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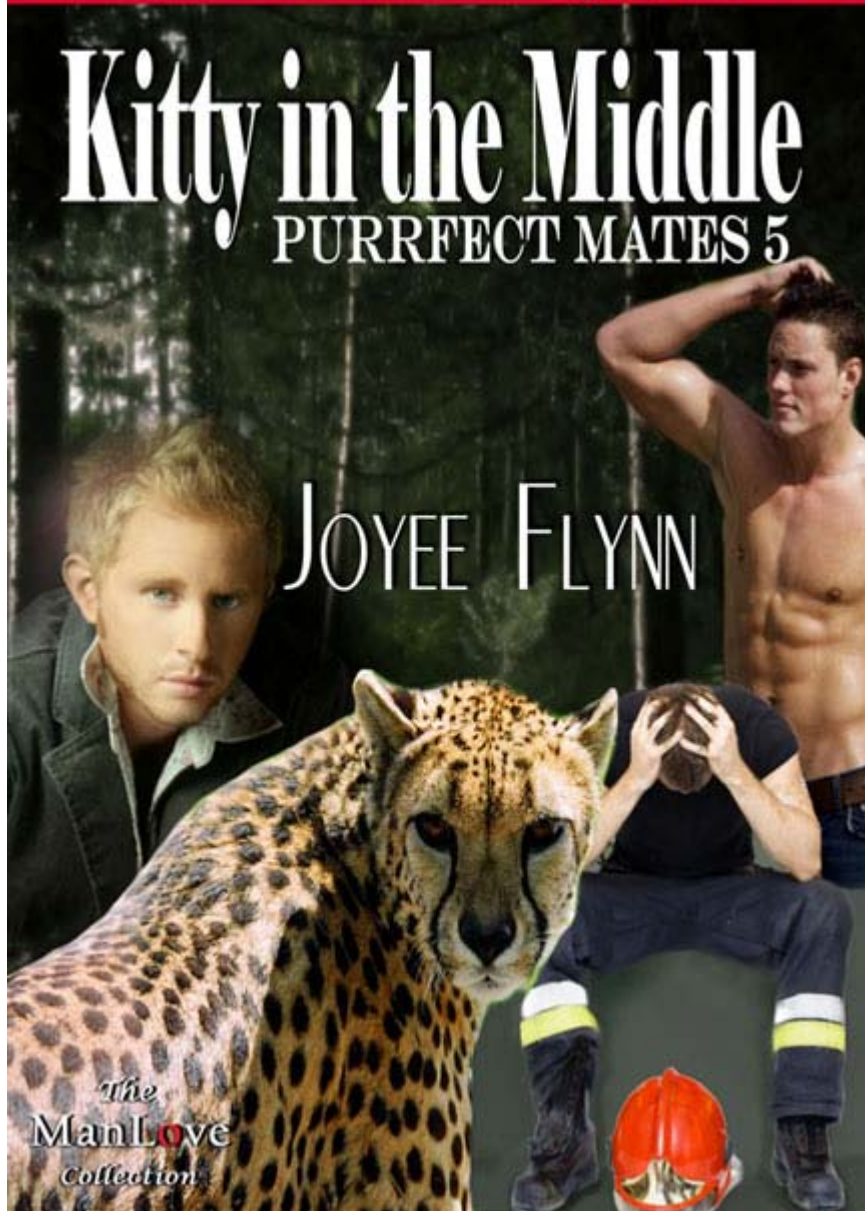
*Ménage Amour*

# Kitty in the Middle

PURRFECT MATES 5

JOYEE FLYNN

*The*  
**ManLove**  
*Collection*



## Purrfect Mates 5

### Kitty in the Middle

Ham Cowell is an artist whose general awkwardness left his life devoid of any meaningful relationships. The oldest of his cheetah litter, he often finds himself being sought out by his brothers for advice. What Ham wants is to be noticed by someone other than his family.

Kale Bauer's a firefighter who has never been able to find someone that he has strong feelings for. When he meets Ham, he not only finds that someone, but he is plunged into a world of shifters.

Luca Riso was just rescued from the Hunters' circus by a group of vampires. He has been severely abused, but his wounds start to heal when he meets Ham and Kale.

When Luca tells his new mates that his brothers are still being held—and he will do whatever is necessary to get them back—will they be able to stay together? Or will anger tear them apart?

**Genre:** Alternative (M/M or F/F), Ménage a Trois/Quatre, Shape-shifter

**Length:** 35,738 words

# **KITTY IN THE MIDDLE**

*Purrfect Mates 5*

**Joyce Flynn**

**MENAGE AMOUR  
MANLOVE**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.  
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## **DEDICATION**

For everyone who sent emails asking, pleading, and even begging for more kitties. Here you go! This is the first of three new Purrfect Mates. I'm thrilled you love my tigers and cheetahs as much as I do... and I couldn't help but add a new cat family. Hope it was worth the wait!

# KITTY IN THE MIDDLE

*Purrfect Mates 5*

JOYEE FLYNN

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## Chapter 1

“Shit...Shit! Are you shitting me? Fuck, okay, we’re leaving now,” Cass growled in his phone, pausing here and there. My eldest brother wasn’t much of a *growler*, so it pretty much got all our attention and paused dinner.

He snapped the phone shut and took a few deep breaths. While some of our closer brothers might have heard parts of the conversation, which was my guess from the sad looks they were tossing each other, I was on the other side of the table, so I didn’t have a clue what was going on. And when the table seated thirty people, that was a long ways away in a big room.

“Shem’s human mate, Diets, was hurt in the line of duty—”

“Is he?” I asked as I stood so fast I knocked the chair over. I swallowed loudly and stared at my brother. Cass and I had always had a strange but incredibly tight, relationship. He was the eldest of all of us and his litter, but since I was the oldest of the younger litter, it was normally us making most of the decisions. I always thought that was odd since I really wasn’t the second oldest child...It just worked for our family.

“No, he’s alive but banged up, Ham,” Cass said, shaking his head. I heard the collective sigh around the room. “Curtis and Shem were



having dinner near where the fire was, and Shem felt Diets's distress. Curtis ran in the building, did a blood exchange to make Diets immortal while none of the humans were around, and claimed him. So he should be fine, but we need to get to the hospital."

"Hael, take our litter and get a change of clothes for Curtis and Shem. They're going to want clean clothes," I ordered as I glanced at Cass, who nodded his approval. "The older litter, go get snacks from the kitchen and we can pick coffee up on the way. If I remember correctly, hospital coffee sucks. Cass and I will commandeer a vehicle and meet everyone out front in five minutes."

"Isn't that a nice way to say *steal* one?" Hael snickered as everyone jumped into action.

"I prefer *borrow*," I answered innocently as I fluttered my eyelashes. Everyone was smiling at least as they booked it from the dining room. When it was just Cass and I again, I focused on him. "How bad is it?"

"If Curtis hadn't claimed him, Curtis was pretty sure Diets would have died," Cass said with a pained expression. "He should be okay now, but Shem is freaking out, especially since he can't see anything."

"Right, okay, we need to get to the lockbox of keys." Cass nodded at me, and we headed to the large attached garage off the service entrance. Luckily we knew the code to get in lockbox that held all the keys for the vehicles at the estate. Since we'd been helping Curtis with updating security and procedures, we knew a lot of the ins and outs of the place.

Three minutes later we pulled up front, each in separate SUVs. While all ten of us could probably have fit in one of the Hummers, we figured it was better to have more than one car in case someone needed to leave or when Curtis and Shem were ready to come home.

Everyone was already out front and hurriedly climbed in. We sped off toward the hospital. Cass knew the general direction, but he had one of his litter pulling up directions as we went, so I made sure to

stay right on his tail. Traffic was light as we zoomed along back roads until we got to more main ones. But all around, we didn't have much in our way. The only stop we made was to Starbucks to get a couple of those boxes of coffee to go and all the fixings.

We pulled up at the hospital within twenty minutes of Curtis's call and parked. It was like a mad dash to find them. No one would tell us anything or knew where our brother was.

"Do your thing, Ham," Cass said under his breath when we found out where the surgical wing was. "We don't know what lie they had to tell to get to Diets."

"Right, I was having the same thought," I grumbled. "Keep the coffee behind me. It interferes with my smell." Cass nodded, and I closed my eyes to focus.

We were shifters and all had a very, very strong sense of smell, even in human form. Once more, we were cheetahs. Large cats have one of the strongest senses of smell in the animal kingdom. But of all of us, for some reason, I had the most powerful honker.

"Elevator," I whispered as I caught a whiff of my baby brother. I knew without having to look that they all followed me. When in the elevator, I smelled traces of Curtis and Shem, but Curtis's scent lingered on the button for the fifth floor. I punched it, and the door closed.

Once we were on the right floor after starting from the surgical wing where Diets would have come in as a trauma patient, it was just a matter of following my nose to Shem. I'd never been so happy to see him. He was curled in a ball on the seat next to Curtis, shaking slightly with fear but probably mostly from the loud, strange sounds around us. Being blind had to suck huge monkey nuts.

"Hey, twerp," I said gently as I sat down next to him. "We brought you guys some clean clothes and some real, non-hospital coffee."

“And I grabbed those banana pudding cakes you like so much.” Hael cooed as he knelt at Shem’s feet. “Well, we all like them, but you could live off of them.”

Shem just nodded a moment before throwing himself into my arms. “I know, Shem. He’ll be okay, baby bro. He’s a badass, hot fireman. He wouldn’t want you to worry.”

“Right, right, of course,” Shem sniffled and wiped his eyes as our litter surrounded him for support. “You guys brought Curtis clothes? He smells like he rolled around in a fireplace and not the good-smelling kind.” He blew kissy faces at his mate to take the sting out of his words.

“Love you too, angel.” Curtis chuckled and kissed his cheek. Cass pulled him off to the side and handed over a bag. Curtis went to change, and then we took Shem to do the same. We figured one of them should be waiting in easy view in case someone came looking for them with information.

After that, it was simply a waiting game, which blew chunks. All of us kept busy with stupid shit just so we weren’t all staring at the clock or hounding the nurses. There wasn’t a single piece of trash or askew magazine in the whole ward.

When some firemen started showing up, obviously friends of Diets, we started playing host. Most of them must have come from the same fire Shem’s mate did because they all looked like they’d been through the wringer. There was soot all over their hair and clothes, and they wore expressions of exhaustion. Though most of them were my walking wet dreams, this was so not the time to try and pick up a date.

Besides, I was probably the most un-smooth man on the face of the planet. I was the eldest of my litter, and in my family I was loved, and my younger siblings came to me for advice a lot. But in the real world, I was invisible. Even at college I swear people walked through me most of the time. I was just plain and unnoticeable, except for the red hair with the black highlights.

I was trying not to pout that all these gorgeous men would never notice me unless I was holding the coffee and they wanted some when a strange, but sweetly intoxicating, scent hit my nose. Immediately, I zeroed in on the elevator as the doors opened and a god of a man stepped off. His eyes locked on mine for a split second, and he did a double take before focusing back on the group. Damn!

He had intense light green eyes that I swear looked almost yellow under the harsh lighting of the hospital. His short, light brown hair was sticking up all over the place from running his fingers through it while it wasn't totally dry. The wet dream still had on his fireman pants with suspenders and a tight black shirt. And damn, he was tall with muscle on muscle. Yummy!

"I was told Diets's brother is here," he said loudly. I stepped closer to him without even knowing it. I'm sure everyone thought I was going to Shem when the man was referring to him. Shem had told the hospital staff that he was Diets's brother so he could get any type of information. Mustn't scare the humans by saying he was Diets's mate.

"Me," Shem squeaked out and then tried again. I heard a couple of growls as the man went over to Shem and invaded my brother's personal space. Then I realized one of them was mine, but not because he was looking as if to intimidate Shem...because I didn't want my mate focused on any of my brothers. He should only want me!

"Diets doesn't have any brothers," my mate whispered to Shem. None of the humans would have been able to hear him, but we could. I snuck closer until I was standing right next to my brother and mate. "But you're just like he described the man he was in love with. Shem, I assume?"

"Yeah," he sighed and then smiled at my mate. I kept the growl down this time, but I was still ready to grind steel with my teeth. "Sorry, but they wouldn't give a flying fart that I'm his boyfriend. I

figured since Diets spent some time in the foster system, maybe I could get away with saying a foster brother.”

“Smart and cute, Diets is a lucky guy.” My mate chuckled and stood up. Damn, he was tall. “Right, forgot you’re blind, sorry.” I glanced at Shem then and realized my brother was holding out his hand and waiting for my mate to take it. To touch him! “I’m Kaleb Bauer. Diets is my best friend.”

“Nice to meet you, Shem Cowell.”

“And I’m Ham Cowell,” I purred as I took Kaleb’s hand from Shem. I was being completely rude, I knew this. But it was either interrupt their conversation and get my mate to stop touching one of my brothers, or shift and drag my mate to a back corner until he focused on nothing but me. “Diets has such attractive and hot friends.”

“Oh? You think so?” Kaleb chuckled as he turned to look away from Shem to me now that I had his hand. When he closed his fingers around mine instead of me just holding his, I swear I felt a bolt of lightning shoot from him directly to my heart and then further down to my cock. Kaleb must have felt it, too, because he gasped. “You are so pretty—did you say Ham?”

“Yes, I’m Hameal, but everyone calls me Ham,” I whispered as I moved closer. God, I wanted to fucking hump his leg like I was in heat. Well, I was about to be in heat, so I guess it made sense. “And I’ll be your pretty anything, Kaleb.”

“Actually, most of my friends call me Kale,” he said seductively as he reached out to touch my face. “Jesus, you are so fucking gorgeous that I basically just outed myself to the men of my engine, and I don’t seem to care.”

“I’m sorry,” I replied with wide eyes and went to move away. “We shouldn’t do this here then. Drop your hand, no one will notice.”

“I don’t want to drop my hand, Ham,” Kale said as he eyed me over as if I was dinner. His Ham dinner to be specific. “I want to keep both hands on you at all times.”

“Are you free tomorrow for some lunch?” I asked, trying to focus on more than letting him touch me wherever he wanted. “I know there are a few things on you I’d like to eat.”

“Depends,” Kale drawled. “Are you normally this flirtatious? Am I just going to be a notch in your headboard?”

“Ham flirt?” Shem busted out laughing before I could answer. “Yeah, because he’s got such great lines. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him flirt or date.”

“Hey, I can flirt,” I said softly, wanting to roll my eyes at how stupid I sounded. I knew I was pouting, and Shem probably didn’t realize he was being a cock block, but like, damn.

“What you said got me hard, baby. I think you did a great job as long as it’s only directed at me,” Kale whispered. I smiled widely at him and wanted to do a happy dance when he started to lead me away from everyone. “This is so strange.”

“What is?” I asked softly. I was pretty sure he was simply mumbling to himself, but I wanted to know what he meant.

“I’ve known I’m not interested in women,” he answered quietly as he glanced around now that we’d walked way down the hall from everyone. “But I’ve never really been attracted to many men either. Then I see you, and all I can think about is getting you naked and kissing you.”

“I’m okay with that,” I panted, my skin starting to heat everywhere. “I’m all yours, Kale.”

“Really?” he asked his eyes going wide as he stopped walking and turned to stare at me. Then he glanced to his left and smiled. He reached out and grabbed the handle of a door, and I had a second to see it was labeled *Supply Closet* before he dragged me into it with him.

As soon as the door clicked shut, his mouth was on mine. It distracted me from the intense cleaning-product smell in there or that it was pitch black save the shine of a street light peeking through the shades.

I moaned like a slut and dove right in, not caring how it looked to him. His lips were so much softer than what I would have expected. And he tasted so sweet! Almost smokey, though, which I guessed was from the fact he'd been working a fire.

There was just enough light from the street lamps coming in through the window that we could make out without falling or crashing into anything. There still was the height issue. Kale had to be at least six-five while I was a shrimpy five-six.

"Jump," he growled against my mouth, and I didn't even know what he meant to do, but my mate told me to do something, and I did. He caught me and wrapped my legs around his hips before leaning me against the door. "Sweet hell, I've never attacked someone like this."

"Me either." I giggled, my heart soaring to know I affected him this way. "I've never been attacked before either, but I like it!"

"Only because it's me, right?" Kale asked as he leaned back enough so I could see his concerned-looking face. I nodded rapidly, not wanting to stop kissing him. "You, this whole thing is so different. *I feel* so differently about you than I have about anyone before."

"What if I was different? What if I was completely strange to you?" I whispered my stomach dropping at the idea he realized already I wasn't human. I wanted to kiss, not talk about serious shit just yet.

"Baby, with the way you look, the way you feel in my arms and fill my heart, I wouldn't care if you told me you were a blue Martian," he answered with a chuckle. "Are you sure that you're okay with me dragging you to the supply closet to make out?"

"Yes please," I whimpered as I rubbed my jeans-covered erection against him. "I've never wanted someone the way I want you, Kale. I swear it." He didn't know he was my mate after all. "We can talk later. Now is the time for some fun before we go back to everyone else."

“Shit, yeah, Diets,” Kale said as he shook his head as if to get out of a daze. “Okay, well, if you’re okay with it, I guess we could both use a distraction.”

“Oh yeah,” I moaned and claimed his lips again. He immediately took control of the kiss, which I was all in favor of. Nothing flicked my BIC like a man who knew what he wanted and went for it. Hell, with as hot as Kale was, I’d follow him around like a kitty cat, purring for his attention.

He pushed his tongue into my mouth, twirling it with mine before exploring every inch of me. I gasped and lifted my head when his big hands squeezed my ass hard.

“Please, sweet Ham, let me have you,” he panted as he placed kisses against my neck.

“We need to talk after,” I said, snapping back to reality. “This can’t just be a one-night, quick fuck in the supply closet. There’s more to this than you understand, Kale. But you have to trust me, okay? Diets went through this with Shem, and you know they’re happy.”

“I—I know I’ll want more from y—you than this,” he stuttered and then took a deep breath. “You’re scaring me a little, but all the blood is in my cock, so my brain isn’t really thinking. I’m off the next couple of days, so yeah, okay, I’ll come home with you tonight. I figure that’s where Diets is going, too, yeah?”

“Yes, but that’s not why you want to go with us, is it?” I asked hesitantly.

“No, sweet Ham,” Kale said firmly as he took my face in his hands. “I can’t explain the draw to you, but even just now, I was thinking of not being in your bed tonight, and I wanted to cry. Something is going on, and I want to know about it, I truly do. But I feel like if I don’t get inside of you, that you’ll be lost to me forever, and I can’t, and don’t want to, fight it.”



“Then take what I willingly give you.” He smiled widely and set me on my feet. We started pulling off clothes so quickly I didn’t even get a chance to take a good look at him. And damn did I want to.

“Nice.” Kale snickered as he pulled something off the shelf. “Medical lube will work, but no condoms.”

“Diets and Shem don’t need them, but I can explain why later,” I said softly, covering my wilting erection at the admission. “I’m clean, and you can’t hurt me.”

“Okaaaay,” Kale drawled but then nodded his head. “Diets did say Shem was a special kind of person, and I thought it was weird at the time, but I think I’m catching on he didn’t mean it as he thought we’d take it.”

“No, no, probably not,” I whispered and squatted to retrieve my pants. My heart broke at the idea I wouldn’t have Kale after all. “I’m sorry.”

“Why are you sorry?” he asked as I tried to pull on my pants. He grabbed my wrist and stopped me. “Why are you getting dressed? Did you change your mind about wanting me?”

“No, I thought you were,” I answered, my eyebrows drawing together. Fuck, I was socially inept when it came to anyone who wasn’t family. I figured his hesitation meant he had rethought this.

“Please don’t go, my lovely Hamael Cowell,” he said seductively as he took my jeans from me and crowded me against a shelf. “I’ve not changed my mind, and I’ve never wanted someone as I want you. If you’ve changed your mind, I will stop in a heartbeat because I would never hurt you. But please, say that you haven’t.”

“I haven’t,” I purred as my cock filled right back up at his sweet words. “And hurry, someone might need some supplies soon.”

“I locked the door.” He snickered. Kale winked at me before using the pump bottle of medical lube. I liked how easy that was...might need to look into finding some of those with pumps instead of wasting time with flip and screw caps. When he reached for me, I turned around so he could get me ready.

