

# **Wolf Mates: What's New Pussycat?**

## **Dakota Cassidy**

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For my good friend Nancy, who inspires me when I just don't think I can anymore.  
My cohort in a good chuckle because really, it's fine, just fine...  
With admiration and love always,  
Dakota :-)

## Chapter One

"Meow."

"Do you see?" Derrick Adams hollered as he held up the cat carrier, thrusting it in his brother Max's face. A black paw, claws unleashed, reached out to swipe at Max's face. Max reached his finger into the carrier's front. "Hey, kitty..." he cooed, making an irritating clicking noise with his tongue.

The paw reached out again, unsheathing its claws once more, and the cat carrier hissed. Max jumped back as the cage rocked in Derrick's hands.

*Tell me, foolish one, what makes humans believe that we kitties enjoy a finger shoved in our faces? Bring it here, boy-toy. Lemme show you what pretty teeth I have...*

Mortals were so unbelievably stupid, especially *male* mortals. Even if they were good looking, Martine Brooks thought. She felt the hair on her back lift in irritation as the silly human tried again to soothe her with a finger that might result in a bloody stump if he didn't back off.

He stuck his handsome face in the opening of the cage and purred at her. Martine yawned.

*If only you knew how desperately stupid you look. Max, is it?*

However, in order to keep from blowing her cover, Martine had to play the game. She'd yet to figure out what she was undercover for, but *whatever*. She only knew she shouldn't shift and she sensed that, even if she didn't know the reasons why. It did, however, mean *something* was preventing her. Be it intuition or premonition, she just knew her best bet was to remain in her cat form. At least for now until she could figure out what in all of creation she was doing here. Martine prepared for a good howl, thus indicating that the pretty boys should go away and leave her the hell alone while she waited to be set free and get some wide open space to shift in.

This time she got closer to the cage opening and howled for all she was worth into Max's face. As pitifully as her vocal cords would allow, just like she'd seen other cats do on Animal Planet.

"Maybe you should take her to your place and let her out of the cage, Derrick?" the pretty dark-haired girl said as she winced.

Well, duh. Very astute. A good stretch was just what she needed. She'd suffered as much indignity as one girl could handle in a lifetime.

The man named Derrick shook her cage. "Be quiet, would you! God," he complained, "she could wake the dead. So, Max, what do you intend to do about this?"

Max shook his head and slapped Derrick on the back. "Nothin' I can do, Derrick. Your prophecy is your prophecy. You know Eva's chicken soup."

*Yes, it was good for the soul, wasn't it?* What prophecy? Martine wondered.

Derrick held up the cage again. She really wished he'd stop rocking the damn thing. A hairball was bound to hurl from her throat at warp speed if he kept this up.

"This -- *this* -- is my prophecy?" Martine heard Derrick yell, disbelief lacing his tone. "How in all of the animal kingdom can *this* be my prophecy?"

Max shrugged his shoulders and the pretty dark-haired woman spoke again. "I didn't believe it either, Derrick, but who can say when you'll find love -- or with whom?"

*Love?* Um, no, no.

What was this, Mutual of Omaha? No love. Martine needed to get the hell out of this damn cage and shift so she could get the frig away from these people and their wing-nut prophecies. She believed in spells and stuff. No prophecies.

"Well, Derrick," Max said. "Guess what? She's all yours. Eva hasn't been wrong so far. Now go away. I have pups to make." The dark-haired woman giggled, rather flirty and stupid if you asked Martine.

But *NO ONE* was asking the cat.

"My lifemate is not a goddamn *cat!*"

*Whoa... stop right there, hot stuff. Lifemate?* Did these people dig into the catnip or what? She didn't have a lifemate. Martine belonged to a warlock and had for many years now, cursed to spend the rest of her life at his beck and call. Oh, Escobar was just gonna love this. She was Escobar's familiar and he wasn't going to be too pleased about this little turn of events.

"Wolves do not mate with *cats!*" Derrick roared and shook the cage again for emphasis. Martine's stomach lurched.

*Wolves?* Like woof-woof? Full moons and carnivores?

That was it. Martine couldn't stop the roll of her stomach. She heaved a long moment and then coughed, opening her mouth wide.

"And now, it's gonna puke," Derrick said sarcastically.

Ick. Martine gagged and finally relieved her throat of the ball lodged in it since this lunatic had stuffed her into this cage.

*How's that for ya?* A round hairball lay at her feet.

Whew, that was better.

Unattractive, but better.

\* \* \*

Hookay, this was nothing like her kitty condo.

Martine scanned the rustic looking cabin Derrick brought her to. He came back down the short hallway carrying a towel.

*HAH!* No way in the universe was that as comfy as her pillow. She had a special one designed just for her. It was frilly and lacy and downright girlie, stuffed with feathers. No K-Mart blue light special was going to be her bed.

And that was that.

Derrick came toward the cage and hesitantly touched the latch. "Listen up, cat. If you scratch me, I'll make Chinese food out of you, hear me?"

*Oh, the indignity of it all. Sweet and sour Martine...*

Martine sighed and eyed the burgundy terry cloth towel as Derrick set it down by the fireplace. At least she'd be warm until she could get the frig away from this loon.

"Look, see this?" Derrick held up the towel as if she were a simpleton. "This is your nice bed. Go lay on it until I can figure out what the hell I'm supposed to do with you."

*Do?* There was absolutely nothing to *do* with her and she wasn't sleeping on of all things a *towel*.

No can do.

How had this happened? Where was Escobar? Martine couldn't remember a damn thing since she'd gone to take a nap yesterday afternoon. Next thing she knew she was peeking out of the wrong side of a cage and being dragged around like so much luggage. Intuitively, she knew she should remain quiet and so she had.

Until now.

Now she was fed up.

Derrick unlatched the cage and moved to the side quickly as though she'd rush him like a saber-toothed tiger. She was a house cat in her shifted form for heaven's sake. A domestic, if you will.

*Sissy...*

Martine decided to play nice as she gracefully hopped from the cage and stretched from neck to toe. Ahhhh, that was good. She approached Derrick swiftly, wrapping her tail around his calves as she rubbed up against him.

Martine experienced a small ripple of something she couldn't quite place. Hmm, he felt oddly *good*. She arched her back and slid up against his legs again.

Oh... Well, now what the heck was this about? No one sent a shiver of nuthin' up her spine, let alone some werewolf, dammit! Twirling her black tail around his calf, Martine purred, hoping he'd stroke her back. Why she wasn't sure, but it never hurt to be friendly.

Derrick clomped his big, boot clad feet over to the small kitchen and began digging around in his cabinets instead. He produced a can of something and held it up to show her as she sat on the braided carpet by the fireplace.

"This is for you. I don't have much so don't get too excited."

What, no caviar? Fine, just fine...

As the electric can opener whirred Martine perused her surroundings. Derrick could certainly learn a thing or two about home décor. This place was about as stark as it got. Very manly, very boring. Thank God he didn't have deer heads mounted on the wall... but then if he was a wolf, he wouldn't hang one on his wall would he? He'd flambé it or something.

Martine's experience with other shapeshifters was limited to say the least. Escobar -- her warlock -- discouraged her from them. In fact, he discouraged her from much of anything but *him*. Escobar had taken her in after her parents' death -- cursed and all, but he frowned upon her socializing, especially with others of her kind. In order to stay with Escobar she had to remain in his circle of power where she was safe. So she didn't question it, but this -- this had to be some huge mistake.

Martine scratched her ear and forgot the niggling feeling that something was desperately wrong with this picture. Escobar would come to get her and all would be well.

Derrick strode over to her place beside the fire and dropped a can in front of her. "Here, I figured I'd better feed you."

*How kind...* Martine sniffed the can and turned her nose up.

Derrick bent down and looked her in the eye. "What's the matter? It's got bacon..."

He said it defensively as if it were caviar. Beans? Baked beans? She sniffed again... with *bacon*. That made the world undoubtedly all right again.

Martine swiped at his handsome face playfully, because well, he *was* handsome. Thick shoulder length hair the color of a black hole grazed his chin as he leaned forward to eye her dissatisfaction.

Whew! Nice lips, baby. Firm and not too full as to be botoxy. He had stubble, stubble she wanted to run her tongue over.

Um, hmmm.



This *couldn't* be something she should be thinking. She certainly hadn't before. Men came and went -- she had her playtime and then she made them disappear.

Literally.

*Poof.* Off to the land of the eternally quiet. No fuss, no muss -- absolutely no carpools and mortgages for this kitty cat -- *ever*.

"So what do you need to keep you quiet while I go hunt down Eva? A ball of yarn? Catnip?" Derrick asked as his green-blue eyes assessed her.

Martine turned, pointing her ass in his direction and swishing her tail. Yarn? *I should think not. Not unless you'd like to be tied up with it.* Now that held possibilities. Martine shivered.

"Okay, look, I'm going to go find Eva and her chicken soup. You stay here."

As if she had anywhere else to go. Martine stuck her nose up in the air and wandered off down the hallway.

"Hey!" Derrick called after her. "Don't even think about using the facilities until I've gotten you some cat litter. You hear me?"

*With the scoop away formula if you will, please.* Martine would have snorted if she could. Cat litter -- *indeed*.

## Chapter Two

Martine spent the afternoon wandering Derrick's home. As she hopped onto his bed, she lay down on the pillow where he must rest his head every night, because it smelled *tres fantastique*. Just like he did.

Crimeny, how utterly sentimental and stupid.

As she scratched her back on the obviously cheap cotton sheets, she pondered this situation. Okay, so far, she'd heard about lifemates and prophecies, werewolves and some broad named Eva.

She had an innate premonition that shifting was not a good idea and Escobar was nowhere to be found. She couldn't even get a vibe from him.

So, essentially the math told her she was in deep kitty litter.

What to do, what to do?

Martine decided to take a peek outside and see what was what. As she jumped to the windowsill she got her first glimpse of her surroundings.

Trees, many trees. Snow covered hilltops and not a frickin' thing else.

*A penthouse suite it ain't.*

A man off to the left had a large cage filled with rabbits. He was feeding them, pulling each one out and cuddling them in his big hands.

Was he a werewolf like Derrick and Max? He must be if he lived here and he certainly looked comfortable in his surroundings. What kind of wolf played with bunnies?

The nice wolfie needed some carnivore therapy.

