lost control almost in the same moment he did, something seeming to come unraveled deep inside me as wave after wave of sweet pleasure crested and broke.

I was only dimly aware of Tadhg's last, urgent thrusts and the roar he gave as he came. In the blissful moments afterward, his hand stroked my cheek and he told me, "I love you, Miranda. I never expected to find love with a mortal, but I can't imagine being with anyone but you."

I rolled on my side, looking into his strangely beautiful eyes. If the fact he was a shifter had ever alarmed me, those feelings were long gone. I felt only desire for my other-worldly lover.

Still, one question nagged at me. "So is it finally over between you and Finn?"

Tadhg shook his head. "Whatever he promised, he'll be back. There's too much bad blood between my clan and his for him to let things lie. But when he comes back, I'll be ready for him, don't worry. And I will never let him do anything to hurt you. You're far too precious for that."

As if to prove his words, he kissed the hollow of my throat, his mouth gradually beginning the slow trail down my body once more. I had no doubt he meant everything he said. And I knew that together, we would do whatever it took to defy Finn and his clan and carve out a long and happy life together. Then I stopped thinking about anything but what Tadhg was doing with his lips and tongue and let my gorgeous shifter love me all over again.

About the Author

Elizabeth Coldwell is the author of numerous short stories and two full-length novels, 'Calendar Girl' and 'Playing The Field'. Her stories have appeared in the best-selling 'Best Women's Erotica' series and Black Lace's popular 'Wicked Words' collections. Formerly the editor of the UK edition of Forum magazine, she now contributes a spicy monthly column, 'The Cougar Chronicles', to its pages. When she is not busy writing, she is an avid supporter of Rotherham United Football Club and can be regularly found on the terraces at weekends, cheering her boys to victory (hopefully!).

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