“W-What?” I asked, worried he didn’t want me. Kale smiled softly at me as he turned me back around, spread my legs, and leaned over, reaching behind me.

“I want to see you, Ham.” I grabbed his arms and moaned as he ran his fingers over my hole. I could see the emotions flickering over his face as he pushed his middle finger in quickly. “I wanted to take all the time in the world to explore you slowly, baby. But we just don’t have it right now.”

“I know,” I whispered and tilted my head up. He kissed me as he stretched me, gently at first, but then the passion between us flared. I ignored the burning when he slid in a second finger, my hole not yet completely ready. It had been over a year since I’d had sex, and even then, I really didn’t have much experience.

But it was worth it to be with my mate. I was careful to show no signs of the slight pain. It startled me at first, though I found I enjoyed it when he scissored his fingers back and forth inside of me. It was heaven.

“Tell me what you need, Ham,” he whispered against my lips.

“Love me,” I blurted out. He froze for a moment and simply stared into my eyes. I wanted to smack myself in the forehead. I held my breath waiting for his response. Kale slowly smiled at me as his fingers started moving again.

“I think I will very easily, and the idea thrills me,” he said with a growl. Before I could reply, he pushed in a third finger, and I moaned as he instantly rubbed them over my sweet spot. “Will you be mine alone, baby?”

I hesitated for a moment. I wouldn’t be just his. We had another mate somewhere. So I said what I could to not ruin the moment but also not lie to my mate. “I will always be yours, Kale.”

“I like the sound of that.” Kale kissed me fiercely, nipping and sucking my bottom lip. I moved my arms up and around his neck as I pushed back on his fingers. In a flash, he pulled his fingers out and lifted me up. I got the idea and wrapped my legs over his hips as he

lined up his cock with my hole. “You’re all mine now, baby. I’ve never met anyone who responds to my touch the way you do. I’m going to be addicted to you after this.”

“Okay,” I cried out as he lowered me onto him. He quickly kissed me quiet, which was smart given where we were. I’d gotten swept up in the moment and forgot we were still in the supply closet. I moved my hips so that I could take more of his huge dick into me. Kale was by far the biggest man I’d ever been with, and I wasn’t willing to wait until my body was ready.

I wanted him now!

“Sweet hell, Ham,” he groaned softly as my ass met his sac. “Never has it been like this. We’re a perfect fit.”

“Glad you want to keep me.” I giggled. His eyes flashed with lust as his nostrils flared. He moved us so that my back was against the door before he started to pull back out. Then, when just the head of his cock was still in me, he slammed into me hard. I bit my lip from crying out.

“If we weren’t in here where people could find us, I’d want to hear every little noise. It fucking gets me hot to know you’d be screaming my name. Does my cock give your sweet ass that much pleasure?”

“No,” I gasped as he thrust hard into me again. “Not your cock, you. You give me this much pleasure, Kale. All of you.”

“Right answer,” he growled and started to pound into me. I’d never had sex with, much less touched, anyone with this kind of need. Kale acted like he needed and desired me more than air, and I soaked it all up like rays of sunshine.

Maybe the socially inept artist would be able to find happiness after all? I knew I’d never have anyone understand me, even if it was just sexually, if they weren’t my mate. But how would Kale react to not only the news I was a shifter but my awkwardness?

“Stay with me, Ham,” Kale grunted as he thrust his hips faster. “Were you thinking of someone else?”

“No, never,” I said firmly as I stared in his eyes. “I was wondering how you seemed to know what I need from you before I even knew. How does your body knows what mine wants?”

“It’s fate,” he groaned and kissed me again. Yes! At least he believed in fate. That had to be a good sign.

I let go of my fears then and gave into the pleasure he was bringing me. When I did, it didn’t take long for me to come. My cock was rubbing against his toned, ribbed abs, and it was the sweetest torture.

“Kale!” I gasped and then bit my lip so hard it bled as I fell over the edge into my climax. My whole body shook with the force of it as I filled the space between us with my cum. His eyes went wide when my ass muscles clamped down, and Kale buried his face in my neck, moaning in pleasure. I was still riding my orgasm when he released his inside of me, filling me with his seed.

“Fuck, Ham,” he panted when we were both learning how to reuse our bodies.

“I’m pretty sure we just did and did it well,” I said with a smirk, trying to not laugh.

“Smart-ass.” He covered my mouth with his hand before I could come up with a comment for that. “I know, you’re ass isn’t smart, but it’s damn fine.”

“Thank you,” I mumbled against his hand. Though it came out more like “ank oo.”

“I demand a repeat performance,” Kale said gently as he moved his hand away. I guess I’d not been hiding my biggest fear as soon as we were done. My heart melted when I realized he was saying that to reassure me.

“Until then, we better get cleaned up and back to everyone,” I replied as he pulled out and lowered me to the floor. “They’re going to realize we’ve been up to something.”

“Who cares?” He shrugged as he reached to the shelf and found some wipes.

“I’m really, *really* glad you don’t,” I whispered as he cleaned me up and then himself.

“You’re so worth the flack I might catch for being gay,” he said firmly and then kissed me.

Well, damn! What did I say to that?

## Chapter 2

Sure enough, when we were all cleaned up and re-dressed, there were several snickers and whispers from the firemen and even my brothers. Most of them seemed good-natured, and Kale didn't seem to care. Fuck it! I wasn't going to dig up more issues when I was looking at a marathon of hurdles with explaining what I was and mating to him.

I let go of Kale's hand for a moment as Cass waved me over. He filled me in on what was going on, and Diets was already healing so fast that Curtis was working on getting him out of the hospital.

Everything was a whirlwind of commotion after that. Next thing I knew, I was giving Hael the keys to the SUV I'd driven since Curtis and Shem were going with them, and an ambulance was driving Diets home. I found Kale amongst his buddies, and I was nervous about how to tell him we were leaving and asking if I could ride with him so he knew where to go.

But like the sweetheart I already knew my mate was, he made it easy for me. He moved closer to me and took my hand in his, oblivious of the stares from his friend. We left when everyone else did and followed the caravan of vehicles in his pickup. I did make sure to assure him that Diets was going to be fine in a few days, but I just didn't tell him the how or why.

When we pulled up at Curtis's family estate and got out, Kale went to follow everyone else. I shook my head and slid my hand into his. Leading us around the property, I thought the lounge chairs by the pool would give us enough privacy without Kale feeling trapped if he didn't react well to what I had to say.

“You look so sad, Ham,” he said gently as we sat down. He leaned back and stretched his legs on a lounge chair while I chose a smaller chair and moved closer to him.

“I’m scared you won’t like what I have to tell you,” I whispered as my eyes started to burn.

“Are you a mass murderer?”

“No.” I snickered.

“Rapist?”

“Nope.”

“Master thief?”

“Never even stole a pack of gum when I was a kid.”

“Then it’s no big deal, baby,” he said with a soft smile and took my hand back. “Just rip off the Band-Aid.”

“I’m a cheetah shape-shifter,” I blurted out. Well, shit, that was smooth.

“Cool!” Kale gasped as his eyes went wide.

“Really?” I squeaked, my own eyes going even wider as my eyebrows shot up.

“Yeah, totally.” Kale chuckled and sat up, pulling my chair closer to him. “I always wondered how it worked with shifters. Are you part cat, or is it like there’s a whole cat in you? I mean, do you simply share your body?”

“Not really,” I answered hesitantly. I searched his face for a moment and was shocked to see there was nothing but genuine fascination. His expression gave no hint of disgust or fear, hell, his eyes were even shining with excitement. “Okay, I don’t mean to shoot a gift horse in the mouth, but why are you just *fine* with this?”

“My mom was a witch,” Kale said with a wink. “Like actual Wiccan and could do magic and stuff. So yeah, I know there’s more to the world than I’ve seen, and it’s cool. Is that why I’m so drawn to you and don’t want you to leave my sight? Are we, like, mates or something?”

“Wow, this is *so* much easier than what Shem went through with Diets,” I whispered and then shook my head. It sounded like I was bitching that this was easy. “My cat and I aren’t separate. It’s more like if you think of split personalities, except I really have one. I have certain character traits like a cheetah, and my cheetah has mine.”

“Like the hair,” he growled as he reached up and ran his fingers through my hair. “I now like redheads, a lot.”

“Good to know,” I purred. “And yes, I purr.”

“I like that, too. What else?”

“There are certain situations where my cat wants to come out, like when I’m threatened. It’s almost as if that side of me takes over, but I’m still me in cat form. I still know who everyone is, but that part of me is in charge.”

“Can I see it?” Kale asked, and then his face fell into a frown. “I don’t mean to make you sound like a pet that does tricks, Ham. I just think it’s cool, and I’ve never known a shape-shifter before.”

“No, it’s fine.” I giggled, leaning forward to kiss him quickly. “You weren’t asking me to play fetch, though I do.”

“Good to know.” He snickered as I stood up. I quickly shucked my clothes, took a few steps back so I didn’t break any of the patio furniture, and shifted. “Wow!”

I moved closer to him, now in my hundred-and-thirty-pound cheetah form. Kale wasn’t scared. Hell, he wasn’t even intimidated as he reached out and scratched my ear. I purred for a moment before the pleasure got to be too much and flopped onto my back, exposing my belly to him.

“I take it you like that,” Kale said in shock before bursting out into peals of laughter. He moved off the lounge chair and knelt down next to me, simply staring a moment. I tilted my neck so I could lick his hand. “Oh my god, your tongue is rough!”

I couldn’t reply, so I did the next best thing and shimmied closer to him. He smiled widely and started rubbing my chest and stomach. I purred and moaned and made all kinds of sounds I was pretty sure I’d



never made before. Damn! There was nothing better than my mate touching me, even in cheetah form.

When I thought I was going to pass out with pleasure and happiness, I shifted back. We'd have more time for play later, but right now we needed to talk.

"So you're really okay with this?" I asked as I turned so my head was lying on his knees as he sat back on his feet.

"I really am, Ham," Kale answered with a smile. He ran his hands down my shoulders and over my skinny chest.

"To answer your question earlier, yes, we're mates."

"What does that mean exactly?" He cleared his throat and looked back at my eyes. I wanted to pump my fist in the air that my mate had been distracted by my scrawny body. "Can you get dressed again? I can't focus on anything but wanting to fuck you again when you're naked."

"But you will after we're done talking, right?"

"Oh yeah," he groaned and handed me my shirt. I yanked back on my clothes and straddled his lap when he sat on his butt. "So we're mates."

"Yeah, and um, well, we have, um, another one," I rambled. His eyebrows shot up, so I went on quickly before I lost my nerve. "Cat shifters get two. And he, well, I hope it's a he, will be your mate as much as mine. We'll be a threesome."

"Kinky," Kale said and wiggled his eyebrows.

"Damn, are you always this easygoing?" I whispered with awe.

"Pretty much. There's so much shit in the world and bad to deal with in life. Why make nothing big into something?"

"Very smart, my hot fireman," I purred and nuzzled his neck. "Fate picked us to be together, and I don't see any reason to fight fate."

"Me either, baby. Not when I've tasted and been with you. I want to kiss Fate for giving me someone like you."

"Thank you, Kale," I whispered, my emotions choking me up. What a sweetheart! "There are lots of good things about being mated and especially to a cat shifter."

"Like what? Are you horny all the time?"

"I go into heat with the full moon." I chuckled, finding it amusing that he was pretty close to the truth. "That's why cats get two mates. It takes two to keep up with us. After we smell our mates, we have forty-eight hours to claim them before we overheat and die."

"What?" he cried out as he took my head in his hands and moved me so that he could look into my eyes. "Why didn't you say this sooner? We've already known each other for a few hours! How do you claim me?"

"I'm fine," I answered gently, thrilled down to my toes that he was so concerned for me already. "I'd be in uncomfortable pain if we didn't already have some hot closet sex. I claim you by us having sex in my half-and-half form and biting you. It will leave a permanent mark, but it will become like a hot spot for you. I could lick it and set your body ablaze with need."

"Sounds good," Kale panted as his eyes glazed over with lust. "What happens after you claim me? That's it? We're, like, married?"

"Basically," I said hesitantly. But when I didn't see any distress on his face from that news, I went on. "I go into honeymoon heat, and for the next three days, all I want to do is fuck, suck, and be fucked by you. I'll be your own personal sex slave."

"Sounds *really* good," he growled.

"Okay, now for the bad." I searched his eyes and waited for him to nod that he was ready for what I had to say. I sighed and then told him all about the Hunters and what happened to my parents. I couldn't help the tears that fell then. I missed my parents so fucking much, and I'd not had much time to heal from it.

"Oh, baby," Kale whispered as he pulled me closer to him. His large arms wrapped around me as he ran his hands down my back to comfort me. I felt so safe, so wanted in a way I'd never felt before.

“And so you stay here with Curtis so you’re safe? That’s no biggie for me. I can live here with you, right?”

“Yes, of course, but you need to know about Curtis and the people in this house, too.”

“Not human?”

“Vampires,” I answered and swallowed loudly as I waited for his reaction.

“Are they going to want to bite me?”

“Not if they like where their balls are,” I said with a snarl. I moved so he could see my face clearly. “Anyone but our other mate even thinks of touching you, I will end them before they finish that fucking thought!”

“Damn, I’m hard,” he moaned. I wasn’t really sure why, but it broke through my anger at the idea of some vamp trying to drink from him. “You getting all snarly and possessive like that seems to do it for me, Ham. I’ve never had anyone want me so badly that they got jealous like that.”

“Well, I might be socially inept and kind of a dork, but you’re mine, and people need to respect that.”

“That’s why you took my hand from Shem’s, isn’t it?”

“Umm, yeah, I wasn’t all that happy that you were focused on my brother instead of me. Shem’s gorgeous, and everyone is always drawn to him. Sometimes it’s because he’s blind and some guys want to, like, save him and take care of him. We had a few idiots like that when we were in college. But, hello, Shem is completely capable of taking care of himself.”

“I was just being polite to him,” Kale said, holding up his hand to stop me when I went to say I knew that. “And for the record, Shem is cute, but he’s got nothing on you, Ham. When I saw you as I stepped off the elevator, I almost dropped to the floor in shock at how beautiful you were. I had to actually check my mouth for drool.”

“Really?” My eyes went wide at his words. No one ever thought I was the hot one of our litter.

“Yeah, really. Shem’s cute, and you guys look a lot alike, but there’s just something about you that goes way beyond cute. There’s this twinkle in your eyes that makes me want to know what you’re thinking. And your hands. God, when I shook your hand, I was ready to beg for you to touch me. Your hands are rougher than your brother’s, like you use them and use them well. Do you do manual labor or something?”

“No, though I do use my hands,” I answered honestly as my cheeks heated up. “I was going to school for an art degree. I’ve not done any work in a while since Curtis’s place and the last one we were staying at didn’t have what I needed. Technically it’s not a job, I guess, but it’s my passion. It’s, well, um, not very manly, Kale.”

“I’ll decide that,” he said firmly and raised an eyebrow at me. “I’m fine with you being a shape-shifter, Ham. I seriously doubt that if you have a talent you’re so passionate about that it will bother me. So what kind of artist are you? Do you draw? Paint?”

“Pottery,” I whispered as I stared down at my hands. He was right. They were hands that worked. I had small cuts on them always and sometimes burns from a kiln or a piece I touch too early. Otherwise there were always calluses on them.

“Like clay and kiln pottery?”

“Yeah, that kind.” I swallowed loudly, trying to get moisture to my now dry throat.

“Why is that not manly?” he asked with sincere shock in his voice. I raised my head so fast to stare at him that I almost fell off his lap at the movement. He moved his hands to my hips to keep me where I was. “Dude, Ham, I’ve seen a few people doing it at the Arts Festival each summer, and that’s hard shit. That clay gets heavy, and you’re always lifting it and working it with your hands. That doesn’t sound like a little girl’s job to me.”

“I’m going to fall in love with you,” I blurted out after a moment of silence. Wow. I really needed to work on getting a filter of some sorts between my brain and mouth.

“I’m glad.” He chuckled and cupped my cheek. I brushed it against his skin, purring at the contact. “If nothing else, you get to play with fire.” Kale waggled his eyebrows at me. “I’m a fireman. I know how hot those kilns get and what you’re playing with there. You literally burn shit for a living and make it into something pretty. So cool.”

“You’re, like, the bestest mate in the history of mates, Kale,” I blubbered with glee. He was the perfect man for me. “I dated a guy in college who said I needed to wear panties if I liked to play with arts and crafts.”

“Fuck him,” Kale growled fiercely as his other hand on my hip tightened. “He’s an idiot, and I’m lucky, but that really doesn’t matter since you’re mine now.”

“Yes I am,” I said firmly and proudly. I leaned in and licked his lips, trying to hold back my smile. “Who’s getting all jealous and growly now?”

“Guess you’ll just have to claim me and show me that I’m yours,” he replied with a groan.

“Just like that?” I asked skeptically as we stood. “You’re just going to accept us being mates? This is a forever thing once I claim you, Kale.”

“I know, babe.” He chuckled and took my hand in his. “My mom taught me to listen to my instincts, and they’re screaming that you’re it for me and to trust you. She also said you never mess with fate. If fate wanted to give me a gorgeous, sex-on-a-stick, sweet mate, I’d be a moron to walk away from that.”

“Then let’s fuck,” I blurted out as we reached the back door.

“Sweet-talker,” Kale mumbled. I couldn’t blame him. That was about the most unromantic thing I could have said. I’d work on it, but right now none of my blood was in my brain...it was pooled in my groin and wanting my mate.

“Diets all good?” I asked Cass as we passed him in the hallway on the way to my bedroom.

“Yeah. Who’s—” Cass replied with a raised eyebrow.

“My mate, Kale,” I answered, dragging said mate behind me. “I’m about to claim him, so see you in a few days.”

“I’ll make sure food is sent up.” He chuckled as I opened my door.

“Thanks!” I called back before shoving my mate in the room and kicking the door closed. Kale just watched me with wide eyes as I stripped and then stalked to him. “If you like those clothes, I’d get naked. Now!”

He nodded as he started yanking off clothes, his eyes never leaving mine. The second he was nothing but glorious skin, I attacked. We fell onto the bed in tangle of limbs as we rolled back and forth to be on top as our mouths consumed each other.

“Submit to me,” I snarled with passion as I got back on top and straddled his hips. I quickly pinned his hands above his head and leaned down so our noses were touching. “I’m claiming you as mine!”

“A–Are you a–always t–this dominant?” He gasped, partially from lack of air, but mostly from the lust I saw burning in his eyes.

“No, not by a long shot,” I purred as I rubbed my cheek against his, marking him with my scent. “Right now I’m fighting my cheetah to stay back until I get you stretched—”

“You fuck me as an animal?” Kale paled so fast I was worried he was going to faint. I didn’t know how to backtrack and explain quick enough, so I shifted into my half-and-half form.

“No, like this.” I let go of his hands and sat back so he could get a good look at me. “And only when I claim you and probably once every full moon. But otherwise I’ll always be in human form when we have sex.”

“I might need to see a therapist,” he whispered as he moved his hands up my thighs and cupped my groin. “I’m completely turned on still.”

“It’s still me in here, Kale,” I said gently. I was used to the idea. I’d grown up with it. I couldn’t even imagine what it was like from his perspective. “You’re not turned on by my cheetah, babe. You’re my mate, Kale. You should be attracted to me no matter what I look like.”

“Good point!” His smile warmed my heart, and I saw the worry lines on his face disappear as what I said sank in. “But you’re not fingering my hole with claws.”

“Then I better just watch you stretch yourself for me.” I chuckled and moved off of him to grab the lube. I handed it over to him as Kale moved on the bed so his legs weren’t still hanging over the side.

“Is this what you meant, baby?” Kale asked in a sultry voice as he slicked up his hand and spread his legs. I practically swallowed my tongue when he rubbed over his hole for a second before pushing two fingers in. “Is this what my mate wanted?”

“Yes,” I whimpered pathetically as I crawled in between his legs. He pulled them to his chest to give me a better view, and I groaned. Kale had to be into playing with his ass if his body accepted his fingers like that.

“Yeah, I can get off on just finger-fucking myself.” He moaned. I tilted my head to the side as I drew my eyebrows together. How had he known what I was thinking? “Ham, you said it out loud.”

“Oh, umm, whoops.” I snickered. Idiot! And then what he said sank in. “You can get off just from fucking?”