Martine let her head rest against the window pane and tried to remember how she'd gotten here. Having never left Escobar, she was at a loss for what was next. Did she have to live here forever with the cranky knuckle dragger? Martine shivered.

Derrick was cute, but not cute enough to replace her kitty condo or her caviar. He was a *werewolf* for goodness sake. He couldn't keep her. It wasn't allowed. As far as Martine knew she could never leave her warlock and *that* was Escobar. She was cursed. If she didn't stay with Escobar bad things would happen. She didn't know what, but *bad* was the word Escobar always used when she asked.

Martine jumped down and meandered out to the kitchen again, eyeing the worn couch as she went.

Maybe she'd scratch it all to hell or something...

\* \* \*

Derrick stormed into the main house where his mother greeted him with excitement. She clapped her hands and hugged him hard. "I'm so happy for you, honey! When are we going to meet your lifemate?"

Derrick narrowed his eyes at his mother and removed her clinging arms from his neck, holding her at arm's length. "Well, I suppose if you have any mice I might be able to entice her to come play for awhile."

Coreen Adams frowned and her hand flew to her throat. "Um, what?"

"Yes, Mother. My lifemate is a cat."

Coreen began to chuckle. "Really? I hope she's not Siamese. They can be snippy, you know. Is she one of those calico cats? Oh, they're so pretty, Derrick, but then again if she's a Persian, well they have spectacular coats. I mean --"

"Mother!" Derrick roared. "I have a cat for a lifemate, for Christ's sake. This can't be right."

Coreen clucked. "You know Eva. She's always right. Look at Max! He got the woman of his dreams."

"Mother, JC's *human*. That's just a bit less like the antichrist to a werewolf. We are canine, Mother. Canine as in we don't dig the little kitties, ya know? We're supposed to chase them, not mate with them!"

Coreen shook her finger at Derrick. "You know, you have a cousin who had a parakeet as his lifemate --"

"Mom! Stop, please. I can't take any more of our kooky family, okay? Just tell me where Eva is and I'll get this straightened out." Derrick headed toward his grandmother's portion of the house.

"She's not here, honey. She's in Africa. On some sort of Peace Corps mission I think."

The fucking Peace Corps? How the hell was he supposed to find out what was going on if Grandma was saving the world one bowl of chicken soup at a time?

Derrick shook his head. This was insane. How did he end up the Beta of this pack of whack-jobs? What other wolf pack anywhere had lifemates that were anything other than wolves? No wonder they were ridiculed far and wide.

Coreen came up behind Derrick and gave him a squeeze. "I know we embarrass you. I'm sorry..."

*Yes, Derrick Adams, you are a first class asshole.* Derrick gripped his mother's arm with affection. "No, Mom, don't be sorry. It's me. I do love you, you know that, right?"

"Of course I do. Don't worry, this will all work out and before you know it, you'll fall in love with -- with -- er, the cat."

Derrick closed his eyes and took a deep breath. No fucking way was he going to hook up for life with a cat or anything for that matter. He liked single and an *occasional* mingle.

Coreen turned Derrick to face her. "Now, how about a can of tuna for your sweetie? I bet she's hungry."

Derrick groaned.

\* \* \*

Martine sat contentedly on the back of Derrick's couch when he arrived back home two hours later, carrying a brown paper bag.

Ahh, Neanderthal man had shopped. How quaint.

Martine continued to pump the back of the sofa with her claws -- a silent revolt against her current predicament.

Derrick began to unload cans by the dozen and stack them on the counter. Canned cat food? Martine narrowed her eyes. No canned food. None. Nada. A big fat no-no. No one was reducing her to eating processed gunk.

It was caviar or nothing and if he didn't produce it soon she'd hock up another hairball smack in the middle of his ugly, brown couch. If she could just shift she could go get her own caviar somewhere here in Clampetville. The really good kind and she couldn't remember the spell for it anyway. It was usually just *there*. In large quantities. But she didn't want to shift yet. Derrick was in for a big surprise if she did. It was better to toy with men -- they were simple creatures, after all.

Derrick came to stand in front of her with his hands on his slim, jean clad hips. "Look, I brought you some food and this." He reached over to the counter and bobbed a feather on a long pole in front of her. "See? This is what you claw to death. *Not* my furniture." Derrick shook the feather at her and ran it under her nose.

Martine backed away and cocked her head at him, letting her tail swat the air. A feather...

*As if...*

He grabbed another toy off the counter and placed in front of her paws. "It's a stuffed mouse," he stated. As though he'd given her the Hope Diamond and she was supposed to be like grateful or something. "Something to keep you busy while I figure this out."

Martine sniffed it, and then sniffed again. Oh, what was in *that*? She took another long whiff, nudging it with her nose.

It was simply *intoxicating*.

Martine picked it up with her teeth and dropped it down on the sofa, hurling herself on top of it. Scooping it back up with her mouth, she savored the rush of adrenaline it provided as she rolled around on the couch, thus falling to the floor in an ungraceful heap. Exceptionally unladylike.

But who gave a fuck? This was glorious! Almost better than champagne, Martine thought as she flew over the living room floor and skidded into the front door, smacking into it like it was home base and she'd just made the winning homerun.

Derrick chuckled. "Nothing like a little catnip to make everything seem better, huh?"

Martine heard the word catnip, but chose to ignore it in favor of the incredible adrenaline rush she was having. Grabbing at the mouse again, she set off running down the hallway and into the bedroom, where she planned to suck every last ounce of catnip out of her mouse.

Leaping for the bed, she must have misjudged her mark because she smacked into the foot of it and crashed to the floor.

As she lay stunned, Martine eyed the curtains that hung to the floor.

Now those would be very cool to climb...

\* \* \*

Martine was exhausted. She needed a twelve-step program for catnip. Jesus, what a hangover. She lay sprawled on the cool oak of the armoire in Derrick's room, too tired to do much else but remain immobile.

When the door opened and Derrick entered, he eyed her, coming to stand over her all big and hunky like. His head just looking over the top of the dresser to peer at her.

Wow, he was dreamy... all brash and rough looking. Martine rolled on her back and wiggled seductively, then just as quickly rolled over and sat on her haunches. She shook her head. Obviously she was still residually affected by the catnip -- because her behavior was just a smidge shy of slutty.

"So catnip is the way to your heart. I see you had a good time." Derrick noted the shredded curtains and his bed all askew.

Martine purred with satisfaction that he'd noted her rebellion. *Take that for stuffing me in a cage and being audacious enough to consider canned cat food worthy of me!*

For the first time since they'd arrived Derrick took a finger and ran it under her jaw, scratching it. A shiver coursed down her spine. "Are you a shapeshifter or what? This makes no sense. How can my lifemate be a cat that I can't even talk to?"

Martine leaned into Derrick's solid hand. *Ask me if I give a crap about talking right now, Derrick.* Right now, *using* the boy-toy was all Martine had in mind. Why couldn't she shift now -- of all the times to fucking utilize a good skill?

Derrick gave her one last scratch and left, heading toward the bathroom.

*Noooo. Come back... I have another itch.*

Martine heard the water running and hopped down off the dresser. Oomph. She stretched her legs and shook off the lethargy. No more catnip.

Peering around the corner of the door to the bathroom Martine had her first glimpse of a naked Derrick. Her wee kitty heart sped up.

*Oh-my-hell...* As Derrick prepared to get into the shower he stretched, reaching upward in a long sweep of naked arms and bare torso. His skin was lightly bronzed, glistening planes of lickable ridges and valleys.

Yeah, baby... Martine's eyes strayed to his narrow waist and well, his *not so narrow* nether parts.

Holy shapeshifter!

Oh, he was perfection! Like nothing she'd conjured up in a spell before. Long and muscled, but not overly so, tall and as sleek as one of her own kind. His chest was broad and firm, a perfect place to hide when one needed shelter and he had thighs like redwood trees.

Martine panted and leaned against the door. She was weak with lust and she was going to have him. Even if it was in a roundabout way.

As Derrick soaped up Martine used every brain cell she had left after her catnip overload and tried to remember a spell she might use to have her wicked way with Derrick without him realizing. Martine was determined to show him she was more than just a cat.

She wasn't *always* a cat, only when the need arose and it had *arisen*... Under normal circumstances she was a woman who played hard and wasn't ashamed to feed her sexuality. Tonight would be one of those nights she indulged in the buffet of sexual activity -- and the hell with her premonition. She would shift and screw his brains out, then return to her cat form afterward. She could keep him in a semi twilight state. A state that made him aware enough to respond and was long enough for her to ride him to glorious victory and when he awakened, he'd think it was all a dream.



## Chapter Three

Her long, supple body slithered over his firmly muscled one in the bed. Naked and on fire Martine crept over Derrick's sleeping form.

Okay, so it wasn't *totally* him offering acquiescence -- she was kind of invading his dreams, but whatever, Martine thought as she focused on her task at hand. Doing Derrick...

He stirred beneath her, the lower half of his body arching upward slightly as she straddled his abdomen, leaning over him and letting her long, black hair caress his chest. Her tongue snaked out, slipping along the firm line of his lips. She lingered on the soft surface, lightly licking.

Derrick moaned, his chest vibrating beneath her. Martine rubbed her pussy against him as she lay, her mouth over his, straddling his head with her elbows. The crisp hair at his belly grazed her clit, sending jolts of fire to her already anxious nerve endings.

Martine took his mouth in a slow possession, pressing her lips to his and slipping her tongue in to glide over Derrick's in a forceful stroke. His large hands found her ass, kneading it, gripping it as he enveloped her in his strength. Martine clutched his hair, raking her fingers into the thickness and pulling him deeper into their kiss. Derrick took command by suckling her tongue, sliding his own deeper into her mouth.

Martine pulled away, gazing down at the man who set her senses on fire like no other boy-toy in her recent boy-toy conjuring. His eyes were closed, but his hands roamed freely, moving to cup her breasts. Martine gripped his wrists as he gently pinched her nipples, turning them into tight, hard points. She lowered them to his mouth, gasping at the hot cavern surrounding them as Derrick cupped them together and laved them in wet, heated strokes.

Martine squirmed against his chest, rolling her hips as she pressed her breasts deeper into Derrick's mouth. He nipped at the tight buds, and sizzling sharp pangs of white lightning settled in her cunt. Martine pulled away roughly and lifted herself toward his mouth. His arms circled her, cupping her ass and pulling her to his lips. Lips that seared her as he pressed them flush to her aching pussy.