“Can’t you? I never touched your cock in the supply closet.”

“Right, but it was rubbing against our bodies. You’re saying you can get off just from ass play, no pressure on your cock?”

“Guess you’ll have to find out, my mate.” Kale groaned as he slid in two more fingers. He threw his head back and humped his hips in complete abandonment. I had to squeeze the base of my cock hard to stave off my impending orgasm. Damn, he was fine. I made a few more whimper noises as he got ready until I was shaking with need. “Okay, I’m ready, Ham.”

“Thank fuck,” I moaned. Faster than I’m sure he could track, I grabbed his wrist and pulled out his fingers. Then I quickly grabbed two pillows and stuffed them under his hips as I rolled him over. I spread his legs a little wider and moved myself in place.

“Warn a guy, will ya?” Kale chuckled as he lifted himself up on his forearms.

“Sorry,” I said sheepishly. “You’re just so fucking hot I can’t control myself.”

“Well, in that case, surprise away.” He groaned and tilted his hips so I had better access to his ass. “Claim me, baby.”

“Thank you,” I whispered as I lined up my cock and pushed in as I ran my other hand down his back, careful of my claws. “You won’t regret this, Kale.”

“I know.” We both moaned as I slammed home, bottoming out in one thrust. As much as I wanted to pause, revel in the feeling of being inside of Kale for the first time, I couldn’t. My cheetah was snarling at me to get my ass in gear...literally.

“You feel like heaven,” I purred and pulled out before thrusting right back in. Kale groaned but didn’t say anything else as I started taking him hard and fast.

What was there to really say, though? Our bodies were saying what words never could as we moved together as if we were perfect for each other. I lost track of time it was so good. It seriously could have been minutes that we fucked with more passion I’d had in my life...or hours.

“Coming, Ham!” Kale cried out. I plastered my body against his, gently pulling his head to the side so I could get at his neck. Sinking in my teeth, I moaned around his flesh. His blood was amazing, my own personal, perfect wine.

Kale shouted to the heavens as I drank him down, the mating link snapping into place. He went stiff for a moment before moaning loudly as he came. His ass clamped down on me, and I lifted my head and roared out my release as I pumped my seed deep into him.



“Kale!” I screamed as the most intense orgasm of my life rode me. It almost scared me with its intensity. When I was finally spent, I shifted back and slid off of him. I grabbed his arm and pulled him down on top of me.

“I’m going to crush you,” he mumbled but made no move to get off of me. I leaned up and licked my bite closed.

“Can’t have my mate bleeding out.” I snickered in between gasps of air. “Tell me that just rocked your world and I wasn’t the only one.”

“Oh no, I’ve been thoroughly rocked.” We rolled onto our sides and stared at each other a moment before bursting out laughing. I’d never had so much fun with a sex partner before, and I swear my soul was ready to explode with the joy I felt.

“And we’re just getting started,” I purred as I moved against him when he flopped onto his back. “You ready for three days of this?”

“I gotta call the station and tell them I’ll be out sick.” He chuckled. And then I think how his life had just changed sank in. “How am I going to get off every full moon, Ham? I’m two days on, two off schedule. There’s never a three day off gap.”

“We’ll figure it out,” I answered, trying to sound much more assured than I felt. “Let’s not ruin this right here with reality just yet.”

“Good idea,” Kale growled and rolled over me. “I wanted more of my cheetah. I think you’re going to turn me into a nympho, Ham.”

“Bring it, my hot-ass fireman,” I purred. This was going to be fun, and the rest would work itself out. It had to. Fate wouldn’t have brought the two of us together with no hope of us actually working out. It would never be so cruel.

## Chapter 3

A few days later when the honeymoon heat was over, we headed back downstairs to join everyone else. I thanked my brothers for sending us up food before hugging Diets. I was so glad he was okay. More than okay, he looked fully healed and was smiling like a loon. Oh yeah, someone had a fun recovery.

“Where’s my hug?” Curtis playfully pouted.

“I’ll give you hugs,” Shem growled and moved from his chair to straddle his mate’s lap.

“Oh, much better, my angel.” He chuckled and nipped Shem’s lower lip. We shared a laugh before diving into breakfast. I smiled like a goof as I watched my mate fit in perfectly with my brothers. There was no awkward in-law vibe or anything like that. They all chatted as if old friends and answered Kale’s questions as if he was one of us. I had the best family and mate.

“I vote for some fun today,” I said with a wink. Cass got my meaning immediately. He laughed and stood.

“Meet you guys in the backyard in five,” he called out before bolting from the room.

“What’s that all about?” Curtis asked with a raised eyebrow.

“We’re going to show you how shifters have fun.” Hael snickered as we all got up and cleared the table.

Kale gave me a questioning look, but I shook my head. He’d find out in a few minutes. When breakfast was cleaned up, we headed outside and grabbed three chairs for the mates. I saw Cass coming out with the football while Hael had thought to bring an armful of bottles of water for everyone.

“Just enjoy the show,” I said as the mates all looked at us like we were nuts. I quickly yanked off my clothes, laughing when Kale put his hand over Diets’s eyes.

“You can’t look at Shem either then,” Diets growled as he pushed Kale’s hands away.

“And I’m looking at them all,” Curtis announced proudly, which got a snarl from Shem. “But only you turn me on, my angel cheetah.”

“Nice save,” Shem grumbled before we started shifting. “Younger litter versus older litter.”

It was our normal teams since it was useless to mix up the litters. With our hive mind when we were shifted, if we played against our own litter, we could see what they were thinking and every game ended in a draw. Not fun.

“Seriously? You guys are going to play football as cheetahs?” Kale asked as his jaw hung open. I tilted my head to the side. “Right, you’re not able to answer me. Duh.”

His cheeks heated up to the cutest pink, though I’d never tell him that’s what I thought. Most men aren’t too thrilled when you call them *cute*. Instead, I trotted over to him and licked his face. He scratched me behind the ears for a moment before I heard several impatient snarls.

“*Keep your fucking shorts on,*” I growled in our link.

“*Just try to keep the mush down to a dull roar and have pity on us who haven’t found any of our mates yet.*”

I would have gotten pissy with Hael except I could hear the sadness in his voice. Yeah, I could empathize, I really could. I was so happy for Shem but jealous at the same time. Every shifter waited for the day they found their mates, and maybe half ever did. It made me sad that half my brothers might not ever find their mates.

Before I could say anything, the older litter snapped the ball and the game was on. Shem scored the first touchdown, doing a dorky little dance before we all tackled him. I might have had the best sense of smell, but Shem was the fastest of all of us.

We kicked off to them next and on we went. It was the most fun we'd had as a family since the death of our parents. And damn did we need to feel this connection, this easiness with each other if only for a little while. We'd lost so much, and while I knew everyone was thrilled mates were being found and life went on...it just didn't replace what was gone. And it was there, hanging over our heads every day that we'd never see our parents again.

*"On your left, Ham!"* Sari called out when I'd gotten distracted. I was racing after Cass to tackle him, and I completely blanked out on what was going on and almost missed Ragu launching at me. I ducked and rolled at the last minute, which worked well since I literally slid into Cass's legs and knocked him down. *"Where was your head?"*

*"Somewhere it should have been,"* I answered, trying to keep the pain out of my voice. It didn't work because four cheetahs turned so they were focused on me.

*"They would have loved it here,"* Samand said gently as they all came toward me.

*"Our moms would have adored Kale, Ham. You have to know that,"* Hael whispered as he rubbed his cheek against mine. *"They're smiling from heaven, big brother. You know they'd never stop watching over us. Death can't keep them from us."*

*"I know, I just miss them so much,"* I cried out. The change in my emotions and pain I was feeling had me shifting back to human form. Almost instantly, my litter did as well. I sniffled against Hael's shoulder as we hugged and rubbed each other's backs and hair.

It might be weird to some that we were naked and touching each other but it was *not* like that. Shifters are very touchy-feely, always needing to feel family and mates. It didn't matter that we were naked men. It was like a big puppy pile for comfort.

"What's wrong, angel?" Diets asked as he came forward.

"We were feeling the same thing," Cass whispered as he and our other brothers knelt down by us.

“Your parents,” Curtis said gently and knowingly as he pulled Shem onto his lap. Diets moved along his mate’s back but was still rubbing Hael’s shoulder. “First time you’ve played football since you’ve lost them, isn’t it?”

“You always know what’s going on without me ever having to tell you,” Shem answered as he rubbed his tear-streaked face in Curtis’s neck.

“When I feel this grief coming from you, I know it’s about your parents, angel. I know how much you miss them. I can’t even imagine what you’re all going through.”

“That’s what I was feeling?” Kale asked as he pulled me in between his legs. “It was your grief I was feeling? I was so friggin lost as to why I was sad, and I didn’t know what was going on.”

“Forget to tell your mate something, Ham?” Cass snickered and rolled his eyes.

“Um, yeah,” I answered sheepishly as I blushed. I looked over my shoulder at Kale. “Sorry about that. You were so accepting of me and being my mate I kinda got really excited about just diving right in, and I forgot to tell you that part.”

“It’s okay, my Ham,” he said gently as he rubbed his cheek over my head. “I’m sorry you were feeling that way, but damn, I was worried I was losing my mind there.”

I went to say something, but I ended up snarling when I caught wind of other animals. “Protect the mates!”

Instantly, we all moved and shifted back. Cass and I took point while the others stayed back and blocked our mates. This was one of those times I loved having family, my brothers, and even my litter mates at my back. I trusted them to protect my mate, as I knew Shem did, with their lives if need be.

Looking over toward the garages, I saw two SUVs pull up and at least a dozen men get out. I recognized a few as Curtis’s men, but strange shifters around our mates threw us into protective mode.

“Who are they?” Diets asked, his voice chilled as if he was ready for whatever danger we might be facing.

“One of them is Mitchell, guys,” Curtis said calmly but didn’t move from his barrier of cheetahs. Cass gave me a nod, and we moved forward. They might be friendly, and that was fine, but if they weren’t, we wanted to know that before they got too close to our family’s mates.

Mitchell froze and held his hands up in a gesture of surrender as a few of the guys did the same after seeing his move. I sniffed the air as we got within twenty feet of them. Five vamps, three wolves, one bear, three I couldn’t identify, and one that I wanted to smell for the rest of my life. Jaguar...my jaguar.

I let out a purr so Cass knew not to attack as I advanced. His head snapped around to me from the back door of the second SUV. The jaguar’s eyes shifted into cat as he looked at me. Oh, that was a neat trick I’d never seen before. He bared his now-longer teeth as he jumped over the front of the first SUV and raced to me. I leapt to him, shifting and meeting him mid-air.

He crushed his mouth to mine as we wrapped around each other. I guess he had enough thought left past whom we were to each other because he twisted so he was on his back, taking the brunt of the fall instead of letting me.

“Mine,” he purred in my ear before licking along my neck and then kissing me again. I melted against his body, thrusting my now hard cock against his stomach.

“What the *fuck*, Ham?” Kale roared as he grabbed my shoulders. I’d been so lost in the kiss I’d missed that everyone had joined us. “Is this what being mated means to you? You just fucking jump the first guy you see?”

“Mine,” the jaguar snarled again and dove for Kale. I ended up getting rolled over with them and landing on the jaguar’s back. I moaned as they kissed a second before Kale snapped back to reality and pulled away.

“Meet our other mate.” I giggled as Kale stared at me over the man’s shoulder.

“Okay, let’s leave them to it,” Curtis said loudly, clearing his throat. “How about everyone else meet in the conference room?” He narrowed his eyes at Shem. “After we’re all dressed.”

“Yes, my mate.” Shem chuckled and reached for Diets’s hand so he could get help back now that he couldn’t see again. Of course his mate was right there and ready to help.

“Wait, back up a second,” Kale whispered as he pulled away from us. It landed us sitting in a tight circle facing each other. “This is your second mate?”

“*Our* second mate,” I answered softly as I glanced from him to the jaguar. “You smelled it, too, right?”

“Oh yeah,” he purred and went to kiss me again.

“Give me a minute here!” Kale yelled as he reached out and pulled the jaguar back. “You guys might know what’s going on here and be able to smell it, but I can’t. So just give me a damn minute. I just learned about all of this a few nights ago!”

“I apologize, my mate,” the jaguar said gently as he took Kale’s hand. “You have no idea the hell I’ve been through, and I’m all over the place. I was so excited to get rescued but scared about coming to live among the vampires whose last leader kidnapped me for the Hunters. Then I get here and instantly smell my mate and then my other one. Instinct just took over.”

“Okay, I can understand that,” Kale replied with a nod as he ran his other hand through his hair. “And we want to know all about that hell you were talking about and what rescue later, but let’s start simple. I’m Kaleb Bauer. Everyone calls me Kale.”

“I’m Hameal Cowell, though everyone uses just Ham,” I said next, not liking the almost wild look of Kale’s eyes. It might be I just found his breaking point. “We met and mated four days ago. Before that, Kale knew nothing of us.”

“So you get back-to-back honeymoon heats?” The jaguar asked and then bit his lip to keep from laughing. “Well, that’s one way to be introduced to our world. I’m Luca Riso.” He turned back to me then. “I’ve never met a cheetah shifter before. You were amazing, so sleek and powerful.”

“Thank you, Luca,” I purred, my cheeks heating up at the compliment. Then I realized something. He wasn’t the typical shading of a jaguar. He had dark, black hair and blue eyes. “I’ve met jaguars before. You smell like one, but—”

“I’m a black jaguar,” he said for me, cutting off my question. “There are different kinds like in the wild.”

“Cool.” I smiled at him before glancing back at Kale. Well, he looked less panicked.

“How am I ever going to still work with you two?” He dropped Luca’s hand and jumped to his feet. “I could explain taking off a few days for Ham’s honeymoon heat as helping Diets out since he got hurt on the job. And I thought we’d find our other mate and he could help me during the full moon like Curtis will with Shem and Diets. But he’s another cat. That’s two horny kitties every full moon and just me to handle it.”

“Well, he’ll still be here for me, too, Kale,” I said slowly, trying to choose my words carefully. We both got to our feet slowly as if trying not to scare a spooked animal. “The heat we go into during the lunar cycle affects all of us the same whether we’re cats or not. You felt yourself constantly wound up during the honeymoon heat, right?”

“Yeah, of course,” he answered, his eyebrows drawn together. “But that was because you were always ready to go and, um, well, naked. Are you saying I feel what you’re feeling so I’m just as wound up?”

“Yes, but when you go to work you’ll be far enough away where you won’t be constantly feeling us in heat,” I said quickly, knowing the next question. “So if your days line up with the lunar cycle, great. If not, you’ll still catch some of the action, and it’s not like that’s the



only time we'll want to have sex during the month, babe. Finding Luca is perfect timing actually."

"Because I won't have to leave you alone when you're in heat with no outlet," he replied with a smile, the proverbial light bulb going off overhead. "Okay, so then I'm done freaking out then."

"Is he always this easygoing?" Luca asked me with wide eyes.

"This is the first thing he's *freaked* out over." I snickered. Yeah, if that was Kale's freaking out, then the man was easy as all get out. "You were at one of the circuses that the Hunters have, weren't you?" My own light bulb went off.

"Yeah, but can we talk about that later?" Luca answered as he glanced at his feet. "I know Mitchell wants to fill Curtis and you guys in, and then I really want a fucking shower."

"Come on, sweetheart," Kale said gently as he wrapped an arm around Luca's shoulders. "We'll get this over with and take care of you." He steered them over to the house, and I took Luca's other hand. "Do you have the same forty-eight-hour rule as Ham?"

"Yes, I'm sorry," Luca whispered, looking defeated as if Kale wasn't going to like it.

"No need to be sorry," I said gently. "I know how it goes, and Kale may be the most understanding man on the planet. His mom was a witch."

"So cool," Luca gasped. "Do you know how rare that is?" We both shook our heads. "True witches and not just Wiccans who practice are far and few between."

"I knew my mom was special." Kale chuckled and gave us a wink. We'd already walked into the house by that point, and I opened the door for the conference room when we reached it.

"I grabbed your clothes," Cass said as he tossed them over to me.

"Thanks, bro." I snickered and tugged on my pants. While shifters were comfortable with nudity, vamps and humans weren't really. Plus, it was always nerve racking to be the only one naked in a room full of people when there was serious talking to be done.

“Wolf, watch yourself,” Rash snarled. He was normally so laid back that I immediately glanced up to see what was going on. And I met the very, *very* lust-filled eyes of one of the wolf shifters. “Not cool, man.”

“Right, sorry,” the wolf said, clearing his throat and looking elsewhere. It was a strict unsaid rule among shifters that one never noticed their nudity. No one could hide their physical response, but someone didn’t stare or ogle like this guy did. “I’ve been in captivity for a long time. I’m not used to the rules anymore. Please forgive me. It’s just you’re all so gorgeous.”

“Anyways,” Curtis drawled so we all focused back on him. “Mitchell was just starting to fill me in. I know he’s not gotten your full reports or backgrounds yet, and I apologize for that, but he felt it was best to get you to safety before the Hunters sent up some type of distress signal.”

“We appreciate that,” Luca said softly as I finished dressing. We sat down, Kale and I on either side of our very scared-looking mate. “I don’t know about everyone else, but I have family that is still with the Hunters. We were separated after we were taken.”

“Let me get caught up on what happened after Mitchell left, and I promise you that you will be my first priority.” Curtis took down a few notes and shared a glance with Cass. I knew what that meant. He wanted my brother there for the interview.

“Thank you, Mr. Booth,” Luca replied, still looking very nervous. “I’m glad you’re nothing like your brother.”

“Fuck,” Curtis gasped, his face paling as he put the pieces together. “Harold had a part in your kidnapping?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Please, I’m sorry. I didn’t get your name.”

“Luca Riso, sir.”

“Luca, I’m not a sir,” Curtis said gently as he took Shem’s hand and then kissed it. “You’re mates with Ham, and I’m mated to his younger brother. I know you’re scared and have been through hell,

but I promise you're safe here and there's nothing to fear. I'm just Curtis."

"Okay," Luca replied quickly and shot me a glance. I nodded my head that it was true, and he seemed to relax slightly after that.

Mitchell took over then, laying out a map and outlining how they traced Curtis's friend Aaron's phone to Florida. There they found a Hunter circus along with another compound of local Hunters. They infiltrated with the men Conley sent and saved everyone they could. The Hunters that survived the attack were being taken to Conley's estate for further questioning along with some of the other rescued paranormals.

"We kept phone and radio silent until now because somehow someone got a heads-up that we were coming because they didn't seem to have much time to prepare. But they *were* prepared for us." Mitchell frowned at that statement. Yeah, I wasn't liking the idea that we might have had a traitor either. "I'm not ruling out the possibility that they might have been on the lookout for us given one of theirs escaped from here. It just seemed something to be wary of."

"No, I agree," Curtis said after a moment and shared a knowing look with his head of security. "I want interviews conducted of everyone at the estate. We need to know if we still have any of Harold's supporters here. I think we got them all, but let's not just assume that."

"Good deal," Mitchell replied as he folded the map. "We brought the eight captives with us that didn't seem to need much medical support. Conley has better facilities for that, and I know you want to set up a clinic or sick bay in the estate since we don't have it yet."

"Remind me to give you a bonus." Curtis snickered as he took some more notes. "You and your men are excused to unpack your gear, get some grub, and rest. You've earned it. Let's meet back here tomorrow morning to start the interviews and gather as much information as possible. Sound good?"

“Yes, thank you, Curtis,” Mitchell said, sounding relieved. I’d not thought he seemed tired until Curtis almost gave him permission to. I glanced at the other security detail and saw the same thing. It was almost as if when that switch was flipped, they eased down off combat mode. That was kind of cool.

“Hael, if you would please talk to the kitchen and have them make a second breakfast. I’m sure our guests would love some food. Ragu, same with the housekeeping staff about getting some rooms set up. Preferably the empty ones in the same wing and floor as yours are. I’d like to keep all the shifters in the same location close to me until they get a chance to be introduced around to the vampires at the estate.”

In other words, not only didn’t we know if there was a leak that was working with the Hunters on our end, but we weren’t trusting the new guys yet. Hael and Ragu both nodded that they heard him loud and clear and headed out to their assigned tasks.

“Cass, if you could please update Conley on what we know and our plan, I would appreciate that.” Then Curtis glanced at me. “I don’t want you to feel left out, Ham. I’ll figure out which suite can be yours with your mates in the next few days, but this comes first. I hope you understand.”

“It’s fine.” I snickered and gave a dismissive wave. “I didn’t even know you were going to move me. The room’s fine, Curtis. You’ve got bigger fish to fry.”

“That we do,” he said, looking none too happy about it. I gave him a nod that I wanted to talk to him in private since Cass wasn’t here to bring it up. We both stood, and he met me by the door. We stepped out for a moment, whispering quietly so everyone in the room with great hearing couldn’t make out what we were saying.

“I’m not worried about Luca,” I said carefully, not wanting to play favorites, but he was my mate after all. “But I think we should assign shadows to the other seven. I’m out, of course, with Kale and Luca. Shem’s out with you guys, and Cam’s out since he can’t see and that could be a disadvantage if they’re not to be trusted. Raz and Samand

don't see well in their human forms, but that shouldn't be a problem as long as the guys don't try to knock off their glasses."

"It should just be feeding them, letting them get clean, and babysitting them sleeping. So it might even be better to keep a group of your brothers sitting in the hallway. Most of the guest rooms have phones, but those are monitored. Plus, we *know* that the Hunters know where we're at since they worked with Harold. So it's not like they can give away a secret position." Curtis looked satisfied with the explanation, and so was I.

"They're working on the food now, nothing fancy I told them. If these guys were being held captive, it's not like they might be able to handle much. I told them it doesn't matter if it's ten in the morning, soup is definitely on the menu," Hael said as he joined us.

I quickly filled him in on the plan as Curtis went back into the conference room. We agreed to mention it to each brother in passing, and we would get more information out of Luca once he had a chance to rest. It could be that all these rescues were truly victims, but we couldn't risk it yet.

For one, we needed to know how long all of them had been held by the Hunters. If one had just joined the group or transferred circuses, then that was something to be wary of. It might seem cold to be skeptical that the rescued men were on our side, but not only our family's safety was at stake, but also that of the entire compound.

I got a strange look from Kale as everyone left the conference room and Curtis led them to the main dining room. I shook my head that it would have to wait for later. He gave me a slight nod that he understood and took my hand. We made sure to sit with Luca in the dining room as the food was brought in. I cringed when he practically dove into the food. How long had those fuckers had my mate?

Kale and I exchanged a look. His eyes glistened with unshed tears as I know mine did. Blinking them back, I put on a strong face as I made sure that Luca picked food that would be easiest on him. Kale kept pushing a sports drink so he'd be hydrated. I couldn't even

imagine what hell Luca had been through, but he had the two of us now to help him. I know we'd bring him back to the land of the living. No matter what we had to do.

## Chapter 4

After everyone ate, the kitchen staff actually came to clean up, whereas we normally brought our own plates back to them. It seemed someone had thought ahead that we didn't want to be separated from our wards and brought it up to the staff. The head housekeeper had told Curtis which rooms had been prepared, and our brothers were all informed of the plan.

Luca had looked so strong and unhurt when we first saw and jumped each other, but as we walked to my room, I realized it was an act. That or the adrenaline rush a shifter feels when they find their mate. Either way, I saw, and knew Kale did as well, that Luca was limping a bit and holding his right side.

"It smells like sex in here." Luca chuckled, his pupils dilating with lust as we entered my room.

"Let's get you cleaned up and some rest before we have your scent of sex in here as well," I said gently as I led him to the bathroom. He nodded and then gasped as he went to take off his shirt. Kale was there immediately to help as I turned on the shower.

"Mother of mercy," Kale whispered. I turned around to see that our mate had more black and blue on him than not. Luca definitely needed lots of time to heal, which could prove tricky since we needed to claim each other. In a few hours we'd be crawling up the walls with overheated bodies to mate.

I wasn't sure how that would work out, but now that Luca had had some real nourishment as opposed to whatever scraps he'd been fed before, that should help.

“Let’s get you showered so we can get some sleep,” I said as I quickly stripped. Kale held Luca gently against his chest until I was naked and could help.

“What about claiming each other?” Luca asked hesitantly and then glanced down at his battered body. He was way too thin and looked like he went twelve rounds as the punching bag. And then it hit me.

“We still want you, Luca, never doubt that,” I answered and then gave him a quick kiss. I walked us into the shower, and he groaned as the warm water ran down his body.

“This is the first time in over a year I’ve been cleaned with anything other than a hose,” Luca admitted sheepishly. It was so the wrong time to get turned on, but at least Kale was having the same problem as he joined us in the shower. We couldn’t help our reaction. Our mate was beaten, though still gorgeous and wet, moaning in the shower. What man wouldn’t react that way?

“Let me wash your hair, sweetheart,” Kale said as he reached for the shampoo, swallowing loudly. That told me Luca’s back had to be just as bad, if not worse than the front. I grabbed the soap and a washcloth, getting it good and sudsed up before putting the soap back in the tray.

“I can do it myself.” Luca gasped as we started cleaning him.

“You have mates now. You shouldn’t have to,” I replied gently, kissing his cheek. He smiled and nodded, leaning back against Kale as he closed his eyes and relaxed.

“After some sleep we’re going to kiss each bruise and make them better,” Kale whispered in Luca’s ear. I was standing right there, so of course I heard it. I assumed he said it quietly so as to not startle Luca.

“This is nothing.” Luca snickered. Then he looked at me, and the pain in his eyes was so evident it was almost something I could reach out and touch. “You should have seen me after they first captured us. Our parents died trying to protect us, and we fought back. Fuck, we fought so hard, but there were just too many of them.”



“We can talk later, Luca.” I kissed his eyes as the tears started to run down his cheeks. It broke my heart to know he’d been through something like my family had but with even a worse outcome. I wanted to fucking string up every last goddamn Hunter and watch them suffer slowly.

“Will Curtis help me find my brothers?” Luca asked after a few moments while Kale rinsed his hair. “I have to find them.”

“Curtis is a good man, I promise. He and Conley have been instrumental in taking out as many Hunters and rescuing as many paranormals as they can. We’ll help as much as we can, okay? We’ll find them.”

“Why do the vamps care about us?” He tilted his head in confusion as Kale leaned him against the tiles now that he was clean so we could quickly wash up.

“I think for Curtis part of it is guilt. He feels somehow responsible for what Harold did since he didn’t know it was happening. Conley is in charge of all the western covens and knows that any paranormal group, even if it’s not his, has to join together. If we don’t, we’re all bait for the Hunters.”

“I wish our Council thought that way,” Luca said with a yawn.

“I don’t think they had any clue this was all going on,” I replied. I’d had a lot of time to think about this over the past few months. Wolves lived in packs. Most shifters lived in some type of group setting. Cats were different. We lived in small pads that normally consisted of just family, so we were prime targets. I just don’t think any of us knew how widespread and organized the Hunters had become.

“That needs to change.” Luca stated exactly what I’d been thinking. “We were never prepared for an attack right in the middle of the humans. They came into our home, and we didn’t live anywhere rural. And I worry about all the other shifter families who live amongst humans thinking that will keep them safe.”

“Me, too,” I whispered and hugged him as Kale shut off the water. We stepped out of the shower and dried off Luca before ourselves. It wasn’t even noon yet, and suddenly I was exhausted. I don’t know if it was the excitement of meeting Luca, or the new barrel of trouble that had just been opened, or the fact that our mate would need a lot of our help over the coming months. Hell, it could have been all of it, but I was just wiped.

Glancing over at Kale, I saw I wasn’t the only one. We climbed into bed with Luca in the middle and snuggled in for a nap. Kale laid on his back as Luca sprawled against his side with me wrapped around Luca’s back. I reached over Luca and took Kale’s hand in mine. He squeezed it for reassurance, but I wasn’t sure there was any.

We had a long road ahead of us now, and it didn’t look like an easy one. But I had a feeling that Luca and our mating would be well worth it. Either way, it wasn’t like we were going to deny him because of the shit he’d been through. We just needed to figure out how to help him heal and find his family.

\* \* \* \*

I awoke to an ear-splitting scream and immediately jumped out of bed. Blinking quickly to wipe away the remnants of sleep, I witnessed the end of Luca’s shift. What had set him off, though? I glanced around quickly, and all I saw was Kale on the other side of the bed looking as freaked out as I was. Nightmare then?

“What’s wrong, Luca?” Kale asked as he moved toward the large cat. And that cat was definitely bigger than either of us and with very large teeth. It was hard to see just how big he was given he was on the bed and we were sharing a small room, but really that’s just splitting hairs. He was big. Luca turned and snarled at Kale, baring his teeth.

“Back away slowly, Kale,” I said in monotone so as not to startle our rattled mate. “I think he had a nightmare, and it set off his cat.

He's either not thinking clearly from fear or not registering who we are."

Kale nodded and took a few steps back, holding up his hands in a gesture of surrender.

"Luca, look at me, babe," I cooed. He turned toward me and snarled. Shit! He was feeling boxed in since we were on either side of him, and I was blocking the door. "Smell who I am Luca, and you'll know we're not threatening you. I'm only blocking the door because we can't just have a strange jaguar running through a compound full of vampires. Smell us, Luca. You know who we are."

Luca closed his mouth as he tilted his head to one side and sniffed the air. He let out a loud purr, and I could feel the tension in the room dissipate. Then he let out a soft cry as he shifted back, curling into a ball on the bed.

"I'm sorry, I'm so fucking sorry," he whispered as silent tears fell.

"It's okay, sweetheart," Kale said softly as we got on the bed with Luca. He pulled Luca on his lap as I ran my hands down our mate's back. "Can you tell us what happened?"

"I woke up from a nightmare where I was trapped. I thought I was back in that cage, and then I felt a cock pushing against my ass and freaked out. I didn't know it was Ham. I thought he was back to rape..." He trailed off and looked between us with wide eyes. Oh shit!

"We won't want you any less now that we know, Luca," I said gently. "You can tell us anything, and we will never, ever judge. We need to know these things so we don't make mistakes like surrounding you in your sleep."

"Right, yeah, okay," he whispered and nodded furiously. "When Curtis and Conley's men came to rescue us, we joined in the fight when we were set free. I killed the one who raped me. I went ballistic in a way I never thought possible."

"That's understandable considering the circumstances," Kale said gently. I couldn't have agreed more. I would have done the same to anyone who hurt our mate.

“I—I couldn’t c—control myself,” Luca whimpered. “I shifted and just saw red. Mitchell finally pulled me off the guy, and I realized what I’d done. I clawed the guy until he was nothing but shreds of flesh and blood.”

“Babe, I would have done the same if I ever got my claws on the Hunters that killed my parents,” I admitted. Hell, it was something all my brothers wanted.

“The Hunters came for your family, too?” he asked, his eyes going wide.

“Yeah, almost the way you described how you got taken,” I answered with a nod, my eyes starting to burn at the memories. “We were home for the weekend from college in the winter. We weren’t even supposed to be there, but Sari had gotten dumped by someone he thought he was in love with and wanted to go home. I smelled them before they got to our house, and our parents screamed for us to get out.”

That day came slamming back to me like a baseball bat upside the head as it did any time I thought about it.

“We didn’t want to leave them, but we all couldn’t fit in our parents’ SUV, and our car was parked on the street. We were still trying to get them to leave with us when the Hunters started shooting up the front of our house and trying to take us out with darts, too. Cam and Shem are blind in human form, and we knew we had to protect them. There were just so many of the Hunters. Our dad, Francis, screamed for us to run as the Hunters came through the front and back doors.

“Cam and Rash got hit with tranq darts, so we picked them up and ran out through the door to the garage and piled in. Cass backed out through the garage door and the blockade they had set up, and we ran. Our parents died keeping most of the Hunters occupied so we could get away. That was the last time I saw them. We’ve not even been back to our house or to their graves yet. I guess Conley’s people went back after we found safety and buried our parents.”

“Fuck, Ham,” Luca gasped, his eyes full of tears as he pulled me into his arms. I felt Kale’s wrap around both of us. “They saved you from a fate worse than death, believe me. They loved you enough to save you guys.”

“I know, but I miss them,” I said with snuffle. “That’s not how they were ever supposed to die, ya know? They were supposed to go of old age and not for a long, long time. We wanted to stay and fight. We’ve debated if we’ve done the right thing. Why couldn’t we just all have escaped together?”

“Because then they would have been focused on just your vehicle and gotten to you,” he answered. “Your parents gave the distraction you needed to get away.”

“I know. It just seems so selfish to have run while they stayed and died fighting.”

“Parents think of us first,” Kale said gently. “They knew what they were doing and obviously it worked. You and your brothers got away, and you’re safe. They would never have regretted giving their lives for that, baby. If you stayed you’d all have been dead or worse.”

“I know,” I whispered and snuggled against them. “I just want to make every last Hunter pay.”

“We will because I’m nowhere near done with this fight,” Luca growled. “I’m getting my brothers back no matter what and killing as many of those fuckers as I can in the process.”

“I’m not sure how I can help,” Kale said slowly as his eyebrows drew together. “I’m a fireman, so I’m not that much use in this situation, but whatever you guys need, you have it. Just tell me how to help, and I will.”

“You’re helping by being here and comforting us,” Luca replied. We were all silent for a bit, lost in our own thoughts. “They came for us at night. I woke up to the sounds of fighting and just hopped out of bed when I got hit in the neck with a dart. I came back to in the back of a van with my three brothers. We were tied up, and the Hunters taunted us by saying they killed our parents.”

“How long ago was that?” Kale asked, his expression as broken as my heart for our mate.

“Fourteen months,” he whispered and shivered. “They separated us about a month after they took us, and I’ve not seen my brothers since.”

“How old are you, Luca? Are you all in the same litter?” I asked, realizing I really didn’t know much of anything about our mate.

“Thirty-six and yes, all the same litter. I’m the second one of us four that popped out.”

“You’re older than me?” Kale replied as his eyes went wide. “You look as young as Ham.”

“Welcome to the world of shifters.” I snickered. “We age slower but heal quicker than humans. You will now since we’ve mated. You’ll also become faster and stronger than you ever could have imagined. I kinda forgot that part, too.”

“So how long do you guys live? Are the stories of immortality true?”

“We can live several hundred years,” I answered with a wink, trying to lighten the mood. “Vampires are immortal. Shem and Diets will be now that they’ve mated Curtis. Conley told us that we could be too if we had some vamp blood, but it won’t convert us or cause us to mate them. Apparently it’s some big secret between their kind. They’re born this way just as we are, so the movies and stories about being turned with a bite and being damned are bullshit.”

“Yeah, I gathered that much when Curtis was out in the sun,” Kale said with a chuckle. “Well, since your brother is going to be immortal, I guess somewhere down the road we’ll have to discuss if that’s something we want for us, too.”

“You’d do that?” I asked, my eyes going wide now. Glancing at Luca, I saw the same expression on his face. “How are you not pissed I left all that out?”

“Yes, I’d do that.” He chuckled before kissing the tip of my nose. “And it’s not like you left out I’d become impotent or something bad,

Ham. You forgot to tell me some good stuff. It happens. I'd be pissed if you were keeping secrets from me or intentionally didn't tell me before we mated, but things happened fast. So you left a few details out, no big."

"Holy shit, are you amazing," Luca whispered in awe. I couldn't agree more. Kale took everything in stride and might have been the most understanding person on the planet.

"We've got much bigger issues going on than worrying that something slipped one of your minds about your world." Kale shrugged and gave us a smile. "You've both been through so much, and it's not over. I'm not going to focus on the little, stupid stuff when we need to keep our eyes on what needs to get done."

"I'm going to fall so in love with you," Luca blurted out, which of course sent me into peals of giggles. "What? I'll fall for you, too, Ham."

"No, it's just—" I started to say and then broke out into laughing again.

"He said the same thing after we met," Kale said for me. I nodded as I took a deep breath and got my laughter under control. "Think you can get some more sleep, or are you hungry?"

"Yeah, actually I'm starving," Luca replied with a smile. "I think my body's catching up on months of being starved."

"Well, it's already after two, so it's lunch time," I said as I glanced at the clock. We got up and got dressed. I gave Luca some clothes to wear. He was a little bigger than me in height but was underweight from his captivity, so I made sure to give him clothes that were a little bigger on me. We'd get him some clothes in his own size later.

Curtis, Diets, and some of my brothers were eating when we got to the dining room. We grabbed some plates off the sideboard and loaded up, checking on how Luca was doing the whole time. It wasn't like I thought he was just going to wig out now that he was awake and

we'd talked. The bruises we'd seen when we showered couldn't have been all of his injuries, though, so I wanted to make sure he was okay.

Well, as okay as anyone could be after what he went through.

"The others are keeping watch over the guys Mitchell's team rescued," Cass said when I glanced around at the empty chairs as we sat down. I cringed at what he said. I'd not gotten the chance to talk with Kale or Luca about our plan yet.

"What?" Luca gasped and dropped his sandwich. "You're watching us? What did we do wrong?"

Kale stared at me with wide eyes as Cass smacked himself in the forehead while Curtis grimaced. My sentiments exactly.

"Nothing, Luca," I said gently as I set my own food down. "We simply need to be cautious until we get everyone's story and verify it."

"You think one of us is the traitor?" He growled as he narrowed his eyes at me and then Curtis. "How could we have warned them you were coming when we were in *cages*?"

"It's not like that—" I started to say.

"Un-fucking-real," Luca snarled and went to stand.

"Luca, there have been instances when shifters have actually helped the Hunters," Curtis said gently. That gave my mate pause as his mouth dropped open. "We know a saber-tooth tiger shifter named Avery. There was a wolf that could mask his scent that helped hold him captive for almost thirty years. We're not saying anyone is working for the other side, but we have to be sure."

"Please understand, babe," I pleaded as I took his hand. "My brothers are here, Shem's mates, not to mention all the vampires Curtis is in charge of. We have to be sure that no one's pretending to be someone they're not."

"Okay," he said after taking a few deep breaths. "How can I help?"

I shot a glance over at Curtis, who gave me a nod to go ahead.



“Were any of the shifters rescued new? Anyone transferred to where you were being kept recently?”

“No,” Luca answered and shook his head before he froze. “Yes.”

“Who?” Curtis asked as everyone else watched what was going on like a tennis match.

“The bear shifter, I don’t know his name,” Luca replied as his eyes darted around the room before focusing on me. “He was in really bad shape though when they brought him in last month. They didn’t even have him perform with the rest of us. He was kept in a cage away from all the other captives, and I only saw him a few times. But I was there when he came to the circus, Ham. I couldn’t believe he was even alive. It was bad.”

“Okay, that doesn’t mean he’s not a victim, but we need to know stuff like that to keep everyone safe. And that might include him, but you can see why that might raise flags.”

“Yeah, I get what you’re saying now.” Luca looked a little green around the gills at the idea of someone being a fraud. “I just can’t see him getting worked over that way just to try and pretend to be one of us. For what? I mean, they couldn’t have known we’d be rescued.”

“To be completely honest, and this stays in this room.” Curtis waited until everyone nodded their agreement before continuing. “We’re more concerned that someone here might be a traitor or still loyal to Harold even though he’s gone. But being held captive can do strange things to a person’s mind. Avery was strong enough to fight against them all those years and eventually escape, though everyone’s not like that.”

“I know,” Luca whispered, looking heartbroken. “There was a falcon shifter like that at our circus. He didn’t see the Hunters or our captors as the bad guys. He worked side by side with them. I don’t know if he was just mental or what, but he hated shifters even though he was one.”

“What happened to him?” Curtis asked as he pulled out his ever-present notebook.

“He was killed during the escape by one of the other shifters that were being held that went to Conley’s. I can’t say I blamed the guy since that falcon tortured him more than any of the Hunters ever did.” He paused for a moment before glancing at Kale. “Am I under suspicion?”

“No, Luca,” Cass answered firmly, all eyes turning to him. “You’re part of our family now. We’re worried about the unknowns and some of the vamps here. You fall into neither of those buckets. You’re my brother’s mate, and Ham is an excellent judge of character. So, no, we’re not worried about you. We just want to help you, okay?”

“Thank you,” Luca said with a smile. We all went back to lunch then, and I gave Cass a nod. I appreciated what he said to help ease my mate. Luca had been through enough. He didn’t need to feel as if the people he should be learning to trust doubted him.