Derrick hovered for a moment until Martine grabbed a handful of hair at the back of his head and rammed her hips in the direction of the tongue that she sought with a frantic, fiery need.

His tongue slipped inside her, slick and hot, jolting her, making her groan with need. Her breath caught in her throat, lodging there as she bit her lip to keep from crying out. The dizzy effect of Derrick's tongue sent sharp pangs of white, hot heat to her pussy. As his lips explored her, Martine rocked against them, savored the slick rasp. Circling her clit, Derrick suckled it, keeping the swollen bud aching with desire. Strong hands reached up to cup her breasts. Twisting her nipples gently, bringing them to stiff peaks.

Martine's stomach clenched as the easy rhythm increased, creating friction, delightful pangs of electrifying need. Her back arched into the moist heat of his mouth as her orgasm drew near. Her thighs trembled and Derrick's hands reached for her waist, spanning her flesh, pressing her to his greedy mouth.

She came with the speed of light, hard and heavy, letting the heat rip through her body as she cried out. It left her panting and gasping for air that had become rife with sexuality -- thick with the tangible smell of need for release.

Martine slid back over Derrick's body, down over the rippled plane of his abdomen as he shifted his hips beneath her, jutting them upward against the pressure of her weight. Martine was dizzy with expectation as she neared the hard shaft that lay between thickly muscled thighs. Her night vision was superb -- even in human form -- and as she gazed upon Derrick's cock, it was all over but the crying.

Martine's chest tightened as she licked her lips, anticipating the slick, hot glide of tongue over flesh. Her heart sped up, racing in time with the electricity sparking through her veins with hot jolts.

Martine let her hair graze his cock, draping it over the rigid flesh, enjoying the sharp intake of breath Derrick took as she lingered, letting her hot breath caress him.

A long, slow swipe of tongue made his hips rise, bolting upward, and his hands found her hair, gripping at the long strands, threading his fingers through it as he pulled her to him.

Closer, Martine took her time, circling the head of his cock, licking it swiftly, lightly. Her hands cupped the heavy sacs of his balls as she teased him with her tongue. His skin was hot and sweet. She lapped at it, savoring the moans she heard from above her.

In a motion of catlike grace and desperate need, Martine enveloped Derrick's cock and he bucked, clutching her head tighter, her slow descent making the muscles in his thighs tense and bulge.

Gripping each thigh she kneaded them as she sat between them and allowed Derrick to glide between her lips. She tasted the surge of hard flesh between her lips and sensed his impending climax.

Derrick pulled out of the hot cavern of her mouth, leaving Martine disappointed. She'd hoped to taste him, the essence of him, but he dragged her upward with arms of steel and rolled her over, his hard length pushing her into the bed, his heavy weight delicious and thickly muscled against her own.

Martine arched upward, wrapping her long thighs around his waist as Derrick took control and thrust into her powerfully, as Martine gasped for breath.

His cock was steel in her tight depths, plunging with no mercy into the wet depths of her. Martine's pussy clenched around him, matching his thrusts as his arms scooped her up and crushed her to him.

Derrick moaned low in her ear, sending shivers up her spine and another wave of climax to her cunt, now on fire with a multitude of sensations Martine had never before experienced.

Martine frantically drove her hips toward the cock that filled her, stretched her, made her blood pound in her ears. Derrick hissed a breath in her ear and her hands found the muscled flesh of his ass, digging her nails into it as he swelled within her and found his release.

Martine rode the wave with him, as hips crashed together and a fine sheen of sweat slickened their bodies, gluing them together. Her nipples tightened sharply, scraping against his bare chest as she let go and came with a fierce yell.

Derrick's lips found hers in their final thrusts and he mumbled incoherent words she neither could understand nor wanted to.

She only wanted this man to stay inside of her forever -- or until she was done using him purely for the incredible lay he was. She couldn't have conjured up a lay this good if Escobar himself taught her the ultimate screwing spell.

As Derrick settled against her, his large frame sagging in release and soon, a sound sleep, Martine allowed herself the simple indulgence of a last roam of hands over his hard back.

Sighing deeply, she realized she had to shift back to her cat form. For now, anyway. Until she knew what in all of the animal kingdom this was about.

\* \* \*

When Derrick awoke, Martine was perched happily upon the chest that had just last night pressed to hers with an urgent heat.

His eyes opened wide and Martine peered happily into them. Man, he was dreamy. It was time to say good morning to her newly acquired boy-toy.

"Meow," she offered as she eyeballed him, sort of husky and low.

Derrick wrinkled his nose and sneezed so hard it knocked Martine off his chest and onto the bed.

Derrick swiped at his tongue with his fingers. "Dammit, feline, I have cat hair all over me!"

Martine purred contentedly.

*If you only knew, wolf man...*

## Chapter Four

Martine decided it was time to take matters into her own hands. Derrick didn't want a kitty for a lifemate and she sure as hell didn't want Derrick for life. Just for a couple of earth shattering, screaming orgasms... or ten. He had no clue what he was denying himself, and Martine was about to show him.

Martine style.

Hopping off the unmade bed, Martine crept toward the bathroom. Screw not shifting. She may as well reveal herself. After last night, she wanted Derrick to drool over her. Froth at the mouth so to speak.

She had a feeling Escobar would frown upon her shifting to her human form in front of anyone. According to him she wasn't allowed to do that because he was giving her respite from whatever curse she was doomed by. Escobar claimed he'd kept her hidden and safe. Martine had never asked why -- she simply did as she was told because Escobar said so. He was all she'd had since almost as far back as she could remember. Her memories of her parents were vague at best, riddled here and there with a hauntingly familiar scent and faint traces of a childhood now but a blur.

Escobar allowed her to indulge in her pleasures as long as she kept them quiet and, more importantly, private. Which she did. She conjured up many, many pleasures with the simple spells she'd learned from Escobar.

Okay, so sometimes the hotties she whipped up had trouble with King's English, but so what? Who needed a man to talk if he fucked like a house on fire? Mute was a good attribute in most men.

Martine suffered in the spell department more often than not, but it didn't matter. She didn't want to keep the men she conjured up -- just play with them and then they could go back to wherever she'd taken them from. The taken from part was a

little fuzzy for her. Martine had no clue where they came from... When she learned to create a man, she quickly realized a real witch she'd never be. Her spells were weak and small compared to Escobar's, but they sufficed when in a pinch.

Derrick, however, was a whole new ball of wax. Sexually speaking he beat the crap out of even some of her best creations. Even the guy she'd managed to conjure up who looked just like Brad Pitt. He was hot all right, but he had this twitch that became irritating after a while.

Ah, well. Now Derrick was her mission. She planned to have him and have him again for good measure, then get the frig out of this strange place where there was no cable TV and jumping over a broom at sundown seemed to be everyone's favorite form of entertainment.

Unacceptable.

Martine peeked around the corner of Derrick's bedroom door and saw his coat was missing from the rack in the small living room.

Good. She needed quiet when she shifted. Total body concentration, and Derrick's presence didn't allow for that. Scampering off to the bathroom, Martine focused on her human form.

Which was going to blow farm boy's socks off.

The slight crunch of bone and flesh mingled with a long moan vibrated off the tiles in the bathroom. Martine rolled her neck on her shoulders and stretched her arms.

She took a quick peek at her nails and smiled. Thank God, she hadn't ruined her manicure with all of this nonsense. She'd bet it would be hard to find a good manicurist in this neck of bumfuck woods.

She took a good long look at herself in the mirror. Her almond-shaped green eyes held the anticipation of a sexual conquest who was actually a living, breathing specimen of the opposite sex. A first for her.

How cool was that?

\* \* \*

Derrick popped open the door to his cabin and stopped dead in his tracks.

Holy hotter than Tyra Banks...

Green eyes met his from across the room, sizing him up with a bold stare and a brazen tilt to her head. Thick tresses of shiny hair the color of a moonless night hung in long strands over the breasts of a woman clad in his old flannel shirt. Perky breasts too, he thought briefly while he tried to remove his tongue from the roof of his mouth.

A raven eyebrow cocked over those green eyes, and her curiously silent lips, full and pouty, remained tipped in a knowing smile. Long legs swung over the small breakfast bar as she hopped up and over and seated herself at the edge of the counter. Her dainty feet hung loosely, swinging as she tucked his shirt around her creamy thighs.

A bead of sweat broke out on Derrick's forehead as he shifted his stance.

Jesus Christ.

"Meow, Derrick." A breathy, throaty voice filled his ears with a hint of a mocking tone.

Meow indeed.

Wait a friggin' second? Meow? This was the *cat*? *His* cat?

Aw, c'mon. No way. No freakin' way.

"What's the matter, Derrick? Did you forget to bring a new toy for the kitty to play with?" she challenged with a chuckle.

He swallowed hard. Speaking would be the obviously manly thing to do. He cleared his throat. "You are?"

"Here, kitty, kitty..." She smiled seductively, her glossy lips slipping into a pout.

"You're the cat?" he asked in disbelief. He knew his question was kind of squeaky and girly on the way out. But for Christ's sake. Who knew that hairball would turn into *this*.

"That's me. The cat. The *goddamned* cat, as I recall you saying. I should be hurt, but I find myself willing to overlook that in favor of other, more important traits you have."



"Traits?" He was bewildered. By her scent, which, p.s. was making him fucking nuts, by her husky voice, by her finally shifting, by *her*.

"Yes, your traits, characteristics, you know? Like your ability to fuck."

Whoa, okay. His cock shot to the heavens as the verb fuck slipped over her tongue. The word had a whole new meaning said by lips like that. He still was unable to speak and that might be a good thing, seeing as he wasn't thinking clearly. "Fuck?" Oh, that was brilliant. Truly astounding construction of a sentence, Derrick.

She hopped off the counter and strode toward him with a graceful speed that was precise and deliberate. Her hair swung to her waist in cascades of brilliant black. His cock reached for the stars as she slithered nearer.

She came to stand before him and his nostrils flared with the scent of her hunger, thick and tangible. "Yes, Derrick, fuck. You are quite adept." Smiling she moved closer still. She was long and tall, her head just reaching the top of his chin.