When lunch was wrapping up, I noticed Luca was breathing heavy. I turned to him and rested my hand on his thigh. I was just about to ask if he was okay when he jumped up so fast his chair went crashing to the floor.

“Luca?” Kale asked, his expression pinched with concern and confusion. Luca shook his head and ran from the room. I shot a look at my mate a second before we were on our feet and chasing after him.

I was much faster than Kale and didn’t wait for him. I figured by now he knew at least how to get back to my room, so I didn’t worry. Whatever was going on had Luca so freaked out that he didn’t even bother to close the door behind him, and I went right in. I got to the bathroom just in time to see him tear off his sopping wet clothes as he stood under the shower and shivered.

“Overheating?” I asked gently as I approached him slowly after figuring out what was going on.

“Y–Yess,” he hissed and scratched his arms. “S–Sorry.”

“Why are you sorry, Luca?”

“C–Can’t want m–me a–after what y–you heard.”

“Not true, babe,” I replied, shaking my head. Kale caught up to us then, panting as his chest heaved from the run up two flights and a few hallways. “We still want you, and your body is saying it’s time. The question is are you ready? Can you handle being mated to us after everything that’s happened?”

“W–Want y–you both,” he muttered as he stared at his feet.

“Then that’s all we need to hear, sweetheart,” Kale said gently as he reached through the open shower door and turned off the water. I smiled at him. He always knew what to say or do to ease the tension. Luca must have thought the same thing because he sighed when Kale picked him up and snuggled in his arms. I followed them with a towel, ready to give our mate what he needed.

## Chapter 5

“Think you can handle three rounds, Kale?” I teased as we took off our clothes.

“Three?” Kale asked, looking at me like I’d lost my mind.

“I’ve got to claim each of you and then Ham has to claim me,” Luca answered with a purr. Now that I was naked, I grabbed the lube from the nightstand and crawled on the bed to him. I felt the mattress dip behind me and knew Kale wasn’t waiting for a written invitation. Surprising Luca, I climbed over him and moved to the middle of the bed on my hands and knees.

We were definitely going to need a bigger bed. Three adult males did not fit very well on a full-size mattress.

“Gimme that meat,” I moaned, shaking my ass like a slut. They stared at me for a moment as if not knowing who should go where. I rolled my eyes, pointing to Kale and then my mouth before gesturing to Luca and then my ass.

“Got it.” Kale chuckled as they moved on either side of me. “We’ve not done any blow jobs yet.”

“Because we kept jumping right into your cock in my ass.”

“Are you complaining?”

“Yeah, I haaated it,” I drawled and then took the head of his dick into my mouth. He held it up for me like an offering, all hard and delicious looking. Who was I to resist?

Luca must have slicked up his hand because he pushed two fingers into me. I groaned and pushed back on them. They both held still, letting me go back and forth, taking Kale deeper in my mouth

when I pulled off Luca's fingers. And then I thrust back hard on them, while letting Kale's cock slip almost fully from my mouth.

"More," I purred after I let Kale's dick go. Luca gave me what I wanted, sliding in a third finger. "I want to taste you, Kale."

"You were, baby," he said gently as he cupped my cheek.

"All of you," I whispered, not sure exactly how to say I wanted to rim him in words. I'd never done it before, and I'd never wanted to. But I wanted everything with my mates.

"Okay," Kale panted, his eyes going wide as he realized what I meant. He lay down with his legs spread on either side of me so his groin was at my complete disposal. Then he pulled his knees to his chest, exposing that pretty pink hole of his. I growled and dove right in. "Fuck! Your tongue is rough. I forgot that."

"Want me to stop?" I asked hesitantly. Maybe it didn't feel good with a rough, cat-like tongue.

"Don't you dare!" I took him at his word and gave a long lick over his hole and all the way up to his sac. Luca worked in a fourth finger, and I was officially in heaven. I cried out as he rubbed over my sweet spot, burying my face in Kale's ass as if it was my favorite treat.

"You ready, my mate?" Luca purred as he pulled his fingers out of me. His voice sounded different, and I felt fur brush over my ass. He'd already shifted to his half-and-half form.

"Yes! Fuck me already," I begged and then went back to my prize. I licked, nibbled, and bit Kale's puckered flesh as Luca lined up his cock and slowly pushed inside of me. When he finally bottomed out, we both groaned.

"Holy hell, I could come from this," Kale whimpered. It was like he was laying down a challenge for me, one I fully accepted. Luca started out hard and fast, molding his body to mine. I turned my head enough so he could see my tongue in our mate's ass. I knew he liked the visual because he started pounding into me with more force than I would have thought his bruised body had.

It took some balancing, but I was able to lean my forearms on Kale's thighs so I could slip in a finger with my tongue. He went wild. Kale hollered out my name as his cock shot ropes of cum up in the air and on his stomach. The sight was probably the most erotic thing I'd ever seen. I pulled my tongue out and slid in another finger as he rode out his orgasm.

"Claim me," I growled. Luca licked my shoulder where it met my neck and then sunk his teeth into my flesh. I screamed as I came, my climax slamming into me with the force of a freight train. Seconds later Luca lifted his head and yelled as he shot his load inside of me.

"Wow," Kale whispered as we came back down from our bliss. Luca licked my bite closed as I moaned in delight. He slid off my back, pulling out of me and flopping to the bed. Kale lowered his legs as I dropped down to the other side of them.

"Yeah, wow just about sums it up," Luca panted. "That was unbelievable."

"I've never been in a ménage before." I giggled, my heart warming now that I'd been claimed by my mate. "I call bottom now!"

"Give me a minute." Kale chuckled and then moaned. I glanced over to see Luca closing the cap of the lube and pushing three fingers into Kale's partially stretched hole.

"You sure you need a minute?" I purred as I rolled onto my back and pulled my legs up, exposing my ass to him. "You're not ready to fuck me while Luca's cum is still inside of me?"

"Fuck, you guys are my own personal kinky dream," Kale said with a growl as he stared at my hole. "That is so damn hot."

"You're ready for me," Luca whispered as he moved over Kale. Our mate looked at Luca then and pulled him down for a kiss. I groaned at the sight. Watching the two of them make out as they nibbled and licked each other's mouths while they kissed drove me wild. Luca pulled back and removed his fingers from Kale's ass.

“Fuck me, someone fuck me,” I whimpered. I’d only been at half-mast when they started kissing, but now I was hard and leaking on my stomach.

“My pleasure,” Kale moaned. He rolled onto his knees and then moved over me. Before I could even say anything, he lined up his cock and slammed into me, bottoming out in one thrust. “Can you tell I like the idea of being inside of you with the remnants of your sex with Luca still inside of you?”

“I’m not sure,” I answered and then bit my lip to keep from begging for more. “I think I need more information to decide.”

“Oh you do, do you?” He raised an eyebrow as he slowly pulled out and then thrust hard back into me. “How about that?”

“More,” I whimpered, conceding the game and letting him know exactly how much I liked it.

“Anything you want, sweetheart,” he whispered and leaned over me. I spread my legs wider so he could move enough to kiss me. Luca moved behind Kale to get into position. He looked over his shoulder, and then softly said, “Claim me, our mate.”

“Thank you,” Luca said so softly I barely heard him. He entered Kale, and that pushed Kale’s cock further into me and folded me over more.

“It’s like having you both inside of me,” I whispered in awe at the vast emotions swarming me.

“Would you let us do that?” Kale moaned, and Luca’s eyes filled with such lust I knew he wanted it, too.

“Yes,” I purred and wrapped my legs around both of them as best as I could. “I’d love to be kitty in the middle.”

“We’re going to have to try that another time,” Kale said and swallowed loudly as he moved back. They both thrust together, and we all cried out at the sensations. Then Kale leaned over and whispered in my ear. “Maybe when we try that master fantasy you told me about?”

“Yes please,” I whimpered, ready to explode. Kale and I had talked about some of our deepest fantasies in between rounds of sex during my honeymoon heat. I had admitted that I’d always wanted, but had never felt comfortable enough with the few people I’d slept with to let them completely dominate me. I knew I’d have to trust someone completely to dabble in a little D/s, and who better to try that with than my mates?

They started fucking me hard and fast, and I couldn’t think of anything else then. I laid there and let them send me to the moon with pleasure. Luca took charge, snapping his hips and thrusting with more strength than I thought possible after everything he’d been through.

It didn’t take long for Kale to be on edge. I could only imagine how it felt to fuck me with Luca’s gorgeous cock in his ass.

“Luca, baby, I’m there.” He gasped as he tilted his head to the side. Luca glanced down at me, and I nodded. I knew what he was asking. He wanted to make sure he was going to bite on the other shoulder than where I’d left my mating mark. Luca gave me a quick wink and sunk his teeth deep into our mate.

“Fuck!” Kale screamed and filled me with his release. Luca roared out behind him, and the erotic sight was enough to throw me into my own orgasm. I couldn’t get over how sex with both of my mates made it twice as pleasurable. Seeing how they lost all inhibitions and threw themselves into our loving and claiming was amazing.

“Wow,” Luca whispered as he licked the wound closed on Kale’s neck and shifted back. “And I get to be in the middle next once I get the feeling back in my limbs.”

“Yeah, I need a nap to recover.” I giggled as they both slowly got off of me. Kale gave me a quick kiss as he pulled out of me and flopped on the side of me. Luca was lying on the other side, and we wrapped our arms around each other. “Yeah, we need a bigger bed.”

“But then we won’t lie on top of each other like this,” Kale replied, sounding like he was pouting at the idea.



“Yeah we will,” Luca said gently and leaned over me to kiss him. “We’ll just have the option and space so we won’t all fall out of bed anytime we move.”

“Good point.” I nodded in agreement as sleep started to pull me under. It wasn’t simply the two rounds of hot sex, though. With the two of them it was so much more everything, and that drained me. It was also the drama and issues I knew we’d have to resolve in the future. Starting with finding Luca’s brothers.

\* \* \* \*

Cass had figured out what was going on and why Luca had run from the dining room and had food sent up instead of making us come down for meals. It seemed sex had some type of healing powers when it was between mates because Luca’s many bruises started to heal. But still we were as gentle with him as possible.

There were a lot more blow and hand jobs than when I had honeymoon heat with just Kale, though those were just as much fun. When I’d topped to claim Luca with Kale on the bottom the second day, our mate had broken down in sobs when we were done.

“How can I be this happy when my brothers are still out there and my parents are dead?”

“I’ve had the same issues,” I whispered as I held him close. Kale pulled us both in between his legs as he leaned against the headboard. “It’s hard to have any fun when you’re suffering from grief. All my brothers have broken at some point when doing anything normal or fun. It feels wrong to have a reason to smile or be happy when our parents just died five months ago.”

“Yes, that’s it,” he cried and buried his face in my neck.

“It’s hard, but you’ll be able to move on, my mates,” Kale said gently. “They are no longer here, but they’ll always be a part of you. And you can’t just roll over and give up and join them. They died so

that you could live, even your parents, Luca. Giving up and letting the sorrow destroy you would mean they died in vain.”

I knew how Luca felt even though he’d suffered worse than I or my brothers had. But I had hope that maybe together with Kale’s supportive nature we could make it. We had to make it.

Once Luca’s honeymoon heat was over, we returned to the real world. I couldn’t help but blush at the knowing looks and winks I got from my family and Curtis’s inner circle. Mitchell ended up being the one to save us by updating us on the news from the prisoners and survivors at Conley’s estate.

“The guy told one of Conley’s guards who was working him over that the jaguar was supposed to be taken out.”

“Because I’m a homing beacon,” Luca whispered as we all stared at Mitchell. That had my gaze swinging over to my mate. “Hive mind and all of that.”

“How long is your range?” I asked, glancing over at Cass. We’d never tried how far away our litter hive minds could detect each other. But we’d accidentally done it once when some of us were home for the weekend from college and the others were still at school. And that was about a five hour drive between locales.

He gave me a nod, letting me know it was okay to share that. It filled me with excitement that we might be able to come up with a plan to find Luca’s brothers.

“I don’t really know,” Luca answered and shook his head. “We were in California once on vacation and one of my brothers stayed home in Washington, and we were able to hear him when we shifted.”

“Yeah, we were able to do the same five hours away at college,” I said with a nod. “But that’s even farther. We might have a way to find your brothers and the other circuses.”

“How?” Curtis asked and raised a speculative eyebrow. “Drive around the country with him in jaguar form hoping his brothers are, too, so that they can sense each other?”

“Unless you’ve got a better idea, I suggest you shut it,” I snarled as I saw the pain and hopeless look cross Luca’s face.

“Right, yeah, sorry,” Curtis said sheepishly and rubbed his forehead with the heel of his hands. “It’s just been so much confusion and drama with the survivors and interviewing everyone here while you’ve been out of the loop. I feel like I’m trying to put this huge fucking puzzle together and there’s just one piece missing in the middle that would tie everything together.”

We all nodded and shared a look of understanding. I got how frustrating it was, especially when Curtis didn’t know if it was his own people who could be the bad guys.

“Avery,” Cass whispered suddenly a few minutes later, breaking all our deep thoughts as we ate.

“Huh?” Diets asked and focused on my brother with his fork halfway to his mouth.

“Avery Donovan,” Cass said louder now, excited because he had a plan. I knew my brother...nothing got him as excited as having a plan. “That’s the piece we’ve been missing. All the survivors that were rescued were with the Hunters two years or less. Avery was with them almost thirty years. He has to know what types of places they would move the circus to.”

“Because if we can narrow down locations, we can focus on those instead of wandering aimlessly!” I exclaimed, taking over his train of thought as Cass nodded with a smile. “There’s got to be some pattern of places they go to. Either they have their own compounds close for backup or—”

“Outside medium to larger cities,” Luca said as his eyes went wide. “I never thought that. I was distracted by, well, um, being held and tortured.”

“What do you remember about the places and travel?” Curtis asked gently. I knew he was a good guy and worthy of my brother, but how he was handling my mate and being in charge of all of this raised my level of respect for him. “Try and start at the beginning.

Cass, can you call Avery? We need him here, or maybe Conley can coordinate that.”

“On it,” Cass said as he jumped out of his chair and raced from the room.

“We started outside of Orlando,” Luca whispered and started to shiver. Kale leaned over and wrapped an arm of comfort around Luca while I took his hand in mine. “I was out of it for the beginning, and I don’t know how long they were there before I was taken there. But I heard the humans talk of Disney World.”

“Where next?” Curtis asked as he wrote down notes.

“Atlanta for about two months,” Luca answered after closing his eyes for a moment. “Two months was how long we stayed anywhere we went. It was Atlanta, then Montgomery, Alabama, then Jackson, Mississippi, and then Baton Rouge, Louisiana.”

“What else do you remember, babe?” Kale said softly when Luca paused.

“I was in bad shape after that for a while,” Luca replied as his eyes filled with tears. “I tried escaping, and they caught me. But I remember someone saying we were in Little Rock, Arkansas. I know it was Knoxville, Tennessee after that and then Charlotte, North Carolina.”

“So you were making a loop of the southeastern states,” Curtis mumbled as he kept writing.

“Yes because they were packing up to head to Columbia, South Carolina when we were rescued. I’d guess we were going back to Orlando after that.”

“We’ll see if Avery has similar information after Cass talks to him,” Curtis said with a sad smile. “This might help us find the other circuses, Luca. If they stick to a schedule like that, then we can intercept them. Hell, if we can figure out how to block off the map, then we can send you in the middle of the loop to help us track the Hunters down.”

“Whatever it takes to get my brothers back,” Luca replied firmly and nodded. I knew it was taking everything he had to be so strong, but I was proud of him. I couldn’t even imagine the horrors he went through when in captivity, and he was ready to go back into the lion’s den to rescue his family. I was going to fall madly in love with someone as kindhearted and brave as him.

“Avery was originally taken to the circus that did a circuit of the southwestern states,” Cass announced as he came bursting back into the room. “Then he was transferred to the Midwest one, and that’s where he broke out. Conley’s already disbanded that one, but he’s going to talk to Conley about the locations he knows of so they can go in and take the others down.”

“Did you tell him about me?” Luca asked.

“Oh yeah, he was almost giddy at the prospect that you could help them narrow the locations. And I guess he just got back from a meeting with his Council and ours. They’ve ordered immediate evacuation of any pards or smaller shifter groups to different werewolf packs around the country until they can organize their own groups. The Council had no idea that the Hunters were on this large of a scale, and they’re not taking any chances.”

“We can house about twenty more people here,” Curtis said as he kept writing. His shoulders were stiff, and he was hunched over farther than needed to write on the little notepad. Sometimes I wondered if he was just pretending to take notes so he didn’t have to look anyone in the eyes and see the pain there. Not that I blamed him if he did that because it was hard enough for me to have to see, and I wasn’t the guy in charge.

“Conley’s organizing with his other counterparts to see what room the larger covens have. Most won’t be a big deal like Avery and his brother Trey since they’re right by a wolf pack and already have that bond with them. It’s the other ones that are on the outskirts or completely alone. Those will be moved with basics immediately, and

then we'll be going back with reinforcements to get the rest of their stuff."

"We're going to need to coordinate with our closest pack to see what they need," Curtis said and nodded at Mitchell.

"I'll call them and find out. Do you want to send us there as backup?"

"No, we still haven't cleared everyone here, and I want you guys ready to go in with Luca if we get a lock on the other circus locations. Your team is better trained than almost any other coven for that type of infiltration."

"Thanks, Curtis," one of the other vamps said, his smile shining with pride.

"You're welcome," he replied with a nod. "You deserve it, and once we settle some things around here and dismantle the circuses, you guys have some major time off coming to you."

"We love our jobs." Mitchell chuckled as he shook his head. "This is more than a job, too. We're warriors and protectors of our people and of all supernaturals. We'd go help free our people from the Hunters whether it was our job or not."

"Yes, yes you are." Curtis smiled and then rubbed his chin in consideration. "Talk to a few of the guys we've cleared and offer the pack our trucks and our guys as drivers when they start moving people. I'm not sure they have anything available without having to rent trucks."

"All over it. We'll let you know what we find out," Mitchell replied as his team stood. Never a dull moment around here.

"Thank you for everything," Luca said quietly as he grabbed Mitchell's hand as the man walked by us.

"You can thank us after we find your brothers," Mitchell replied with a confident smile. I really felt he believed it. I was hopeful, I truly was, but also realistic. For all we knew, Luca's brothers were dead. But it wouldn't help us to think like that.

"I'm going to put in my two weeks' notice," Kale said when the room cleared besides Luca and me.

"What?" we both gasped in shock.

"It's the only way," he answered with a nod. "I love being a fireman, but you're my mates, and I'm already half in love with both of you. I won't even be able to concentrate at work with everything going on here and knowing you guys are ass-deep in alligators looking for these circuses. And an unfocused fireman is a dead one. Not to mention the danger I could be to my men if I'm distracted."

"Maybe you could just take a leave of absence until we find Luca's brothers?" I asked hesitantly after a few moments. Luca nodded at the idea as he leaned further into Kale's embrace. "It's not fair to ask you to give up the job you love for us."

"You're not asking. Besides, I was already toying with the idea before today. Curtis and I had a long talk about the fire hazards I've seen around the compound. It hasn't been updated in a very long time. He wanted to hire me on the side to get it up to code, but I think that just needs to be my fulltime job. I could always do consultant work in the area."

"You'd really just give up your dreams for us like that?" Luca asked, his voice full of awe as tears glistened his lashes.

"I'm trading in one dream for a better one," Kale replied softly and kissed Luca's temple. "Fate gave me two wonderful mates, and I've never been happier in my life than in the short time I've known you both. And I'm not just saying that because of the mind-blowing sex. It's so much more than that. Curtis said never to worry about money, but I won't be one of those in-laws that is a leech. I will figure out a way to provide for my men."

"I have money," Luca whispered. He said it so quietly that I barely heard him. We both glanced at him expectantly, waiting for him to elaborate. "My family is rich. I mean like holy mother of rich with a long-dated history that goes back to the pilgrims."

“Sweet,” I drawled, trying to break the tension and seriousness of the conversations of today. “We landed us a big fish, Kale.”

“I need to contact my parents’ attorney,” Luca said thoughtfully after we all had a laugh. “He’s a shifter, and I’m sure knows full well what happened. But I don’t even have a driver’s license on me, so I need to get all new everything.”

“And then we need to do some shopping, babe.” I chuckled and leered at him. “Because my clothes really don’t fit you or do you any justice. You can pay us back later since you have gobs of money.”

“And I’ll go put in notice at the station,” Kale said with a smile, seeming excited. “I’ve got enough vacation time where I think I can swing not working during my notice.”

“Then we have a plan!” It was a small plan, making baby steps toward the bigger goals in mind. But it was a step in the right direction. And we needed that.



## Chapter 6

Luca made his call and set up getting money wired to me since you needed an ID to pick it up and he didn't have one. It turned out the attorney was a childhood friend of his father's, so the guy was elated Luca had survived and was ready to do whatever he needed.

And damn was that man efficient. He was already organizing the will to be taken out of probate since none of the heirs had stepped forward and said he'd get Luca his new IDs and debit cards overnighted. I asked if the lawyer gave three wishes to everyone or if Luca was just special. He laughed, and I really liked that look on him.

I just about swallowed my tongue when the bank manager told me that Luca's attorney had wired me ten thousand dollars. Holy shit! And was that just for him to use until tomorrow? Was Luca that high maintenance?

"In case it takes longer to get new IDs and debit cards," Luca assured me when I balked at the amount. "Plus, he doesn't know the situation on us living with Curtis and all that. I'm sure he was thinking I'd need to rent a place and buy all new stuff. He's just being cautious."

"So it's not for your mani-pedi and upkeep?" I teased, but I was at least half serious.

"Yeah right," Luca snorted and looked seriously offended as we climbed back into one of the cars from Curtis's estate we borrowed. "I saw a Target on the ride over and was going to pick up a few pairs of jeans and some shirts there. I'm totally high maintenance."

"Good to hear." I chuckled and took his hand in mine after I started the car and pulled out of the lot. "Though I guess I could get

used to champagne and caviar for breakfast every morning if you really want.”

“Smart-ass,” he mumbled. We glanced at each other and burst out laughing.

It only took us a few minutes to drive to Target. I parked and we hopped out, making sure to grab a cart as we entered. We laughed and joked around as we started in bath products. Sure we had everything at Curtis’s house, but most people liked certain brands, and it would help Luca feel like it was home instead of a place he was just staying at.

“Think we could talk Kale into waxing?” he asked with a purr as we passed razors. I stopped and gaped at him. “What? I like the way it feels. That’s the only area I’m high maintenance in. I like having it done.”

“We can do that,” I squeaked after swallowing loudly a few times. “Think we can find a place around here and surprise him?”

“You read my mind.” He glanced around to make sure no one was watching before giving me a quick peck on the lips. Mustn’t scare the locals at Target with man-on-man PDA. While he was so close to me, he whispered in my ear, “I think we’re being followed. I saw that guy in the bank, and he’s been looking at everything an aisle over from us as we shop but not getting anything.”

“I saw him, too, but I was hoping I was being paranoid,” I said with a sigh. I really just wanted one little outing with my mate to be normal.

“What do we do?” he asked quietly but went back to browsing.

“I’m going to text Cass and see if he wants us to pick up any food on the way home,” I replied as if the idea just hit me. I knew Luca got what I was implying...I was calling in for backup just in case.

“That sounds good. I’m in the mood for some Chinese if they’re okay with that.” Good man. He knew how to handle his nerves in a situation. I nodded my agreement and shot off Cass and Curtis a text.

We wandered over to clothes then and picked out some necessities for Luca. I teased him about not needing boxers or underwear with us as if we weren't scared that Hunters had found us.

*"On our way. Wait until we get there and then lead the guy away from people"* was the text I got from Cass a few minutes later.

"Big order for Chinese." I giggled and showed Luca the text. "I saw a place a few blocks away. We'll stop there after we're done here."

"Sounds like a plan," Luca said with a wide, toothy smile. He was ready to get some payback. Did that worry me? Oh yeah, but I thought it was normal given what he'd been through to be a little ready to kick some ass.

I saw the guy get on the phone then, and we ignored him as we went and picked out a pair of sneakers and flip-flops for Luca. I texted Cass about going to the Chinese place covertly while Luca was showing me shirts and blocking the guy's view. My brother agreed on the location, and they said they'd be there and ready in ten. Worked for me.

We picked up some snacks and a new e-reader for Luca to stall a little more just in case they needed more time. Then we decided to get a Blu-Ray player and some movies for the TV in our room.

"We can order some dirty ones later," Luca said with a wink as we headed to the register.

"I was thinking more along the lines of making some of our own." I leered at him, and he shivered with lust. Yeah, he liked the idea.

We checked out, and I paid with my debit card like normal even though the guy now had a friend hanging out with him at the little snack area. Oh goody, reinforcements.

I almost wanted to throw my head back and laugh at what we had planned for them. Seriously, these guys needed to take some kind of class on how to be better at stealth. Luca and I weren't James Bond by any means, and we had picked them out right after the bank. How stupid did they think we were?

I felt better thinking that they were just idiots instead of them thinking we were an easy picking. I'm not sure why I cared what the goons thought. Maybe I just had some pride? I think the idea of looking dense and weak bothered me, though. Me sensitive about being short? Naw.

"Aww, he made a friend," Luca said quietly as we loaded the bags into the trunk of the car. "Now we get to have two beat downs."

"Just remember we want them to be able to answer questions," I replied after we got in the car.

"I'm not stupid, Ham," he said with a snarl. "They can't tell us where my brothers are if they're dead."

"I know you're not stupid, honey." I took his hand in mine and shot him a smile. "I want to tear their throats out after what the Hunters did to my parents and your family. I'm worried about me holding back, and I wasn't tortured like you were."

And raped, I added in my head. Luca seemed even more sensitive about that than the beatings he received. Kale and I had talked while Luca had been busy after we found out and agreed that Luca worried about our perception of him after he told us. Who blames the victim for being brutalized? Did he think we saw him as damaged goods? I just didn't know, but we'd asked Curtis to look into finding a trauma counselor who was a paranormal in case Luca needed one.

"Right, okay, that's fair," Luca said after a few minutes. "I can get that. Sorry I snapped at you."

"I'm in a lot of pain from it, but you can make it up to me later." He snickered as I pouted and pretended to be gravely hurt.

We put our game faces on as we pulled into the parking lot of the restaurant. Luckily it was the only thing there and had a large area surrounded by trees so the other business in the next lot were blocked out. Cass would be smart enough to know to go over there. So I drove over and parked just on the side of the building as if I didn't want to park by everyone else and risk getting the car dinged.

As we got out and pretended to be listing everything we needed to order, I saw a flash of orange out of the corner of my eye. Good, they were here. Then our new friends parked and got out of their cars. How did we get them over here though without looking suspicious?

Luca answered that one quicker than I could have come up with an idea. He rubbed his body against me suggestively before reaching out and running his hands down my chest.

“Ever been fucked in an alley before in daylight?” he asked, acting as if he had no clue someone else was around and was too distracted by my body to lower his voice.

“Here? Now?” I gasped and then moaned. “What if someone sees us?”

“It’s past the lunch rush,” he said firmly as he pulled the waist of my jeans so I was walking with him around the car. “I’ll let you fuck me, okay? That way you can cover up easier if someone stumbles upon us.”

“Fine, but let’s go around back,” I replied and nipped his neck. “You still got that lube in your pocket?”

“You know how horny I am.” I nodded like a lust-filled man wanting his mate, which I actually wasn’t faking. The idea of fucking Luca in broad daylight where we could get caught was hot. Who knew I was into that sort of thing?

We gave a few cursory glances around as if we didn’t know we were already being watched and then headed back around the building. I was kissing Luca’s neck and pawing at him the entire way.

“Good call,” I whispered in his ear as we moved out of sight.

“Very impressive.” Curtis snickered as he came out from behind one of the dumpsters. “You better make some noises because they’re getting close.”

“Oh yeah, baby, shove those fingers in me.” Luca moaned on cue.

“How can you be this tight after we both fucked you this morning?” I panted and then groaned. We made all kinds of great noises until they walked around the corner.

“What the—” the first guy yelled.

“Surprise! We’re not idiots,” I said with a wide smile and held my arms out in a “ta-da” fashion. They turned to run, but nine cheetahs had already surrounded them. “So I’d start talking *real* fast before my brothers get hungry.”

“Yeah, we didn’t get them their Chinese yet,” Luca drawled with a smirk as he crossed his arms over his chest and leaned against the building. He looked calm and bored with the situation, but I knew he was ready to pounce any second and tear these guys apart.

“We could scream,” the second guy said as they moved to stand back-to-back. As if that would help them? In a flash Curtis was there with his hand wrapped around his throat.

“And I could knock you out and stuff you in the trunk of my car before you took a breath to holler.” He hissed and snarled. “If we bring you back to the compound to be questioned, you won’t ever leave there. You feel me?”

“Yeah, we got you man,” the first guy said in a shaky voice and held his hands out in surrender. “We were just supposed to watch the guys and report back when we knew for sure their names.”

“And why didn’t you?” I asked. I smelled that he was telling a half truth, so there was definitely more to the story. I had a feeling that wasn’t *just* what they were supposed to do.

“You kept calling each other honey and babe,” the second guy sneered with disgust. Oh, a homophobe, too. Well, wasn’t that just the icing on the cake?

“Who were you calling?” Curtis gave the man a shake to get him back on track.

“No way, man, they’ll kill us,” the first man exclaimed and started to shake. Cass swiped at the guy’s leg none too gently with his claws. Not enough to do major damage but enough to draw blood and show we weren’t fucking around. “Shit!”

“Yeah, you’re in deep shit all right,” Luca snarled and stepped forward. “And we can smell lies, so you weren’t just supposed to watch us and call it in. Tell the fucking truth before we eat you.”

“We’re dead anyways.” The second man seemed to know what the situation really was and tried to egg us on by spitting in Luca’s face. “Just do it already.”

I had to hand it to my mate. He wiped it off and rolled his eyes as if saying “that’s all you got?”

“Oh no, we’re going to have lots and lots of fun with you,” Curtis said with a purr as he rubbed the guy’s ass. How he put that show on, I wasn’t sure because the idea of even touching the man when he was clothed made me want to vomit. “Ever been fucked and bitten by a vamp? I hear it can turn any straight guy gay.”

“No way, you’re mated to the little one and can’t cheat on him,” he replied, his voice showing the first signs of fear as his face went so pale I was surprised he didn’t faint.

“Now how would you know that just by following us?” I asked with a wide smile. “Gotcha!”

“I think we take them to the sex room in your place and fuck them until they bleed or talk.” Luca had a hard look on his face, but I could tell from the way he was shaking that even the threat wasn’t easy to say. If I had to guess, and I felt I knew Luca well enough to guess accurately, he was shaking with rage and disgust at the possibility of even touching them to make the threat seem real.

“We tell you and you promise no rape? You’d just kill us quickly?” the first guy asked as he started to cry. Oh come on now! They were going to do god knows what to us, all tough and big, and now he was crying? That just didn’t seem right. “I can’t be fucked by abominations.”

And just like that I lost any ounce of pity that he might have gotten roped into this. “So we’re not human to you? That’s how you Hunters justify what you do to us? Un-fucking-real.”

“You don’t even have souls,” the second guy said with conviction.

“The fuck we don’t,” I snarled and got in his face even as Curtis held him off the ground by his neck. “We were all baptized, you asshole. We used to go to church with our parents every Sunday before Hunters murdered them. I’ll go to heaven with a clear conscious when I die, but you’ve killed innocent people and done unspeakable crimes. No priest would even absolve you.”

“Who do you think funds us?” the first guy asked with a look in his eye that screamed he thought he just won something by that little tidbit.

“No truly Christian church would condone what you do,” Luca said and then backhanded the guy across the face. “You kidnap, kill, rape, torture, and make money off of god’s creations, whether you see us as animals or not. There is no real church that would sanction that.”

“I don’t do all of that,” the second guy replied, looking completely offended we’d accuse him of anything. Yeah, because he was just such a Boy Scout. Douche bag.

“You might not have personally, but you know what goes on in those circuses and don’t stop it! That’s just as bad as having done it yourself.” Luca started to shake with rage, and I knew he was about to shift. Part of me wanted to let him so he’d attack the guy and we wouldn’t have to listen to this hate anymore. But we needed more information. Damn logic.

“Get them out of here,” I said to Curtis as I wrapped my arms around my mate and pulled him back against my chest. “Let’s continue this at home where no one can interrupt us.”

“Run,” the second guy shouted after giving a hard blow to Curtis’s solar plexus. The first guy took off and got a whole three feet before two cheetahs were on him. Did I mention they were dumb? Hell, Curtis didn’t even drop the guy from the blow to his body.

A few of my brothers shifted back so they could hold the guy on the ground and help load him up. Cass did the same to help Curtis with his guy, not that he needed help.



“Can I play with this one in my room?” Hael asked flirtatiously as he rubbed his body over the man on the ground, keeping up the act that we would ever in a million years really touch them. “He’s firm in all the right places. I think he’d really like something shoved in him.”

“No, please, please, I’ll tell you anything,” the guy whimpered and cried as he struggled. “Oh god, you’re all naked!”

“Yeah, where do you think our clothes go when we shift?” I snickered as they dragged them away to the SUVs I now realized were parked behind the other Dumpsters. We were actually lucky that no one from the restaurant came to take the garbage out or anything while we’d been questioning our captives.

“I feel like we should pay the restaurant for letting us use their parking lot or something,” Luca said as he rubbed his hands over my arms. I got the hint. He’d calmed down and was letting me know he was back in control.

“I do really feel like some Chinese food now.” I kissed his neck gently and let him go.

“Sounds good to me.” He snickered as he pulled away from me. I’m not sure I’d be handling this as well as he was if the situation was reversed. Was he just repressing what happened to him?

“We’re getting food to go,” I called out to my brothers and Curtis. “Who wants what?”

“You know what we like,” Cass said as he shoved the guy in the backseat. “Don’t be so stingy with the egg rolls this time, though!”

“And more crab rangoon,” Hael yelled out as he yanked on clothes.

“We might need all the money you had transferred just to feed all of them.” I chuckled as we waved at them and headed back around front.

“Please,” he scoffed and shook his head. “My litter has finished ten large pizzas after a day of running.” His face fell so fast that it hurt my heart.

“We’ll get them back, Luca,” I said tightly as I hugged him back to me. “We will get them back no matter how long it takes.”

“Think they know where any of them are?”

“I think Mitchell and his guys will get every last bit of information they have out of them.”

“I want to just pound them until there’s nothing left of them, Ham,” he whispered as he stopped by the car. “What kinda person wants to do that to another human being?”

I thought about that a moment as we stared at each other. “One who knows they are partially if not fully responsible for the deaths of their loved ones and wants to save their other family members. You’re not talking about just killing for the thrill of it, Luca, or killing some random person. These *are* the bad guys, and none of us would think any less of you for wanting to do that. Hell, I want to, too.”

“Okay, as long as we are all nuts in the head and I’m not the only one.”

“Nope, not the only one, babe.” I chuckled and threw my arm around his shoulder. “I think everyone’s a little crazy, but only the non-scary ones are able to admit it.”

“So once I start thinking I’m sane, then it’s time to be worried I’m completely off my rocker?”

“That’s my theory,” I said as I gave him my best winning smile.

“You’re lucky you’re hot.” He giggled and shook his head. “Seriously, it’s a good thing you’re sexy and fun, or I’d be tempted to throw you in the rubber room just for being twisted.”

“You like twisting me,” I purred in his ear.

“Yeah I do. I love it just as much as you do.” We shared a laugh and went inside to get the carful of food we would need to feed everyone. It was nice we could tease like we did, though. If you can’t have fun in life even when the shit hits the fan, then what was the point of putting up with all the crap in the world?

I didn’t know, and I hoped I never found out.

## Chapter 7

Mitchell and his guys had one of them spilling his guts by the time we were back home and done eating. I already wanted to kiss the man for saving Luca and bringing him to us. Maybe Kale and Luca would let me thank him by getting on my knees? Yeah right, and piggies flew.

“We know current locations on two different circuses,” Mitchell said with an evil smile. I ignored the blood on his shirt and hands. I didn’t care what he had to do to those assholes to get the information, but I didn’t really want to know either. Selective knowledge worked for me.

“Call Conley and get it set up,” Curtis said as he got on his feet and grabbed a map out of a stack of papers. “Tell me where.”

“Already called Conley, and we’ve got his crew and a few choppers inbound that should be here within a few hours,” he replied. He moved over by his boss and eyed over the map.

“I don’t even ever need to be in charge, do I?” Curtis snickered and shook his head. He wasn’t chastising Mitchell for making the call by any means. I knew him well enough for that. Curtis was simply grateful that he didn’t constantly have to hold everyone’s hands and micromanage.

“We know who’s the boss, but that doesn’t mean we don’t know what needs to be done.”

“Amen to that, brother.”

“Okay, we got one in Madras, Oregon,” he said, pointing to the map. Luca started shaking next to me, so I wrapped an arm around him. Kale had met us back home, and like we’d been doing since

Luca came into our lives, we were sitting on either side of him so he felt protected. “And we’ve got a second one in Las Vegas. That one stays there permanently and is off the strip.”

“What better place for that kind of *entertainment*,” Kale practically snarled, putting all his disgust into that one word. “The tourists think it’s sleight of hand or other illusions instead of freak show carnies like at the other ones. They have no idea what they’re really seeing.”

“Yup, and the guys we have didn’t come from Vegas, so we have more time to get that one without any red flags being raised. These two came from the Oregon one and are scheduled to check in by noon tomorrow and say Luca’s dead. So we go in tonight and wipe them all out before anyone suspects anything.”

Mitchell didn’t realize his mistake until Luca shot up from his chair so fast he knocked it backward and almost made me fall off my chair since I was leaning against him. My arm went flying off of him and smacked my chair hard enough for me to wince.

“Sorry, sorry,” he cried out as he checked my hand and wrist. Then he did the same to Kale, who’d had his hand on Luca’s thigh.

“We’re fine, honey,” Kale said gently as if trying not to startle the frightened animal in the room. It was actually an accurate analogy in this case. “Calm down, Luca.”

“Calm down? Calm down!” Luca shouted, his voice going an octave higher the second time in panic. “Ham was with me today when they were following me and supposed to kill me, Kale. I could have gotten our mate killed. And you want me to fucking clam down? He could be dead right now because of me if we hadn’t noticed them and called in for help.”

“But you *did* notice them,” Kale said as he stood up, keeping his hands in front of him as a sign of surrender. “We could all die at any minute of any day.”

“I’m living proof of that,” Diets added with soft eyes as he pulled Shem closer to him. “That doesn’t make it anyone’s fault other than

the guys who were sent here. But it didn't happen, and we're going to take them out before they hurt anyone else."

"We?" Shem and Curtis said together.

"I put my two weeks in with Kale this morning," Diets answered nervously as his mates stared holes in him. "Luca might not be my mate, but he is a part of this family, and we stick together. Plus, we never know what's going on here from day to day, so I need to be here for when I'm needed and not worrying y'all about getting caught in a fire."

We all sat there a few moments and just looked at him while trying to digest the news. "I love you," Shem cried out suddenly and threw himself at Diets. "But if you ever keep something so major from us again, no sex for a week."

"Yeah, like you could not have sex that long." Diets snickered as he wrapped his arms around Shem.

"I didn't say *I* wouldn't have sex. I said *you* wouldn't have sex. Curtis and I would fuck like bunnies and not let you join." I still knew it was an idle threat. Shem was incredibly affectionate and, now that he had mates, a horny little shit. Not that I was any better, but it was still a valid point to be made.

"Normally I would say that Diets and I should stay out of your way," Kale said firmly and got everyone's attention off of the two kissing men. "But we're ex-military and these Hunters are human. We're of use and can handle ourselves."

"How did we not know you used to be in the military?" Luca asked with wide eyes.

"We've been a little busy," I answered with a wink.

Curtis turned to Mitchell then, and they seemed to have a silent conversation with each other. Mitchell was the one to speak then, and we all knew why. Curtis didn't want to tell Diets no or put limitation on him.

"Fine, but you won't be in the front lines. These are humans we're going up against, but we're a lot damn harder to kill than you are even

if you're mated to one of us. Plus, we don't want any confusion with your scents when we're going in to take out the humans we know to be Hunters. You get out captives after we've cleared an area while we move onto the next."