Derrick looked down into the green eyes that mocked him, but he still struggled for words as he fought to comprehend what she was saying. How could she know he was adept... Holy shit! She was from his dream last night?

A cat? The cat? "Explain," he choked out in as much manly fashion as he could muster.

Her tongue ran lightly over her lips. "I said you are adept at fucking. You know, sex? I want to have more. Sex, that is. So I'll go get naked while you fumble for more than one word every sixty seconds, and then we'll fuck." Her words came out with a purr to them. She pivoted gracefully and headed down his short hallway as he stood rooted to the spot.

*Hellloooo up there! Did you hear that? The kitty wants to fuck! Um, cock to brain -- you are on sensory overload. Snap the fuck out of it and go get 'em, tiger, er werewolf!*

His *cat* looked like that?

*Cat -- dog -- freakin' armadillo, buddy, she wants you. So take off your clothes and go get her. Like now, before I explode.*

Okay... okay. He could do this. If the kitty wanted to play, he was all for it. How could he not be all for it? The sway of her hips alone could make a guy come. He wanted to know what made her decide to shift and why. But he wanted to devour her more.

The scent of her in his nose and the taste of her on his lips this morning when he'd awakened was something that had haunted him all day long. Smart man that he was, he'd never made the connection to the friggin' cat.

He'd thought it was just a wet dream.

And now he knew it wasn't.

He tore off his shirt with haste and went to stalk his prey, stake his claim, beat his chest in total Neanderthal fashion.

But not before he took off his shoes, he thought as he bent to unlace them, half hopping half tripping to the bedroom. He stopped at the door leading to his small room and inhaled sharply.

His *cat* lay on the bed with nothing but a smile on. His cock pressed painfully against his jeans.

Again, he was speechless and well, speechless. She was sinfully, decadently, fucking fabulous. Every creamy, sinuous, long, graceful inch of her. Her legs stretched for miles, lightly muscled and lean. Her feet were dainty and arched as she wriggled them under the comforter at the bottom of the bed.

Her name -- it might be good to know the name of the person/cat whose pert, round breasts he was ogling. Now if his brain could just send a signal to his good grammar skills... "What's your name?" Aha! He speaks.

Stretching her arms above her head in a sweeping arc that was both fluid and sensuous, she smiled at him. "Martine."

Martine... Hookay, good, now that the meaningless introductions were over he could really stare at her breasts and her nipples that were tight and flushed with color.

Martine smiled again and wiggled a finger at him. "C'mon, let's stop pussyfooting around so to speak." She patted the bed beside her and giggled, throaty and low. "Take off your clothes, Derrick, and come here."

*Psssst, Derrick. Do what the nice lady tells you and let-me-out!* As if mesmerized, Derrick tore at his jeans and threw them in the corner.

He approached the bed with less speed. It wouldn't look good if he behaved like an anxious kid in high school. Besides, no one else took control in the bedroom. He held the reins or it didn't happen.

"Derrick." Her tone held a warning.

Okay, maybe she could hold them for a little while, but then it was all about being a manly man. Derrick wasted no time as he lunged for her, straddling her long, lithe body with his bigger one.

She smiled again, that "cat that swallowed the canary" smile and reached up to place her small hands on his chest, kneading the muscled flesh.

His cock throbbed, burned, could beat a brick to death it was so hard. Derrick leaned forward to taste her lips, soft and full, sweet and tangy. He ran his tongue over them, let the soft plane of them seep into his light caress as she threaded her hands through his hair and pulled him deeper into their kiss.

Martine found his cock and held it firmly, gripping it in a gentle squeeze of soft hands and teasing fingers. He bucked over her, driving into the tunnel she'd created as his mouth devoured hers. She pulled him upward by his rock-hard shaft and tilted her head to lock eyes with him before she licked her lips and took him into her mouth with an agonizingly slow, deliberate slide of her tongue.

He clenched his teeth to keep the roar in his throat from erupting as she bathed him with her wet, warm tongue. Martine's hands found his balls, tight with need, and cupped them, rolled them gently in her hand as she rode his cock with her mouth. His legs tensed and his hips thrust to meet the bob of her head as she took him deeper and deeper. Derrick drove into her mouth as his cock burned and he reeled with his yet untapped desire, thick and hot, fighting not to come.

Derrick pulled from her mouth and winced at the cool air on his wet shaft. He could have stayed in her mouth forever, but she had places he wanted to explore with his lips and tongue and he couldn't hold out much longer with the kind of skill she possessed. It was mind blowing...

She whimpered as he pulled away, sliding down her body with his lips, over the slope of her shoulder and down to just the tip of her full breast, avoiding the tight nipple. Derrick let his tongue savor the underside of it as he teased her soft skin and she writhed beneath him, supple and firm when he began to plant hot kisses along each curve. Martine's hands wound in his hair, clutching him to her as he captured a nipple and tugged at it with firm pulls, running his tongue over the tip, laving it with long strokes.

Her long legs wound around him, urging upward toward the cock he wanted to ram into her, but he wasn't ready to succumb to her tight depths just yet. He needed to taste the slick cunt he knew waited for him. Her breathing was ragged as he cupped each breast, bringing them together and bathing each nipple alternately.

Martine bucked beneath him, mewling small, breathy sounds of delight when he let go and paved a path of tongue and lips over her firm belly, caressing her ribcage beneath his hands as he went.

Her scent, spicy and musky, filled his nostrils making his head spin and his tongue burn to lap at her wet flesh. Settling between her thighs, Derrick lifted her legs high and wide, exposing Martine's flesh to his gaze. He closed his eyes as the sight of her, the sheer power of his lust, made his gut clench and his body quake with need. He gripped her knees before running his hands over the silken expanse of her thighs, tracing a pattern of heated caresses. Derrick let his hands swoop down over her and rest between her legs, savoring the heat of her smoothly shaven pussy.

Martine's impatience became evident as she gripped his wrists, her hands small in comparison to his own, her skin a stark contrast of ivory against his own olive complexion. Lifting her hips she offered herself to him with a sigh. Derrick leaned

forward and inhaled, devouring her hunger mingled with his own as he dipped an urgent tongue between the slick lips of her cunt.

Derrick heard Martine hiss and exhale sharply, her belly caving beneath his hands as he delved deeper, lapping the essence of her cunt. Finding her clit, he circled it with slow deliberation, wrapping his lips around the swollen nub.

Martine's hips rotated beneath his lips, lunging forward when his finger slid into her, gripping it as she clenched her muscles around him. Her depths were hot and slick and the taste of her juices sent a bolt of electricity from his mouth to his cock.

Impatient hands yanked at his shoulders, digging into the flesh as Martine drew him away and up to her again. As he hovered over her she opened her eyes and snaked her tongue out across his lips, obviously savoring her own taste on them. She purred, wrapping her arms around his neck and clinging to him, letting her nipples scrape his chest.

Derrick slid a hand under her back and rolled Martine to her stomach. She immediately lifted her perfect ass in the air, ready to accept him as she slithered the upper half of her body to lay low on the bed.

Derrick fought not to tear into her, his cock raging, pulsing with need. His hands found the smooth globes of flesh, round and firm. He squeezed them and Martine responded with a low, husky moan, so he kneaded harder, reveling in her taste once again as he feathered kisses over her ass.

Derrick positioned himself between Martine's thighs and swallowed hard. It wouldn't do to take her with the abandon he struggled to contain until he heard her whisper, "Fuck me, Derrick, hard. *Now.*"

That was it -- he couldn't stop now if he wanted to. His cock poised at her opening only for a moment before he drove into her, hard and hot. She was slick and wet, tight and heated with the first stroke. She gasped from the force of his thrust, but when he hesitated, she hissed again, "Derrick, don't stop. It's okay, fuck me. I *need* you to fuck me!"

And he did.

Lights flashed behind his closed eyes as he clenched his teeth and rode her relentlessly, pushing into the silk that clenched his swollen shaft with a frantic rhythm. Each stroke he took she matched, driving back into him with a strength he'd never guess she possessed for one so small, but she took each thrust with pleasure, tightening her small hands into fists beside her head when he reached around her and fondled her clit.

Derrick's climax roared through him. From the base of his cock it shot upward, tearing through him with white-hot heat.

Martine shuddered beneath him, the slap of their flesh echoing in his ears as she came too. Derrick heard his own yell echo off the walls of his small bedroom as he growled his release, pumping into Martine until he knew she was spent too.

Her legs collapsed beneath her and he fell forward on her, her small body heaving against his larger one.

*Jesus fucking Christ!* he thought fleetingly as she nestled against him. Derrick remained as speechless as he had been since he'd first walked through the door. It was the most incredible lovemaking he'd ever encountered, bar none.

Better not to think of what that meant and focus on the fact that he'd just done a cat. Wasn't there like a law of nature that this was defying?

But, hell, cut a guy some friggin' slack already. Maybe this lifemate thing could be a cool gig for a week or so...

## Chapter Five

Wow, wow, wow! Martine's head still spun from the magic that was Derrick. All six foot four *human* feet of him. Living, breathing and well hung too, she might add.

Nothing had ever compared to that -- not any man she'd made up, not even any two men she might have made up. He was a *GOD* and Martine couldn't wait to do him again and again and again... and then go home -- to her kitty penthouse with Escobar and never see Derrick again... Her heart tightened a bit at that.

Well, of course it did! It wasn't sentimental at all, it was *seximental*. Sorta like wishing for the sex you once enjoyed in your youth, but couldn't any longer because you just didn't have the stamina. Who wanted to give *that* up willingly? It had little to do with her heart and a whole lot more to do with her libido. Giving up sex like that would be heart wrenching.

Painful even.

She knew she didn't have a choice but to give it up and that was okay, kind of... not a lot, but kind of... this would have to end when Escobar found her and find her he would, but until then she wasn't going to waste anymore time pussyfootin' around.

Martine giggled at that -- stupid and girly, just like she'd heard that silly woman of Max's do.

Nudging Derrick, she moved to leave the bed and clean herself, but he held her tighter and her heart skipped a beat.

This feeling -- this new and curious tug of emotion beat the hell out of her catnip OD yesterday. It was euphoric and empowering, leaving her vulnerable.

Um, no -- not vulnerable. Couldn't be a good sign. Cats were aloof and bristly, not vulnerable. "I have to clean myself," she said, "or would you prefer that your manliness leak all over the bed? I don't do sheets." Just in case he was wondering.