"That works, but I was thinking you could use some sharpshooters while you guys get close to the bad guys." Kale shrugged that either way worked for him.

"You can handle that?" Mitchell asked, his eyebrows shooting up in surprise. The two human mates nodded, and another of Mitchell's evil smiles crossed his face but with a tinge of respect as well. "You guys are just full of surprises, man. What do you need from us?"

"A place to practice before we go." Diets snickered, and Mitchell shot him a confused look. "Ranger-trained snipers always have their rifle they used while in service. They're not always military issued, and everyone has their own preference and specific modifications."

"Plus, they're expensive and have distinct barrel patterns that most people are smart enough not to reuse in case the last guy didn't use the gun for the best purposes."

"Dude, I don't know if I should be appalled or hard right now," I said to Kale, trying not to just sit there and gape at his statement. He reached over and brushed his hand over my groin.

"Well, I don't know if you're appalled, but you are hard." He snickered before getting serious again. "Do we have a local terrain map of the area? Diets and I can find some high ground and clear a way in for you guys. Our rifles don't make much noise and won't alert anyone."

"I'll get it while you practice." Mitchell gave a sharp nod. He never disrespected Diets or Kale, but I think he never considered they could handle sitting at the big boys' table with the other paranormals. I had a feeling that estimate changed and he'd have to rethink a few things before ever being so quick to judge again.

"Cass, get the jet ready to fly into Madras. We'll follow behind the choppers and pick up everyone we can take into Vegas. So charter

a flight there for afterward. The choppers can take the survivors and a few captive Hunters back to Conley's compound for questioning."

I noticed Hael's face crumpled then, so I asked what was wrong.

"Nothing, it's stupid," he answered quickly. "I want to help."

It took me a second to get what was going on until I realized he wasn't the only one of my brothers who looked conflicted. "Shit, I totally forgot."

"What?" Luca asked gently as he glanced between us.

"Our parents said they were going to take us all to Vegas when the younger litter turned twenty-one," Cass whispered and was getting choked up. "Which was a few months ago."

"Then I'll book us several suites at one of the nicest casinos there, and after we see some justice done to the people who murdered your parents, we'll celebrate the way they would have wanted," Curtis said softly after a few minutes of pained silence. "I know it won't be the same without them, but they would have wanted your lives to go on even though they're not with you anymore."

"You're absolutely right," Cass replied with a sharp nod and then swallowed loudly. "We've not really had much fun since we lost them, and after we take down two circuses we'll definitely have something to celebrate."

We all agreed even though it wasn't the trip to Vegas we'd always talked about. It was something I knew we needed to do as a family.

"And we'll be celebrating with two of your brothers hopefully," I said quietly to Luca. He nodded as his eyes filled with tears.

I just hoped we found them alive.

\* \* \* \*

I firmly believe that you learn new things every day. What did I learn that day? I didn't like helicopters. I *really* didn't like helicopters, and they are an evil invention. I was strapped in and not even half hanging out like you see these guys in movies and I still felt like the

ball in a pin ball machine. And these weren't some rickety choppers...Oh no, Conley only got the best.

Yeah, well, until he got a hyper-jump toy to beam me somewhere, next time I would take a plane or drive like normal people. And then there was Kale grinning like a loon the whole ride! Luca seemed to like it about as much as I did, so maybe it was a cat or shifter thing? Either way, helicopters suck.

"You just have to get used to it," Kale shouted into our headsets with a lopsided grin. Luca and I both flipped him off, which sent him into peals of laughter. We shared a look. Yeah, Kale wasn't getting any tonight.

Just when I thought things couldn't get any more jumpy and I could keep the contents of my stomach down, the chopper stopped moving forward and they opened the goddamn door! I watched in horror as Diets and Kale clicked some hook onto their harnesses and then tied off onto the chopper.

"See you guys soon," he said, blew us some air kisses, and jumped. Mother fucker! I was mated to an insane man. Luca's eyes looked like they were going to pop out of his head, so at least we were on the same page.

Diets was right behind him, and they dropped down the rope like nothing at all. Once they were secure on the ground, one of Mitchell's guys pulled the ropes up and we were back on our way to where we were going to land. As soon as that metal death trap touched down and the door was open, I was out of there in a flash.

"I love you, ground," I whimpered as I dove to my knees and kissed the grass. I sat up when I realized just how insane that sounded, completely embarrassed until I realized Luca was right next to me doing the same thing.

"No more choppers for this kitty," he said firmly, not seeming to have the same embarrassing moment I was.

"Are you guys going to be able to handle this?" Mitchell called out as the chopper started to shut down. "I mean, if the ride here



bugged you...” He trailed off and held his arms out as if to say, “what the fuck?”

“We can handle the hunting and killing we need to do tonight,” I said now that my world wasn’t shaky. “But I’d rather eat you in cheetah form than get back on that damn thing.”

“Good to know.” He chuckled and shook his head. They started pulling gear off the chopper and suited up. We had two miles to cover to get to the circus, but Luca and I weren’t going in with guns. We came equipped with other deadly weapons.

“If something happens tonight, I want you to know that the time I have spent with you and Kale have been the best days of my life,” Luca said suddenly as we got undressed. “Even though I was worried about my brothers.”

“I feel the same way,” I replied around the lump that had formed in my throat. I hugged him to me, ignoring the fact we were naked amongst armed vamps, and then kissed him passionately. “You keep your ass safe so we can keep getting to know each other and fall in love.”

“You do the same.” After that there was nothing left to say. I wanted to tell him I loved him, but it was too soon. I knew it was how I felt already. It just wasn’t the right time to admit it. If I said it now, it would seem like I said it just in case we died, and I didn’t want him to ever doubt my words like that.

We shifted and rubbed against each other while the vampires lead the way. Luca froze for a moment and gave a strangled cry. If his brothers were dead, he wouldn’t have known just by shifting, so I guessed at least one was alive but just not in the best shape. Well, shit!

He went from jogging along with the vamps to racing at breakneck speed. I heard Mitchell hiss at him and tell him to slow down, but he didn’t listen. I wasn’t sure what to do, but then I did what any good mate would do...I raced after him. No way was I letting him go into hell by himself.

Luckily for both of us, cheetahs were much faster than jaguars, and the vamps were almost keeping up. I caught him quickly and realized for the first time how much bigger his animal form was than mine. I couldn't get over it, and it almost made me stumble as we ran.

He was almost as long as a tiger but even broader. A little guy like Luca shifted into over a five-hundred-pound black jaguar. And while jaguar's tended to run two to three hundred, sometimes four hundred, in the wild, it wasn't rare to see one his size.

Who says I couldn't still be surprised?

As we came up on the quiet circus, I saw two guards go down. Diets and Kale were in position. And the powers that be were on our side because one of the first cages held a black jaguar that looked exactly like my mate. Well, would have looked like him if the poor thing wasn't seriously underfed and bloodied from gashes that could have only come from a whip.

The captive jaguar gave a quiet whimper when he saw Luca, and my mate licked his muzzle through the bars. I didn't know what to do. Should we shift back and get the lock off? But we didn't have keys, and that wasn't the original plan.

Mitchell answered my question by showing up and ripping the door from the hinges. It wasn't quiet, but he must have understood the pain Luca was feeling from seeing his brother like that.

I saw a flash over Mitchell's shoulder and leapt over him. There were too many smells to discern every little thing, and that's the only way the human could have snuck up on us. I took him to the ground as he raised his gun, and I tore out his throat.

I've never been a person of violence or even very aggressive. But knowing that this was one of the Hunters responsible for the death of my parents, Luca's parents, and my mate and his brothers' captivity awoke the predator inside of me. I swiped his weapon away and tore out his heart just for good measure, so I didn't have to worry about him getting up and being a problem later like in some B horror flick.

“Can you walk?” Mitchell asked Luca’s brother after giving me a nod that he understood I saved his ass. The jaguar gave a shaky nod. I was willing to bet he couldn’t walk far, though. “Lead him toward the choppers. At least far enough away so he’s not at risk.”

Luca nodded and licked his brother’s face again before giving me a quick lick. I nuzzled his face for a second and took off after Mitchell. As much as I wanted to stay with my mate, we had limited time before all hell broke loose, and I needed to stay on task or our people could die.

I saw another Hunter raping some poor young guy who smelled of wolf and jumped on his back. I used one paw to reach around and shred his throat before he had a chance to react or scream. Just then I heard a whizzing sound fly past me. Glancing over my shoulder I saw that Kale or Diets had taken someone else out behind me that had been advancing on me.

Okay, so Kale was back to getting sex from us tonight after a save like that.

“I’ve got him,” one of Conley’s men said as he lifted the guy gently into his arms. He stared down at the injured man who was silently sobbing. “It’s okay, kiddo, you’re safe now.”

They headed out, and I moved to Mitchell’s side again, watching his back as he broke another cage door open. He quickly told them who we were and pointed to the direction of safety. With a quick nod, the two women nodded and shifted into pretty lionesses before taking off.

“Where’s my jaguar? I’m feeling horny.” Someone called out in a drunken voice. I turned to see a man staring at us with wide eyes. I darted in front of Mitchell, and let out a snarl that could have blown someone’s eardrums. It might have done that, but it also made the human piss himself. That worked for me.

Before I could get him, one of the vamps jumped him and sank his fangs into the guy’s neck. He drank for a few moments, and it was almost seductive. I’d never seen a vamp drink from anyone before

since they considered it a more private act. I changed my initial opinion when the vampire then tore the guy's throat out. If I'd been in human form, I'm sure my jaw would have dropped.

"I got hungry," the vamp said with an impish smirk and shrugged. Okaaay then...Good to know.

I focused back on the task at hand, jumping into the fight that had broken out now that the Hunters realized they were being attacked. I know that in battle there is a certain sense of honor and lines you don't cross. This wasn't one of those times, and this wasn't that kind of battle.

I raced around, clawing up any Hunter's back or legs I could get access to that was distracted or fighting. These were monsters, and one didn't play fair with monsters. And I had too much anger in me at what they'd done to care if I was fighting dirty.

By the time everything was said and done, it had taken a half an hour to kill all the Hunters but three and free everyone. We kept the ones alive that had been in what looked like their makeshift command center in the form of the nicest trailer there. I figured Mitchell picked them because the ones working night guard duty had to be the ones lower on the totem pole.

I thought it was a good theory, and I didn't have a better one, so it worked for me.

"Jackpot," Mitchell exclaimed as he came out of the trailer behind his men, who were holding our captives at bay. I tilted my head to the side in question since I wasn't really able to talk just then. He shook some papers at me and a few of the vamps. "I've got present locations on all the current circuses and several other Hunter locations."

I couldn't help what I did next. It was instinctive. I rubbed against him and purred with everything I had. I wanted to kiss his feet right then. We could find the rest of Luca's brothers with that information and help so many other paranormals.

"You got some explaining to do, babe," Kale said in a firm voice from behind us. His words didn't register at first. I just knew that my

mate was there. I turned so fast to him that I almost knocked Mitchell off his feet. I shifted back to human form as I leapt the several feet to my mate. It was a good thing Kale was paying attention because he caught me.

“Was that you who saved me and shot that guy?” I asked as I peppered his face and neck with kisses. “We found one of Luca’s brothers. I’m so glad you’re okay. I take off my earlier ban on you getting sex from me.” Then I caught up and realized he wasn’t doing anything but holding me so I didn’t fall. “What do I have to explain? Why are you upset? We won!”

“Why were you rubbing all up on Mitchell and purring?” he asked slowly as if trying to control his anger.

“You’re jealous!” I gasped, my eyes going wide. My calm, easygoing mate was fuming because I’d left my scent on another man.

“Give me reason not to be, Hamael,” Kale ground out between his teeth. Uh-oh, my full name was never a good sign coming from anyone.

“He found maps for the other circuses,” I said with a bright smile, deciding to ignore his anger. He looked confused for a moment, and I explained what Mitchell had told me. “I love only you and Luca, Kale. I don’t want anyone but you two, ever.”

“You what?” His eyes went wide, and his jaw dropped open. Oh fuck! Had I just admitted that out loud? Yeah, I stuck my foot in my mouth once again. I started to lower my head and get off of him, but he tightened his hold on me. I glanced up at him, not sure why he was doing that, and then his mouth mashed down on mine.

Since I wasn’t expecting that, I was frozen with shock for about two seconds before throwing myself into the kiss. I moaned and rubbed myself against him as if we were alone and not surrounded by vamps, my brother’s mate, rescued supernaturals, and captive bad guys.

Some things were just more important.

“Do you really love me, Ham?” he panted as we broke apart.

“With all my heart, Kale,” I whispered against his lips. “I wanted to tell you, but with everything going on, I didn’t want you to hear it from me for the first time and think maybe it was just because I was scared we wouldn’t come out of this alive.”

“I know you better than that,” Kale said seductively as he ran his hands over my naked ass. I couldn’t help but shiver at the attention. “And I love you, too, baby.”

“You do?” I smiled into his neck, thrilled beyond words that he felt the same way.

“Yes, Ham. I think I’ve loved you since the moment I stepped off that elevator in the hospital and you took my breath away.”

“Do you love Luca, too?” I asked hesitantly. I didn’t want to ruin our moment, but it was never just us now that we found our other mate.

“I do, but I’ve not told him yet,” Kale said with a nod.

“Me either.”

“Then let’s go meet his brother, help anyway we can, and we’ll tell him and show him tonight.”

“You come up with the best plans, my mate.” I sighed and didn’t even bother moving off of him as he carried me like a monkey wrapped around the front of him. I was tired now that the adrenaline rush was over, but I’m sure Kale was as well. But just like the man he was, the man I loved so dearly, he never said a word and treated me like I meant everything to him.

## Chapter 8

Luca's brother Fenton wasn't in as bad of shape as we originally thought, which relieved Luca in ways that couldn't be put into words. He was patched up along with the other survivors and loaded onto the chopper for Conley's estate until after we handled the circus in Las Vegas.

Mitchell had let Curtis and Conley know of our success and what he'd found on the other locations. Conley was working with both Councils to get what was needed in the hopes of one large simultaneous attack in the days to come. He also talked with some humans he was close to that knew about our world regarding this "church."

As it turned out, the church not only hated all paranormals but just about every human minority on the planet. I would never understand how supposed people of god could teach such hate. I wasn't well versed in the Bible, but I remembered it saying quite often that all of god's creatures were special and life was sacred. How had they missed that part?

Did they think that only referred to the people person X thought counted? It was disturbing to say the least, and I really hoped that it was a tiny, tiny part of the human population that subscribed to this crap.

We ended up staying the night in Portland because there was some big-time convention going on in Vegas and we couldn't get our flight plan scheduled until three in the morning. It was better just to stay the night, rest, and start fresh tomorrow. If we landed then, we wouldn't have enough time to coordinate our next strike until daylight. We

needed the cover of night to keep casualties low and not attract the human authorities.

I sat on the couch in Mitchell's suite with Luca snuggled up against me while Kale was on his other side. He was being torn in so many directions that it hurt just to watch. I mean, how many different emotions can one person handle in their body at the same time?

He was excited his brother was rescued, alive, and would have a full recovery. Then he was worried about his other brothers. He grieved over the loss of his parents, was thrilled we'd taken down the circus without any casualties to our people or the rescued paranormals, and on edge about the circus we were taking out tomorrow.

How he wasn't ready for the padded room amazed me.

"Since tomorrow is a much larger target to take down, the break tonight actually gives Curtis and the rest of the Cowells time to get there as well," Mitchell explained as we all listened and refueled. I had to admit, I was still getting used to vampires being around me, drinking blood as if it was no big deal. I knew they had to, but seeing it was just weird for me. One sat there and drank it on ice with a bendy straw like I would a pop.

I'm not sure that was a sight I'd ever forget. I was glad though that Curtis had thought ahead and loaded coolers of blood in the choppers in case we weren't able to go right to Vegas.

"Wait, all my brothers are coming?" I asked, my eyes going wide with shock when I realized what he'd said.

"Yes," Mitchell answered and looked confused as his brows drew together. "I would have thought you'd welcome the backup, and how you guys can communicate is a great advantage."

"I get that," I gasped, nodding like a bobblehead doll as I tried not to burst out laughing. It didn't work. I laughed so hard I thought I was going to pee myself and actually fell off the sofa.

"Is he having a psychotic break or something?" Mitchell asked as Luca and Kale knelt down by me.



“No, I’m okay,” I squeaked out and then started all over again.

“You’re scaring us, Ham,” Luca said in a small voice. That got me to calm down. He had enough on his plate right then. I could pull it together and let them know what I found so funny to keep him from worrying about something else.

“Cam can’t go into a fight even remotely like the one today,” I finally replied as I shook my head. We moved back onto the couch. This time they sat on either side of me as if that would keep me from going insane. “That’s why I was laughing.”

“Because he’s blind like Shem?” Diets asked, his face not looking happy that I thought their blindness in human form a handicap.

“Um, no, not because of that,” I answered with a wide smile. I was trying so damn hard not to laugh anymore. “Cam doesn’t do so well with blood.”

“Doesn’t do so well?” Mitchell raised an eyebrow, telling me without words that he was ready for me to elaborate.

“Yeah, not so well.” I snickered. “He faints at the smell of it. He sees it, or it gets on him, and he vomits like the Exorcist. But yeah, he smells it even in cheetah form and he drops like a rock.”

“That explains a lot,” Mitchell said as he shook his head. “I thought he really just didn’t like any of us or vampires. Every time any of us sit down by him at meals he can’t get out of there and away from us fast enough.”

“It’s not you guys. He’s just mortified that he’s a frigging cheetah shifter, a predator, and can’t handle blood. Plus, he has enough issues with being blind, so he’s really hard on himself. He thinks he’s a total defect and an embarrassment to us all.”

“Oh, poor Cam,” Luca replied with a pout. My mate looked like he wanted to run all the way back home just to give Cam a hug. “You just don’t tease him about it, do you?”

“We did when we were kids just because we knew he wasn’t doing it on purpose. But when we got a little older we realized he was truly distraught over it, and we’ve never said a word since. And it’s

not like major gore that does this to him where it's understandable for most people to faint. I'm talking like paper cut and he passes out when blood forms."

"Is there something wrong with him that he has that kind of extreme reaction?" one of Mitchell's guys asked after he closed his jaw from shock.

"Of course not," I snapped. Luca and Kale both rubbed my back with their hands to help keep me calm. I took a deep breath and tried to remember it was a valid question and not an attack on my brother. "My parents had him checked out a bunch of times by different supernatural doctors. They couldn't find a reason. There were lots of theories about his sense of smell being off and even inner ear issues. But nothing concrete or definite was established."

"Well, that just blows," the guy said and shook his head. "And he's living at a compound full of vampires."

"Curtis assured us it wasn't like in the movies where everyone's drinking from each other constantly in the hallways and what not." I shrugged. What other options had we had after our parents died? "He's fine most of the time, except when you guys bring blood to the table, he runs."

"We'll pass the word around to keep blood out of the main dining room," Mitchell said firmly with a determined nod.

"Don't," I gasped as my eyes went wide. "For one, it will humiliate him that all the vamps were adjusting because of his problem. Secondly, it would make him look weak to everyone there, and we don't know if we've got a traitor on our hands. We asked Cam if he could handle it before moving to Curtis's place, and he promised he'd tell us if it became too much. Cam never lies. He would let us know if he couldn't handle it."

"But there's gotta be a way to fix it, right?" the vamp, whose name I finally caught, Hayden, asked in almost a panic. I was struck speechless by the desperation in his voice for a moment, but he just kept rattling on. "Couldn't that affect his ability to find his mate? That

could explain everything I guess, but I have to figure out a way to get around that.”

My jaw hung open as he walked out of the room like suddenly none of us were there. I glanced around and saw that I wasn’t the only one with that look on their face.

“What the fuck, dude?” I asked Mitchell after a few minutes of silence once I shook out of my stupor.

“He’s got a major crush on your brother,” he answered with a shrug. “He’s been trying to chat up Cam since you guys arrived, but Cam looks at Hayden and flees. It’s been bugging Hayden because he thought it was something about him or something that he did. At least now he knows it’s the blood thing.”

“Still, that was a pretty strong reaction for a crush,” I said slowly and exchanged a look with Luca and Kale. Yeah, they were thinking the same thing I was. Hayden thought Cam was his mate, and either he was and my brother couldn’t smell him right because of whatever was wrong with him, or he really wasn’t and Hayden was just fixated on Cam enough to convince himself they were mates.

Either option didn’t leave me feeling warm and fuzzy. I definitely thought this was something I should discuss with Cass before maybe talking to Cam.

“It is what it is,” Mitchell said noncommittally and went back to studying his maps for tomorrow. I guess that was the same thing as our walking orders.

Everyone headed to their rooms then and called it a night. As much as I wanted nothing more than to crawl into bed with my mates and get some TLC from them...I smelled. Really, really badly.

We took turns in the shower as if knowing that sharing would lead to other things none of us had the energy for. I was first, and I didn’t even finish drying off before collapsing on the bed and passing out.

\* \* \* \*

The next morning we ate, hopped on the flight, and were off to Vegas. Curtis had been good to his word and rented the top floor of the Bellagio. Hell, I didn't even want to think of how much that one cost or how he was able to pull it off at such short notice.

We met up with the rest of our party and got situated before having some lunch and minor sight-seeing. There was no way we were going to be able to patiently wait in our rooms with tonight's adventure on our minds or being in a place like Las Vegas for the first time. But we kept it to a dull roar on excitement levels to keep our energy.

I know everyone says the fountains at the Bellagio are pretty, but that just didn't cover it. I couldn't get over the time and energy put into designing that, not to mention the genius to have that kind of vision. I wanted to chill there all day with one of the huge fruity, frozen drinks I saw people walking with down the strip.

"Is this where we peel away one by one and walk in different directions?" Sari asked with a snicker. "Of course we're the Cowell ten not *Ocean's Eleven*."

"Oh man," Cass said and several of us groaned. "You so didn't just go there, you dork."

"Come on! I couldn't be the only one who was thinking that?"

"You want me to describe it to you, Cam?" Hayden asked softly. My older brother went stiff and moved closer to Cass. How did he not know that a vamp was standing right next to him instead of one of us?

"No thank you," he answered and pushed Cass in front of him so that he was now next to Hayden. I caught Luca's gaze and realized he knew what I was thinking. There was something my brother wasn't telling us. Unfortunately, right now was not the time to find out what that was. But I'd get to the bottom of it eventually.

We wandered around some more until dinner time and then headed back. Everyone was quiet and thoughtful while we ate, some of it nerves about tonight. When we were done we went outside to wait for the local Vegas coven to pick us up. Conley had arranged for

them to get us, loan us some vehicles and personnel so we didn't draw attention at the hotel by walking out armed.

People tended to frown on that, especially in tourist areas. Humans were funny like that. Yeah, because I blamed them on worrying when they saw big guys packing major heat.

The vamps that came with us were really nice. One lady in particular couldn't stop apologizing that they never knew that the Hunters and captive supernaturals and shifters were right there under their noses all along. I understood how it could happen. I didn't like that it did, but I wasn't thrilled about a lot of things in the world and couldn't change them all.

The Vegas coven had enough of their own problems keeping their secret safe and dealing with the normal trials and hardships of being something other than human. Like dealing with humans who could be incredibly nosey at times, keeping the blood supply flowing to their coven, and running the business that brought their income.

So I was pretty sure none of us held them liable for not knowing there was a circus there that wasn't legit. Hell, I'd been there one day and there was so much to see that I couldn't believe that anyone could keep it all straight ever. There was the strip, then the strip off the strip, then malls, and on, and on, and on. And that wasn't even all the casinos, resorts, and clubs in the area.

As we approached the stopping point for the cars where we'd shift and continue on foot, the air was thick with apprehension and some excitement. I took Luca's hand in mine and squeezed it tight for support.

Just like last night, we'd dropped Kale and Diets off so they could get into position, and at least the idiots weren't jumping out of helicopters this time. Luca and I had kissed our man good-bye while Shem and Curtis did the same with Diets, and they vanished into the darkness.

"I don't know if I'm excited to get home and play out my vast hot military fantasies with my commando mate or if I'm going to vomit

from fear at him being out there alone with Kale,” Shem said as he shook his head. He reached for my hand, and I took it. My baby brother gave me an apologetic grimace as he realized how what he said sounded.

“I know what you mean,” I replied gently and gave his hand a squeeze. “I feel the same way, and it’s not a reflection on Diets. It’s just that you wish you were there to back them up or that they were safe at home.”

“Exactly.” He gave me a nod, and we moved apart to get undressed. I was just kicking off my shoes when Cass spoke up.

“Holy shit! I didn’t know jaguars were so big.” I glanced over my shoulder to see all my brothers staring in awe at my mate. Yeah, he was as good-looking as an animal as he was a man. He was sleek, solid, and screamed that he was powerful and not to be fucked with.

Mitchell cleared his throat and got us back on task. Minutes later we were shifted and ready to go. Since we were so fast and could stay lower to the ground blending in, we’d all agreed that each of us would back up a vampire going in so no one was caught by surprise.

Luca whimpered, and I knew one of his other brothers was here. This time I was ready and darted in front of him to keep him in position. He gave me a nod and licked my face that he understood.

We headed out then in formation, with Mitchell taking the lead and Cass at his back. We all had animal instincts and were able fighters, but I had to admit, without judging, my eldest brother was the fiercest and sometimes meanest of all of us. I knew as the man of the family now that our dad was gone, he took the role seriously and wasn’t just out for justice tonight.

He wanted vengeance badly. We all did, but most of us wanted them to never be able to hurt anyone else or destroy any other families like they did ours. Cass wanted them to suffer. If that helped him deal with what happened to us, then who were we to judge or tell him it was wrong? It wasn’t like he was blaming every human and randomly

taking people out. These *were* the people responsible for the death of our parents.

When we reached the outskirts of the circus, several guards were already dead from our sharpshooters. And while I wanted to be grateful that there were less for us to deal with, it worried me why they took them out so early. Last night they waited until we were right there. How many Hunters did they see that they were picking them off already?

I got my answer, and it wasn't good. There were dozens upon dozens, and they were packing major heat. They knew we were coming. They didn't seem to have known enough in advance to pack up and leave, but they definitely were able to call in reinforcements.

"Split up," Mitchell roared as they opened fire, each having a machine gun. Yeah, this was so not good.

*"I'm running up the middle to throw them off,"* Shem said in our litter's minds.

*"No!"* I screamed as he took off. Damnit! He was the fastest of us, no doubt about it, but there were dozens of men shooting fucking automatic weapons at us and he was running *toward* them.

"Shem!" Curtis shouted, and several Hunters focused their fire on him. It actually helped Shem as he barreled through the men. They didn't seem to know where to direct their attention. These were no soldiers—they were goons with guns. Part of them focused on the rest of us cats, some on Curtis, some on Shem, some trying to take out our snipers, and the rest on the vamps who spread out and were approaching them from all sides.

My litter raced after Shem since we could see what he did with our hive mind. The Hunters who turned their focus on him were the ones we took out. We worked our way through them, clawing up and biting them to disable their ability to fire a weapon. They weren't a threat after that, but there were too many to finish each one off on the first strike.

Just as we finished our first pass up the middle, I caught a glance of Cam, Luca, and a couple of the local vamps working on the closest cages. Cam would never have made it through this gore, and really I was shocked he was even handling being on the outskirts of it.

Shem took off to bisect their cluster from the other direction, and away we went. The five of us disabled and really disfigured at least twenty Hunters in those two passes. I figured those were great numbers, especially since none of us got shot in the process. I wasn't sure how that happened, but I choose to believe it was our parents watching over us from heaven.

*"You better believe it,"* Hael said as we finished our second sweep. I realized they all saw what I was thinking. *"I can feel them almost as much as I can you guys right now."*

*"Do we believe in ghosts or spirits?"* Shem asked, as we rested for a quick moment.

*"Hell if I know, but I won't turn away any help in this madness,"* I answered and then spun on him. *"You ever pull a stunt like that again and endanger us all, I will beat your ass into next month, mates or no mates to protect you."*

*"It worked, didn't it?"* he replied with a snicker.

*"You should have told us the plan instead of just racing off. You knew we would follow, and you risked our lives with the idea in a major way without ever clearing it with us."*

*"You're right, I'm sorry,"* he said quietly. *"I swear I wasn't thinking of it that way. I was just thinking of football and how if we divided, we'd conquer."*

*"I'm not saying it was a bad plan, Shem. Just that you should have cleared it with all of us first."*

*"It won't happen again."*

*"Okay, then let's get back in there. Everyone ready?"* I got several loud snarls and knew they wanted to get back in the mix just as much as I did. We'd done a lot of damage in a short time, more so



than the vamps even did, and there were as many of them as us and they were packing.

We made three more passes, taking the time to finish people off now that their numbers had dwindled. Damn if my rash little brother didn't figure out the way to save all of our asses with the moves he pulled. It took an hour of fighting until the dust cleared and they were all dead. Some of them hadn't come right out and had been hiding, so there were a few ambushes and surprise guests to the party.

But when it was all said and done, we had three vamps badly hurt that would recover, a few of us with a graze from a bullet, and all the captives rescued and alive. It was a good night.

The vamps were helping to free the shifters and supernaturals while my brothers were dragging bodies into one pile to be burned. I went in search of my mate. I found him lying next to a jaguar that was in really bad shape whimpering and licking Luca's face. I shifted back and screamed for Curtis and Mitchell. They came racing over with Kale hot on their heels.

"Drink from me, little one," Mitchell said gently and tore into his wrist with his fangs. Both jaguars looked at him as if he lost his ever-loving mind.

"It won't turn you into vampires," I said after having figured out why they were against the idea. "Shem's done it, and he's harder to kill. He's also immortal now, but he's not a vamp, okay? You need to drink it so you can heal."

"Do it," Luca said gruffly, his voice tight with emotion. I was so focused on his brother I'd not seen him shift back. Kale and I wrapped our arms around him as we watched his brother lap at Mitchell's wrist. After a few minutes he gave a body shudder and started to change back to human form. He was a mess of wounds and blood from older and newer beatings. And one arm was hanging down funny, so I guessed that it was dislocated.

I wasn't sure about all cat shifters since we all tended to keep to ourselves, but most shifted back when injured. The shift helped kick-

start the healing, and then it was easier to deal with the pain and wounds in human form. Sometimes, though, a shifter was hurt so badly that they couldn't shift because it took too much energy. That's when it was time to worry that they were gravely injured.

"Thank heaven," Luca gasped when his brother was a man again. Kale gave me a confused look.

"We shift when we'll be able to heal," I said quietly to explain. "It's a good sign that he'll recover fully."

"Good. Thank you, Mitchell."

"You're welcome," he said as he licked his wound closed and sat back on his butt. "Your mate and his litter saved our asses when this was clearly an ambush. Donating a little blood is nothing compared to that."

"You would have done it even if we hadn't, you big softie," I replied with a smile and gave his arm a playful punch.

"Yes, I would have, but I'm just glad to have the opportunity to show you how grateful I am for what you did."

"Honestly, it was Shem's rash idea." I snickered and rolled my eyes. "We just followed because we couldn't not back him up when he was literally running into the fire."

"And remind me to kick all of your asses after a nap," Kale said firmly but with no real heat in his voice. "You could have died, Ham."

"We all could have, Kale," I replied, holding up a hand to cut him off when he went to argue. "Yes, it was stupid and unorganized, and I already laid into Shem. But would I be the man you love if I'd let my baby brother go in there alone?"

"No," he sighed, the fight leaving him.

"I feel like I could conquer the world right now," Luca's brother said and moaned as he sat up. "That stuff is like liquid adrenaline."

"Take it easy, Fenton." Luca chuckled and turned to Mitchell. "Will this change him in any way?"

“He’ll be stronger, faster, and harder to kill, but otherwise he’s still him. We don’t publicize what our blood can do for other supernaturals because you know we could become targets.”

“Yeah you would,” I said with a nod. Five minutes ago Fenton looked like he was on his death bed, and now he seemed better than I felt. It was no wonder Shem was not only happier now that he had mated but also full of so much energy some days he was bouncing off the walls.

I learned something new every damn day.

## Chapter 9

We all got back to the hotel high on victory and excitement. Of course, we all showered first thing, but then I knew some of my brothers were going to check out the sights and experience Vegas. We were staying a few days, and I knew tomorrow night I'd join them with my mates, but tonight we needed each other.

I was the last to get the bathroom this time, and when I walked back out into the bedroom, I actually lost control of my legs. The sight in front of me was just too damn erotic, and I tripped over my own feet as the towel slipped from my hands.

"I wanna be kitty in the middle." Luca moaned as he thrashed around the bed. "I want you both inside me at once."

"Oh hell," Kale practically whimpered, and I couldn't agree more. I was about to blow when I walked in to see Kale with four fingers buried in our mate's ass, but the visual of both of us filling him up had forced me to grab the base of my cock and squeeze hard so I didn't come.

"Please! I need you both," Luca cried out as he rocked his hips faster onto Kale's fingers.

"I'm not going to say no. Are you?" Kale asked as he glanced at me.

"Do I look stupid?" I was on the bed next to Luca running my fingers around where Kale's hand joined his body. "Are you sure, my love?"

"M-My l-love?" he sputtered as if trying push past the pleasure he was feeling so he could register my words.

“Yes, my love, my mate, the man I’m in love with,” I whispered, licking the shell of his ear as I pushed a finger inside of him along with Kale’s.

“I love you, too,” Luca screamed and shot his salty seed all over his stomach. I glanced over at Kale. Yeah, we needed in him now because I thought Kale was going to keel over soon if he didn’t get his release. His dick was leaking so much it was running back down his stomach from where his cock touched him.

“Climb on Ham,” Kale said hoarsely, his voice deep with lust when Luca came down from his climax.

“I love you, Kale,” Luca panted as he sat up after we pulled our fingers from him. His cheeks were flushed and his eyes were glazed over from the pleasure, and he had never looked sexier. I loved the way happy looked on my men but completely debauched was just too hot.

“I love you, too, Luca,” Kale whispered and brushed his lips over our mate’s. It was sweet, and if we didn’t all love each other, I would have felt horrible intruding on such a tender moment. But, as it was, I was part of it.

“Are you sure about this, babe?” I asked as I lay on my back, and he rolled over so he was straddling my hips.

“I’ve been dreaming of it since we first mentioned it,” he answered with a purr. He was stretched and ready to go. I held the base of my cock for him, and he lowered himself down. Well, it was more like he just stopped holding himself up and fell onto my dick fast and hard.

“Fuck!” I hollered out as my eyes almost rolled back into my head.

“That is the idea.” Luca giggled as he leaned forward.

“Yeah it is,” Kale moaned as Luca smashed his mouth down to mine. I could tell he was trying to move his hips as we kissed passionately, but Kale was holding him still. “Sweet hell, honey! Your ass is wanting this as much as you do.”

Luca and I both moaned as he slid two fingers inside Luca along my cock. It felt like pure bliss from my side, and I could only imagine the fun Luca was having from it.

“Do it! I’m going to come again already,” Luca cried out against my lips. I had noticed that his dick had never gone soft and was leaking on my stomach. I loved it. Nothing got me as hot as my turned-on mates. Kale quickly slipped in a third finger just to check, and I had to start thinking about anything other than the men in bed with me.

Baseball. Baseball would work...Except I was picturing nine hot men sitting on the bench in the dugout touching each other. Damnit! I tried thinking of going to the doctor. Yeah, all that got me was an image of my mates role-playing with me naked under lab coats. Well, didn’t I just have a very dirty, imaginative mind?

But on the bright side, I knew something I wanted to try with them another night.

Kale pulled his fingers out and moved into position. “If it’s too much, tell us, okay? We can stop at any time.”

“I know,” Luca said with a soft smile as he glanced over his shoulder. I knew that, too. Kale would never push anything that made us uncomfortable, no matter how much he wanted it.

Kale leaned over and kissed his shoulder as I moved up and did the same on the other one. Then Luca reached back and pulled the cheeks of his ass apart wider to give Kale more room. I ran my hands gently down his sides because, like all cat shifters, he loved to be petted, and I knew it would help him relax.

Luca gasped when Kale pushed the first inch of his cock inside of our mate alongside mine. Shit! I was going to come before he got all the way in. It made Luca almost unbearably tight around me and filled me with sharp emotions because of what we were experiencing together.

“More,” Luca whimpered as his tongue darted out, and he licked my collarbone. I glanced over his shoulder at Kale and saw the

restraint evident on his face. It was taking him every ounce of control not to just plunge right in. He did as Luca wanted and slid in over halfway.

“Oh god, oh shit, oh fuck that’s good.” I moaned and fought to stay still instead of moving my hips.

“You should feel it from my end.” Luca and Kale groaned at the same time.

“Next time,” I gasped as Kale pushed in further. We were totally going to be doing this again with how amazing it felt. As if one person, we all cried out together when Kale finally bottomed out. We lay there, tangled together, as close as three people could get, panting and trying to keep our bodies under control.

“Please move,” Luca begged after several moments. “I’m ready, it feels awesome. Now fuck me already.”

“We love you, too.” I chuckled in his ear and then moaned like a slut with no inhibitions when Kale started moving. I gave him a few thrusts to move alone and then joined in at the same time as him.

“Oh. My. God,” Luca screamed as his short nails dug into my biceps where he’d moved his hands to when Kale was fully inside of him, too.

“Good or bad ‘oh my god’?” Kale asked as he froze.

“Good, I swear it’s good. Please don’t stop again,” Luca cried out in pleasure. Kale listened, and we found our rhythm again. We didn’t go as fast or hard as we normally did, but with these extreme sensations, there was no need to in order to feel like you were flying to the moon.

“Gonna come,” Kale grunted as he moved faster. I couldn’t agree more. I reached in between Luca and me and ran my thumb over the head of his cock. That’s all it took. I didn’t know he was that close, but he had a hell of an orgasm.

He screamed our names until I wondered if hotel security would show up at our door. At the minimum, whoever was in the rooms next

to ours knew exactly what we were doing. Well, not exactly, but they would have a general concept.

His hole clamped down on us, and Kale's cock started to pulse as he cried out his orgasm. It was too much. I was thrown over the edge and into my climax. I swear it was so intense I thought I would black out from it. We rode the waves of pleasure together, never letting go as our bodies pulsed in time as if one.

When it was over and I could finally focus again, I had two mates collapsed like wet, heavy noodles on top of me. "Guys?"

"Right, sorry," Kale moaned as he moved and pulled out of Luca.

"I can't move on my own," he mumbled into my neck. "My body's no longer solid."

"That good, huh?" I chuckled and kissed his cheek awkwardly because I was feeling very similar. "I'm kitty in the middle next then."

"That, or I have this fantasy where you're both professors and I'm the naughty student," Kale admitted as he collapsed next to us. "I didn't bring a ruler for spanking, though."

"Oh fuck, I want to play that game." Luca moaned and tried to move. It didn't work. "After a nap, though."

"Yeah, nap first and maybe some food." I chuckled.

"Thank god for room service." Kale snickered and snuggled up against us before pulling the sheet over us. "You guys going to sleep that way?"

"I'll wake up when he gets hard inside of me." Luca giggled, and I moaned.

"Love you both," Kale whispered and kissed each of us. "I have you guys, we love each other, and nothing else matters."

"Amen to that," Luca said with a yawn.

"And the rest we'll figure out as we go," I replied to my sleeping mates seconds later. I had no doubt that with the way I felt about them and they for me we'd work through anything that came up. I drifted



off with a smile on my face, so much love in my heart, and just a little excitement to be kitty in the middle sometime soon.

**THE END**

**WWW.JOYEEFLYNN.COM**

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Joyee Flynn grew up in Chicago living in the same house all her life until she left for college. Though she has a great life, she loves to get lost in fantasy that only books could bring. Her wide interest in reading was reflected in her writings. Currently Joyee lives with her dog, Marius, named after a vampire from Ann Rice's Interview with the Vampire series. She dreams of one day living out in Montana, enough land to have a few horses, and find a couple of cowboys of her own.

A lover of men, Joyee's all about them in any form in her books. Vampire, werewolf, military, doesn't matter at all as long as they are hot, hard, and sex fiends!

## *Also by Joyee Flynn*

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Ménage Amour ManLove: North American Dragon 2: *Dragon Ours*

Ménage Amour ManLove: North American Dragon 3: *Their Dragon*

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