Derrick's chuckle skittered up her spine. "Wanna talk about this?"

Yes, this was definitely where the mute aspect of her "created men" came in handy. "Talk." She sat up and cocked an eyebrow at him. "About?"

Derrick let a big hand roam over her back in a smooth circular motion and she found herself leaning into it, enjoying it even. "We did just share something intimate," he reminded her -- as if she needed reminding.

"And?"

"And it deserves discussion."

"Do you talk to all of your little wolf chicks after boffing them?"

"Nope."

"So what makes me a warm fuzzy?"

"You are a *cat*."

*Who just ate the canary, baby...* "Yeah, meow..."

"How did you come to be? Where the hell do you come from?"

"This is important, why?"

"It's important because I'm supposed to be your lifemate."

Martine finally swung around to face him. His chiseled features were solemn, but his eyes teased hers. "Care to explain that theory to me? I mean, I'm a cat. How can a cat be your lifemate? You're a dog... What is a lifemate supposed to do other than the obvious I've gathered from the title?"

"I'm not a dog, I'm a *werewolf*. It's kind of a long story -- the explanation for why you're my lifemate, but a lifemate is just what the word implies. We are bonded by sources unknown to us for life."

"Really? And what source tells you this? Do I get a say in it? I mean, I don't remember anyone saying, 'Hey, Martine, want a lifemate today with your tender vittles'?"

Derrick laughed again, and his whole face changed as he did. Gone was the hard plane of his jaw, replaced by a grin and flash of white -- and she figured -- some very sharp teeth. "What do you eat?"



"Caviar, naturally."

"Caviar? You're kidding."

Martine snorted. "Well, it beats the hell out of poor Bambi."

Derrick slid his long, thick legs off the bed and rose, naked and unashamed, to go to the bathroom. "Speaking of Bambi, I'm starving. You?"

"Not for rabbit I'm not."

He laughed again and Martine's ears burned. "I was thinking more along the lines of stew."

Oh, whew. "Does stew have caviar?"

He poked his handsome face around the doorway, giving her stomach a small jolt. "That would be a negative. It has carrots and potatoes and venison."

*Bambi...* Martine shrugged her shoulders and grabbed his shirt from the chair beside the bed. "It'll have to do, won't it? It's not like I have a choice, now do I?"

Derrick swatted her on the ass as he passed her and headed toward the kitchen. "C'mon, lifemate. I'll teach you what the great outdoors is all about."

"It better not include hunting down my cuisine. Do you hear me, Derrick?" she yelled after him. Martine shuddered in distaste. Totally not going to happen. She didn't even hunt mice.

Derrick's laughter rang in her ears as she followed him out to the kitchen to eat stew. She shuddered one more time for good measure.

\* \* \*

Okay, so stew was quite pleasant. It wasn't escargot, but it was pleasing enough in a rather simple way.

Oh, hell, who was she kidding? It was fantastic! She smiled as she slathered more butter on her fluffy dinner roll.

"Not bad, huh?" Derrick asked as he watched her lick her fingers.

"It's adequate."

Derrick offered her more. "Want some more adequate?"

She held her hand up just as a small burp escaped her lips. "No, thank you. I think I've had enough."

He smiled that cocky grin. "Yeah, sounds like it."

Martine pushed away from the small table and went to stand by the fire in the living room. She was warm and full -- it was naptime. Sitting on the floor, she stretched and then curled into a ball, luxuriating in this new, if not simple pleasure of total body satiation.

Sex *and* stew. Did it get any better? she mused as she drifted into a contented sleep.

She felt, rather than saw, Derrick's large presence as instinct told her he was near, his solid frame somehow reassuring in the madness that this adventure was. Warmth crept over her, comfort lent to a peaceful security she couldn't ever remember experiencing in all the time she'd been with Escobar.

Derrick's hand toyed with her long strands of hair, brushing them from her face as he knelt near her. "We need to talk, Martine."

"Shhh, I'm sleeping."

"Where do you come from?"

"Not here, that's for sure."

"I kind of assumed that. No one who lives here eats caviar."

"Then they are as Bohemian as I first guessed."

Leaning over her, Derrick cupped her chin. "Where do you come from, Martine?"

A little information couldn't hurt, right? "New York. A better question is how did I get here, farm boy?"

"I picked you up. Eva's prophecy told me to pick you up off the Jersey turnpike. You were at a rest area in a carrier."

*Jersey?* Of all the utterly foul places to be dumped! *Jersey?* Wasn't that the land of the Sopranos and polluted oceans? "Jersey? How did I get to Jersey?"

"I was hoping you could tell me that, feline."

Sitting up she crossed her legs and looked Derrick in the eye. "I don't know. The last thing I remember I was in my penthouse. I have no clue how I'd get to Jersey!" Panic began to settle deep in her gut. How could Escobar have let this happen? He was her warlock, for crap's sake! It was he who said she couldn't ever leave him. "Okay, this makes no sense at all. Tell me about this prophecy nonsense. What does it mean, anyway?"

Derrick sighed, his big shoulders heaving. "According to my grandmother Eva, you are my lifemate. She reads prophecies in her chicken soup. She read Max's and he found JC who isn't a shapeshifter like you at all. I was next in line, I guess. I'm the Beta of my pack -- it stood to reason I was the next sucker."

Martine's eyes narrowed. "Sucker? My being your lifemate makes you feel *suckered*?"

"Well, it is a little beyond the realm of believability, don't you think? A cat and a werewolf?"

"What's the matter with cats?"

He winked at her. "Well, nothing... *now*..."

Oh, sure, now that he realized his kitty could fuck like a bunny... "Look, there has to be some kind of mistake, so until we can figure it out we'll just -- just -- oh, I don't know what we'll do! We'll just wait it out until something happens. Like this prophecy comes to an end." Or Escobar showed his cowardly face and whammied Derrick with a spell or two. "And what is a Beta anyhow?"

"Second in line to the Alpha -- the Alpha being Max."

The idiot who couldn't keep his finger out of her face? "Forgive me if I don't get this pack crap. I'm just a mindless ball of fluff. Explain the pack thing."

Derrick leaned back on his haunches. "We're not that much different than a family, I guess. You come from a litter, I come from a pack. Granted we're not the most normal in a long line of packs, but we are family. We stick together. My duties as Beta are to carry on the line of my pack, just like Max's are."

Groovy. Well he wasn't carrying it on with her. "Okay. Thanks for the explanation. Maybe you could just give me a ride back to Manhattan? Tell Eva or whatever her name is this is some big mistake. Maybe she was reading Dim Sum at the time and got confused. I'm not your mate -- life or otherwise."

Derrick shook his head firmly, his thick, black hair falling around his face. "Eva is never wrong and I can't bring you back. It would be going against the prophecy and legend says that's a no-no."

Legend? What fucking legend said a cat and a werewolf should mate for life? Whoever wrote that was smokin' wacky weed. "So you won't take me back to New York?"

"Nope. I don't tempt fate. It's you and me, cat woman."

Life? Cats had nine of 'em... Oh, God. "I'm not your lifemate, Derrick. It just doesn't make sense. It's impossible. I'm a shapeshifter, yes, but I shift into a kitty, not a werewolf. Can you imagine what our children would look like? We'd be a circus sideshow. No, this will never do. I want to go home, tonight."

Derrick's hard jaw tightened. "Look, I'm just as freaked out by this as you are. I like single. I like it a lot and I sure as hell don't want a *cat* for a lifemate!"

*Oh, nice way to talk to your lifemate. Way to woo a girl.* Wait a minute. Why should she care if he didn't want her for a lifemate? "So, if we're in agreement about the lifemate thing, why wouldn't you want to risk this legend in order to save your single-ness?"

"Um, no. I may not agree with Eva on this, but I don't fuck with fate. Let fate change its mind all on its own. Until then, I'm going to keep doing what I do and hope Eva comes back from Africa soon."

Her prophecy sayer was in friggin' Africa? Didn't they have like a number she could be reached at? "This is ludicrous. I don't want a lifemate. Tell that to fate!" she yelled angrily.

"That makes two of us, Garfield!" he yelled back. Except he was louder and Martine didn't like that. Not one bit.

Martine jumped up and stomped off to Derrick's bedroom, slamming the door behind her and hurling herself on the bed. Garfield indeed! She was much more like the pretty Fancy Feast kitty...

\* \* \*

Strong hands cupped Martine's breasts and she purred, arching into them as a solid chest warmed her from behind.

Derrick... his hands were delicious even if he *wasn't* her lifemate. They could be fuck buddies until it was time to go back to New York.

Her arms wound around his neck as he lifted her shirt and caressed her ribs. His cock prodded her, thick and stiff against her spine.

It did things to her insides that probably shouldn't be happening between fuck buddies, but who gave a shit right now?

Derrick's hand, broad and hard, slid between her thighs, dipping into her already wet cunt. A ripple of pleasure shuddered over her sensitive skin, on fire with his touch. His lips found her ear, nibbling it, rimming the shell of it with his tongue. "I have an idea," he whispered, making her shiver with his low, husky tone. "Seeing as I'm so *adept* and, well, you don't seem to mind telling me so, what say we play this by ear?"

"And what do you mean, 'play it by ear'?" Did this mean they could be fuck buddies? Oh, yippee skippee!

His thumb found her clit and began to roll it gently to a swollen nub. "I mean, why not enjoy each other's company until Eva shows up and explains this -- or whatever is supposed to happen, happens."

Martine felt the curve of his hip nestle hers as he raised her thigh over it. Like she could say no when that luscious cock was poking at her from behind. "So I just stay here and be your plaything until fate takes its course? The prophecy is fulfilled?"

Her hands found his hair and she clenched it, gripping the thick locks as he spread her wet flesh and hovered at her passage. "I'll be your plaything too..." he offered back, letting his words trail off as he slid into her.

"Ooooh, good, be -- be-because -- llllll -- onlywanttodoyou... oooohhh," Martine cooed, because words were becoming impossible as his thick cock stretched her deliciously. It was right and wrong and right... and all of the things it had never been before with anyone else. Of course all of her "anyone else's" had been men she'd conjured up -- so she had no other comparisons to go on. Maybe all real, live, human men were like this. Maybe they were better.

Derrick cupped her ass as he took her with slow, precise thrusts of his hips. "So shut up and do me," he chuckled in her ear.

Hookay. She could do that. Focusing on nothing but his cock, Martine thrust her hips back at him and shuddered at the sensuous slide of heat against heat. The friction was carnal and sweet, and her pussy ached with a pulsing need for release.

Derrick's hands roamed over her thighs gently. Gone was the urgency of the night before and left was something more tender and as yet undefined in Martine's sheltered world.

She gripped his head to her shoulder as she came. A simmer that turned to a burn erupted in her, wending its way from her toes to her ears. Blood rushed to her ears and made her head swim as Derrick came too, moaning his release in her ear. He wrapped his arms around her waist, tightening his grip on her as he spasmed inside of her, his thick cock jerking as his thrusts slowed.

Martine's chest rose and fell rapidly while Derrick lavished kisses over her shoulders. "Well, boy-toy. I guess you'll do in a pinch," she teased.

"Yeah? Well, you're not so bad yourself, for a cat."

Martine rolled her eyes. "I'm a finicky one too, so you should consider yourself lucky."

Derrick pinched her ass as he withdrew from her. "Well, get your finicky ass in gear. Mom wants to meet you."

Martine's hackles rose. "Oh, no. That wasn't part of the deal. We are fuck buddies -- not betrothed."

"Okay, but if they come beating down the door and decide to camp here in the bedroom I can't be held responsible."

Good gravy... "I can't meet your mother. I have no clothes."

"JC sent some over. She's rounder than you and shorter, but they'll do," he replied as he strode to the bathroom all hard and muscled.

How charming. "Fine. Let's meet mom. I can tell her what I think about this lifemate business and she can call grandma and tell her this ain't happenin'."

Derrick threw a wad of clothes at Martine. "You can tell her whatever you like. Mom has deaf ears. Eva's word is gospel."

Oh, good. Great, peachy keen.

Where in all of hell was Escobar? she wondered as she held up the knit sweater, running her fingers over the K-Mart special.

It wasn't cashmere, that's for sure.

\* \* \*

"Oh! Derrick! She's lovely," a short round woman exclaimed as they entered the big house that was rather warm and inviting, despite its rustic qualities. Derrick hugged the woman Martine assumed was his mother. "Mom, meet Martine, Martine, Mom."

Martine was enveloped in a warm hug that she couldn't have avoided if she tried, yet somehow didn't mind. Martine often wondered if her own mother was anything like the moms she saw on television. "It's nice to meet you too, Mrs..." Her words trailed off as she realized she had no clue what Derrick's last name was.

Derrick bent down and whispered, "Adams. Coreen Adams."

Martine's creamy skin flushed and her pert nose twitched. "Er, Mrs. Adams."

Coreen Adams took her hand and smiled. "You can call me Mom. Now come in and sit down and tell me all about yourself. What kind of cat are you anyway? Persian? I was telling Derrick that I thought you might be, but seeing you now, I'm not sure." She cocked her head as she assessed Martine, her chubby hand gripping Martine's lightly.

Martine's heart tugged a bit. She wasn't even bothered by the prying questions when under normal circumstances her sharp tongue would have sounded off by now. Martine laughed. "I'm a domestic, actually. It's a long story best left for a quiet moment to explain."

Yeah, like how did you tell the mother of the man of your horizontal wet dreams come true you had no intention of explaining anything. You just wanted to fuck and run... best not to reveal, Martine thought.

Coreen Adams patted her hand reassuringly. "Of course, how silly of me. There'll be plenty of time to talk now that you're finally here."

Derrick gave his mom a kiss on the cheek and smiled at her. "Yeah, Mom. Give Martine a break, let her adjust. Heard anything from Eva?"

*Yeah, Mom. How is Eva?* And why was Derrick in such an all fired rush to hear from her? Humph. Fine, just fine... he wanted out as much as she did.

Good. Very good.

Coreen waved Derrick off. "How should I know? You know Eva. She doesn't call, she doesn't write, she just does as she pleases and shows up when a prophecy floats into her chicken soup."

This prophecy shit was way big with this bunch, huh? Helllooo... Although, she supposed it was as important to the Adamases as Escobar's chants and spells were to him.

Derrick hugged his mother's shoulders. "Okay, Mom. Why don't you get to know Martine and I'm going to go hunt down Max."

Coreen winked. "I think he's in the study. He and JC *finally* came up for air. We'll have new pups soon. Count on it."

Derrick chuckled. "Good, Mom. I'm glad you're so happy."

Pups? Was that like a litter? Good thing Derrick didn't want a lifemate as much as she didn't want one. No frickin' way was she having anything that might ruin her figure. Especially a dog... er, werewolf, er -- wait, what the hell would they have if they had offspring?



It'd be like a bad episode of that cartoon *Catdog*...

Derrick nudged Martine. "Look, JC's outside with Hector. Maybe you could get to know her a little. I think you'll like her."

Did fuck buddies make friends with their intended schtupp's in-laws? Martine let herself be led into the fold that was known as Adams, each reluctant step less hindered by the gentle persuasion of Derrick's mother, who coaxed her with the promise of a bowl of cream...

Somehow that gave Martine a pleasant glow that while unexpected, was just a tiny bit welcome.

## Chapter Six

Derrick made a hasty beeline for the study where Max was supposed to be. He was totally freaking out over this whole Martine thing and he needed to figure it out. Max would help. He would help or Derrick would give him the ultimate in noogies.

"Well, well, look who's surfaced for some air," Max mocked as he looked up from the football game he was watching.

Derrick snorted. "Like you should talk, boink-master."

Max gave him a cocky smile and nodded. "Yep, that I am. So how's it going with the little woman? Have you given in to your prophecy yet?"

Derrick sank into the chair beside the couch and shook his head. "This is pretty fucked up, Max. I mean how can a cat be my lifemate? We have the most screwed up pack in the universe."

Max cocked an inky black eyebrow at him. "Ya know what, Derrick? I used to feel the same way you do. I inherited this bunch. It's my job to see to it we reproduce -- as if that weren't a big enough friggin' feat -- it's also up to me to keep this crazy crew in line. It's not easy, you know. But to top things off I have to watch your ass too when your position in this pack is to help me. Not hinder me. All you do is bitch and moan about *you*. What about the rest of us? Why is everything about you? I know we aren't like other packs -- we have some pack members that are a little left of center, but so what? Does it mean we're any less loyal, or for that matter strong?" Max shrugged his shoulders. "It's all about appearances for you, Derrick. It always has been, but for me, now anyway, it's about solidarity and leadership. I love my family, regardless of their 'issues' and I love JC. If I hadn't listened to Eva I wouldn't have found JC and *that*, I wouldn't have missed if you gave me a normal pack with fucking whipped cream on it."

Derrick sighed. His brother was head over the proverbial nookie and someone had to knock some pack sense into him. "Max, JC is *human*. It's a bit different than a cat."

Max leaned forward and eyed Derrick. "On the contrary, know-it-all. She's very different. She doesn't shift at all. She doesn't hunt with me and she sure as hell isn't baying at the moon once a month. Your kitty --"

"-- Martine," Derrick cut in. It pissed him off that Max referred to her as anything but. Then it pissed him off that he gave a flippin' shit.

Max flipped Derrick the bird. "Martine. It's a pretty name. I've heard she's as pretty as her name."

Pretty? She was drop-dead, heart attack inducing fantastic. Pretty seemed less than appropriate when describing Martine. "She's okay."

"Well, whatever she is, she shares a common bond with you that JC and I don't share. She can shift. JC can't."

Derrick ran a hand through his hair. "But JC could if she wanted to. She could become one of the pack if you took it upon yourself to do it."

Max clucked his tongue at him. "See, all you do is think about yourself. JC has to *want* to and if she does, we'll explore that. If not, I'm okay with it. I don't want her to do anything she doesn't want to."

Wasn't that very free love like?

"Where does Martine come from anyway? Has she talked to you about it? Does she have family she left behind?"

"I dunno..." Goddamn, that sounded shallow. It *was* shallow.

"Did you ask?" Max prodded.

"Sort of."

"Sort of? Are you starting to understand what I mean about you, Derrick? In my personal opinion you don't deserve a lifemate. You're too wrapped up in all that is Derrick."

Derrick clenched his jaw. "Look, I asked, but she didn't tell me much and all I know is I picked her up in a rest area out of fear for this legend crap. She doesn't want to hook up for life either, you know."

"So how about you pry? Coax, wheedle. You can do it if you really want to. If you don't, I can't help you."

Derrick had to admit he was curious. But not a lot -- well maybe just a step up from a little. "I'm not asking for help, Max."

Max cocked his dark head at Derrick. "No? Well, I am, bud. I want our line to go on forever and I want to do it with the help of my family. In order to do that I have to reproduce and so do you. You once said to me that it was just you and me. You were right."

Derrick looked away from Max's hard glare. If only that was the problem. He wanted to complete the act that led to reproduction with Martine. Over and over until he banged her right out of his system. When he was buried inside of her he felt something he'd never felt before meeting Martine.

And he wasn't liking it. It was free falling and he wanted his feet on the ground. "You could reproduce enough pups to carry on the line, Max. You don't need that from me," he offered lamely.

Max nodded, his face hard and unyielding. "Yep, you're right. So go on back to Derrick's world and I'm going to go find my woman." Max rose and strode to the door. "Oh, and when you're done with Martine," he said over his shoulder, "do us all a favor and be nice to her. Let her down easy. And make sure you duck. No telling what a broken prophecy will do to a guy..." Max waltzed out the door on a chuckle that rang in Derrick's ears.

He was a selfish putz, but it wasn't like Martine was game for this lifemate thing either.

She wasn't... she said so... she did... he'd heard her.

And now, that very fact was sitting in his stomach like an anchor.

Fine, if she didn't want him, he didn't want her either.

Not much...

\* \* \*

Martine smiled at JC. She was really very nice. It was kind of fun to sit and talk about girl things. Martine had never had a gal-pal.

Just Escobar.

She was beginning to wonder why she never questioned the curse thing. Why it meant she couldn't ever have friends or *real* lovers.

JC came from a city too. Hoboken -- Jersey. Jersey didn't seem so low class to Martine anymore. JC was nice and she was *human*. A rather peculiar experience for Martine. Humans weren't that much different than she was.

Martine found herself smiling as Max came up behind JC and hugged her from behind. "You must be Martine," he said over JC's dark curls. "I'm Max. Sorry about the finger in your face on our first meeting."

Martine giggled. "It's okay. It happens, I guess. Yes, I'm Martine. It's nice to meet you on equal footing."

Max chuckled. "Derrick treating you okay?"

He was treating her to the sexual escapade of a lifetime, thank you. Martine smiled again, slower and with hesitation. "Yes, I'm fine, thanks. Derrick has been very nice." In a *canned* cat food kind of way.

Max nodded. "Good," he said firmly. "If you need anything at all, you just let me know. I'll be happy to help out."

This was her opportunity to ask for a ride back to New York, but Martine found it didn't seem as important as it had yesterday, or even this morning. Her stomach fluttered. "Thank you, Max."

Max smiled again, a smile that reflected his brother's, except it wasn't quite as yummy. "If you don't mind I'm going to whisk JC off for a nap. You tired, honey?"

JC tilted her head up to look at Max and laughed at him. "Yeah, wolfman, I'm beat. C'mon, let's go *rest*." JC's cheeks flushed with color. She looked at Martine and

grinned. "It was really nice meeting you, Martine. Come down to the house tomorrow and we'll talk some more, okay?"

Martine smiled back, just because the idea of spending more time with another woman was something that appealed to her. "I will. You two go *rest* up. Bye." She wiggled her fingers at them as she began to make her way back to the big house that held Coreen who was loving and smelled like apple pie.

Derrick caught her on her way up the steps. "Wanna take a walk?"

Martine's heart did a flip that would rival a Romanian gymnast. Good heavens, what was this about? Instead of analyzing it, she acquiesced. "Okay, sure."

Derrick held out a big hand to her and she placed her smaller one in it, ignoring the sizzle of heat that screamed up her arm and went straight to her breasts. Her nipples tightened painfully.

Damn! All of this sex stuff was going to chop off, at the very least, two of her nine lives. Martine scanned the cloudless blue sky and inhaled. It wasn't so bad here. It was quiet. No police sirens or ambulances screeching through her cat naps.

"It's pretty here," she commented lightly.

Derrick nodded. "Yeah, I love it. Do you miss the big city?"

Well, truthfully, what was there to miss? She never left Escobar's apartment. She didn't need to. What she knew of the city was what she'd gleaned from watching the Travel Channel. "I won't lie and say I don't miss caviar, that's for sure, but no, not too much."

Derrick stopped her along their path to his cabin and pulled her to sit beside him on a fallen tree. Martine's nose twitched at the new scents that surrounded her. Fresh and crisp was how she would best describe it.

"Tell me about where you come from, Martine. You didn't just happen."

Did fuck buddies get to know one another? Martine sighed. What was the point of not telling him? If Escobar wanted her to keep her yap shut, he should have rescued her by now. It wasn't like Derrick wouldn't understand. He was well versed in the sublime. "I belong to a warlock. I'm a familiar."

There. Now it was out in the open. *Have at it, farm boy.*

Derrick's eyes narrowed. "A warlock? Like a witch?"

Martine twirled a strand of her long hair. "Yep. A witch, well he's male so he's a warlock."

His eyes grew narrower. "Male?"

Martine was growing impatient under the Gestapo's flashlight. "Yes, Derrick. He's a man. A nice man, who's like a father to me. He saved me from a curse. Took me in when my parents died."

Derrick's face softened. "I'm sorry. What kind of curse?"

This was where everything became a blur for Martine. "I don't know a lot about it. Escobar forbids me to speak of it. I've been with him for as far back as I can remember."

"Escobar being the warlock."

"Yes."

"Explain the word *familiar* to me."

"It means I am a source of energy to a warlock or witch. I sort of lend my energy to his spells."

Derrick brushed her hair from her face as the chill wind picked up and she automatically leaned her cheek into the caress, then pulled away because this was so not okay. "So you can cast spells?"

Martine shook her head and decided to be honest. "Not very good ones. I've learned a thing or two from Escobar, but I never produce the entire package, so to speak." Or someone with a package like Derrick's.

"Where is this Escobar?"

*Good fucking question.* "I don't know. You'd think by now he'd have tipped the witch world on its axis trying to find me, but nothing."

Derrick's gaze pierced hers. "So how did you end up in a rest area on the turnpike?"

Okay, now he was irritating her. If she had the answer to that she'd be the Amazing Kreskin. Jesus Christ with all the questions. "I don't know. Don't you think I'd tell you if I did?"

His eyes became dark. "Well, I don't know. You seem awfully secretive. You've been here almost a week and the better part of it was spent as a cat. Could be you're hiding something."

Yeah, she was hiding something? Please. If only she could own something as mysterious as that. Martine was beginning to think staying in her cat form had its perks. "You know what, farm boy? I didn't make you come and get me. I don't even know how I got where I ended up. So gimme a break. I didn't ask to come to the hills here and share your outhouse!"

Derrick's shoulders began to shake as he laughed. "Okay, okay. So you don't know anything about how you got here. Chill out. C'mon, let's go back to the cabin. You'll catch cold."

Martine thought that was a fine idea. She stalked off up the path that led to Derrick's "Martha Stewart's answer to a decorator's dream" cabin with quick strides. Like she'd ever ask to end up in a place like *this*.

Jerk.

Stupidhead.

Bunny killer...

\* \* \*

Martine was in the kitchen when he got back to the cabin. He'd admired the graceful sway of her fired up ass from behind as she stomped off in a fit over his questioning her existence.

She'd tied her hair up in a knot at the top of her head and silky strands kept falling around her face, escaping it. The fading light from the kitchen window gave her an ethereal glow that twisted Derrick's stomach into a knot.

Well, hell. It didn't hurt to admire the fact that she was beautiful, exotic, sensual, now did it? No. It was perfectly okay. He'd admired other women for their beauty...



Yeah! He had, so Martine was nothing special.

She was plainly ignoring him as she poured herself a glass of milk and averted her eyes to look out the window.

And this bugged the shit out of him, why?

Squaring his shoulders, he set off to placate the nice kitty. Whoever had said cats were moody must have had one as a lifemate. After all, it made sense to keep the peace between them. It meant more nookie.

"Martine? Look at me and stop behaving like a two-year-old," he demanded.

She slapped her glass of milk on the counter and put a hand on her hip. Hips he liked to hold when he drove into her. His cock stiffened and pressed against his jeans. "Oh, you mean me? The cat? Look, my furry friend, I have no clue how I ended up where I did and your insinuation that I did is really tweaking me! If I knew how to get back to where I came from do you think I'd choose to stay with you? Hah!"

Ooooh, she *was* tweaked. And he liked it. Her pheromones were flying around the room like flies on a hot July day. He sauntered over to her, not that he could help but head in her direction. His shaft was like a homing device. Her anger was pretty sexy and the blood was pumping on an all points bulletin through every available vein in his body.

He hovered over her and looked down into her green eyes, dark with anger. "Yeah? Well, I would take you back if I knew where 'back' was. I can't just dump you at the rest area."

Martine folded her arms over her chest. "And why not? You've taunted me with catnip and cheap canned cat food. What's a rest area dumping in the scheme of things?"

Derrick folded his hand around the back of her head and tilted it backward, gripping her hair in a firm, but tight clench. Their lips were but a breath apart. Her pert breasts just touched his chest and they were heaving. She was pissed. He widened his stance to encompass her legs, giving off a signal that was loud and clear, and fighting its way out of his jeans. "I don't do drive-bys." Their breathing was harsh in the silence of the kitchen, rasping in short, choppy beats.

Her tongue slipped over her lips. "Let go of me."

"Nope."

"If you don't..."

"You'll *what*?"

"Put a spell on you."

"Oooh, big, bad familiar that you are."

Her hands began to push at his chest and then changed course and gripped it.

"That's right. Don't you forget it."

"So go ahead. I *dare* you."

"I wouldn't if I were you."

"Well, I just did. C'mon, kitty. Whammy me."

"I don't feel like it."

"Chicken."

"Cat, thank you."

"Whassamatter. Afraid?"

"Of a dog? Fat chance."

"Werewolf, thank you."

"Same difference."

"Big difference."

"Says you, furry one."

"Look who's talking."

"I'm not a long-haired cat. Furry implies long hair."

"Nope, you're not."

"Do you like long-haired cats better than short?"

"Only in their *human* form."

"I *do* have good hair, don't I?"

"You wanna talk product or fuck?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"Always."

“Fuck.”

And that was all it took for initiative. Derrick dove for her lips and Martine didn't stop him. She devoured him back, suckling his tongue, dancing with it as her arms that had been pressed to his chest wound up around his neck.

Her body melted into his, fusing them together. His hands tore at her clothes, ripping the buttons on the sweater JC had loaned her so they scattered to the floor. He cupped her breasts as she drove her own small hands into the waistband of his jeans and stroked his harder-than-hard length.

Derrick heard his moan as she milked his heated shaft, vaguely aware of the fact that he didn't moan a lot in his illustrious career as a Casanova.

Tearing his lips from her, he allowed raw hunger to consume him as he pulled her head back to expose her neck. He seared a path of tongue and lips over the long column of it and ended at her nipple. Derrick let his hot breath linger over it, watching it tighten before placing his mouth over and inhaling.

Martine collapsed into him, pressing her breast further into his mouth. He took long licks of each nipple as he let go of her head and jammed her pants down around her ankles, leaving her naked and exposed, but for the shirt that was left hanging around her shoulders. Martine ripped at the button on his jeans and unzipped him with trembling fingers, releasing his cock and gripping it with a fevered caress.

His nostrils flared with the sweet scent of her cunt, he smelled the musky wetness, and his fingers burned to touch her. Derrick lifted her as he felt her jeans fall away, stepping over them as she wrapped her legs around his waist and gyrated against him, lifting herself high against his body.

He gripped her ass, kneading it, grinding her to him as he carried her to the counter, blindly reaching for the edge with one hand outstretched. Derrick set her on the cold tile and Martine bucked against the shock as she settled, scooting the lower half of her body toward him and leaning back on her elbows.

Her green eyes were glazed, shiny with anticipation as she matched his gaze. “I need to lick you, Martine.” His body tightened harshly as he heard his words. Saying

them, having the freedom to say them without her shying away made his cock scream for her and his head muddled with nothing but thoughts of consuming her, possessing every last inch of her, owning her...

Martine lifted her legs to place an ankle around each of his shoulders and arched her slender spine upward, offering herself to him. "Then lick me, Derrick."

He pulled her forward roughly and slipped his hands beneath her ass, holding her to his mouth. Her legs clenched around his neck as his tongue took its first taste of her. His senses exploded when he took the first long stroke of her flesh. Wet and hot, it glided over his needy tongue with a rush that left his taste buds on overload.

Derrick fought to slow himself. He would scare the shit out of her if he let himself be carried away by this fire that was burning him from the inside out, but Martine pulled his head to her, pressing her cunt flush to his tongue. She trembled beneath his tongue, arched into it, ground against it as he laid it flat over her clit, then swirled it over the swollen nub.

Dragging a finger between the cheeks of her ass, he found her slick passage and inserted a finger, pushing and pulling away in forceful strokes. Her pussy clenched him as her hands clutched at his head and she rode his tongue.

Derrick tasted her release, reveled in it as Martine yelled his name and her legs tightened around his neck, her heels digging into his back.

Derrick let her catch her breath, ragged and harsh, before removing his mouth from her and standing up. He needed to catch his too. He might hurt her and it troubled him to consider it. He stood between her creamy, long thighs and caressed her skin, letting his hands roam over her ribcage, cupping her small breasts, thumbing her nipples, fighting his hunger as it washed over him like high tide. He trailed a finger back to her cunt, slipping into the wet warmth, then back over her belly, along her throat in slow increments until he reached her mouth. He leaned over her, pressing his still jean clad cock to her as she wrapped her legs around his waist. Opening her eyes, she licked his finger, taking in Derrick's heated gaze as she suckled him.

He kissed Martine then, with hungry need, outlining her lips with his tongue, and she clung to him, digging her hands into his hair. Reaching between them he yanked his jeans and underwear off and she let go of his neck to run her hands along his back, molding him to her.

She was sleek and hot beneath him as she rose to meet his hips, letting his cock spread her flesh, tease her clit.

Derrick entered her with more force than he wished, grunting as she jolted from under him and he stilled himself, but she held his face in her hands and locked eyes with him. "I like to *feel* you in me, Derrick. I'm not ashamed to tell you I want to be taken, hard. You won't hurt me. I share your same desires. So *take* me, Derrick." Her breathy insistence made Derrick's cock swell within her.

Derrick bracketed her head with his arms on the cool counter as he pulled back and drove into her satiny heat. He gritted his teeth. "Christ, Martine. I don't want to hurt you."

Martine kissed his cheek, his forehead, and coaxed him by saying, "You won't hurt me, Derrick. I promise." She raised her hips again, moving away and rolling them back up to meet his.

He couldn't stop now if he wanted to and so he ignored his fear and pressed into her once more, hard and slick. Martine's eyes slid closed and her neck arched as she took the harsh thrusts with a long, throaty moan. She encouraged him and Derrick lost himself in the sweet oblivion that was Martine.

Her abandon as she met him stroke for stroke made him dizzy with lust, brimming with heat as it raced to his cock. Martine's small hands stroked his back, clutched his ass, driving him deeper into her, and she whispered his name in his ear as she panted. Taking her lips again Derrick felt his muscles ripple, tense and scream as he held on by a thread. "Come with me, Martine," he said against her lips as he felt her pussy clench his cock, milk his length with her strong muscles.

Martine whimpered and tightened her grip on his shoulders, bowing her back and screaming out her pleasure. Derrick exploded inside her. His seed poured, hot and thick from his cock as he threw his head back and howled.

Jesus Christ was his only thought as he tried to catch his breath. This woman... she was like no other sexual partner on the planet.

Every curve of her meshed with his in completion. Her sexual appetite matched his own carnal hunger.

Christ... this woman...

"Hey, farm boy. Help the poor kitty, would you? You weigh a ton and the tile is cold on my back."

Derrick didn't want to withdraw from her body yet, so he slipped his arms under her and cushioned her spine. "Better?"

Martine smiled that seductive little half-smile that made his gut clench. "Much, thank you," she said as she squirmed beneath him.

"Done with the hissy fit?"

She cocked an eyebrow at him. "I guess."

Derrick chuckled as he lifted her to a sitting position. "You like me, admit it."

"I won't. I like your *cock*."

"Yeah, but you like *me* just a little and you know it. You just can't admit it, *feline*." Derrick scooped her up and off the counter, carrying her to the bathroom as she draped her arms over his shoulders and shook her head.

"I do not."

Kissing the top of her head he realized it was suddenly important for her to *like* him, not just lust for him. Which was fucked up, but as he brought her to the bathroom and warmed a cloth with water to clean her, he also realized he'd never stuck around long enough with anyone after sex to care if they liked him. He'd never wanted to and even though they had been drawn into this by Eva's wacky prophecies -- Derrick still wanted to spend more time with her. His past lovers meant little to him. They were for

the moment -- he didn't worry past pleasing them in the heat of passion and then he went along his merry, single way.

Shit.

After cleaning them both, Derrick took Martine back into his arms and carried her to the bed, pulling back the covers. He laid her down and crawled in beside her, pulling her close to his side. Martine sighed softly, burrowing next to him and slinging a leg over his thigh. He found himself possessively giving her a goodnight kiss on the tip of her perfect nose and tucking the covers around her. Warmth, sweet and slow, suffused every pore in his body, creeping toward his chest where it settled in like a bear in hibernation.

Oh, hell.

He was *fucked*.

## Chapter Seven

Martine woke with the hard press of Derrick's back to hers and smiled with pleasure.

Then frowned.

This was so not good. Not at *all*. His touch was becoming familiar and his presence, gulp... welcome.

This was *not* the fuck buddy she'd planned on.

Derrick was a player too -- he didn't want her any more than she wanted him -- not forever anyway and certainly not in a way that had anything to do with the mundane -- like watching television. So it wouldn't be good if she ended up wanting -- wanting anything more than a good lay. Best she'd ever had in fact -- or whipped up in a pinch.

Stretching, Martine crawled out of bed and grabbed Derrick's shirt, pressing it to her nose before she threw it over her head. He smelled of the outdoors and some cologne she'd always identify with him if she ever smelled it again.

Shit. This was the girlie, stupid, he's all that and a bag of chips thing she'd seen on afternoon soap operas. Minus the fact that he probably wasn't her uncle's brother's cousin. Silly women, swooning over some tall dark hunk who was destined to break their hearts in an episode down the road.

Derrick was a werewolf.

She was a cat.

*Here, kitty, kitty...*

Martine squared her shoulders and went to find something to eat. She was ravenous after their night of lovemaking and all screwed up in her head about it.

She had to go back to New York.



*Soon.*

Her heart clenched at the thought of leaving here and it tweaked her. Dammit!

*Fuck buddies* didn't have any qualms about waving goodbye over their shoulders and avoiding the door that might hit them in the ass on the way out.

Sex.

This was just about the sex.

Martine sniffed Derrick's shirt again and shivered. Okay, so it wasn't *all* about the sex. There was more. She wasn't sure what *more* was, but it was *there*. In the pit of her belly, in her clogged throat, in her heart that was clenching painfully at the thought of going back to Escobar and her life of kitty condos, caviar and badly produced men.

Derrick was a full body tingle. A roller coaster ride. A rush of adrenaline. A soft place to fall...

A dangerous mixture of emotions Martine was unable to define seeped into every pore of her body nonetheless.

And she wanted *more*. More of Derrick in any way she could get him. She wanted to experience every last emotion -- painful or otherwise with him. Even if it meant when Escobar came calling she had to go back to something that seemed less like a life and more like a prison.

Martine made up her mind right then and there.

Full steam ahead.

Derrick or bust.

\* \* \*

Derrick woke with a smile on his face and instinctively reached out to find the warmth of Martine's slender body, but came up empty and that left *him* feeling empty.

Shit.

The emotions he'd experienced last night holding Martine in his arms flooded him, leaving him overwhelmed. Protective, possessive and pissed that he was all of those things -- were high on his list of priorities at this point. Derrick set that aside in favor of finding Martine.

His body tensed as he realized maybe she'd left. Would she go back to New York alone? Jesus Christ, would she do that? Just take off in her cat form and risk possibly being killed by something along the way?

Derrick bolted upright in the bed and reached for his jeans on the floor, throwing them on and zipping them haphazardly as he stormed out of the bedroom door. He stomped down the hall and blew into the kitchen to stop abruptly, catching sight of Martine at the kitchen table.

She took his fucking breath away, with the sunlight streaming in, glancing over her black curtain of hair. She sat at the edge of the chair, gazing out the window with a faraway look in those amazing green eyes.

Was she lonely for New York and her penthouse? Her caviar and cushy lifestyle? Escobar?

This Escobar dude was pissing him off. Who the fuck did he think he was anyway? And how did one go about finding a damn warlock?

Derrick took a deep breath and wandered leisurely over to the kitchen table, savoring her lithe form, composing himself.

Yeah, like that was possible to do around Martine.

He reached around her and tilted her head up to look at him. "Thinking about me?" he asked because he needed to hear her say it.

Martine's eyes crinkled at the corners and she snorted. "You'd like that wouldn't you, egomaniac?"

Derrick laughed, deep and low in his throat, running his finger down the tip of her pert nose. "Maybe," he admitted.

"Yeah, well don't get your suspenders in a knot over it, farm boy. Quit smoking the crack that is *you*. I like your sexual prowess. That's it," she stated, wrinkling her cute nose, but her almond green eyes flashed something Derrick couldn't ignore. It was more than desire, more than... whatever it was, it wasn't the look of lust she'd given him up till now.

Derrick pulled out the chair next to Martine's and smiled. "Tell me about your life with Escobar."

Martine shrugged and moved the curtain of her hair out of her face, cupping her chin. "What do you care about my life with Escobar?"

"Don't be difficult, cat. I'm curious. Were you raised with others? Do you have friends, siblings? Did you go to school?"

Martine exhaled. "No, I didn't go to school like all of the other children. I've seen it on TV, though. Looked like fun. I'm sorry I missed back to school night and naptime and getting the crap beat out of me on the playground. But I did earn a degree in Speech Communication on the Internet. I don't have any siblings and I don't have any friends."

Martine said it so matter-of-factly that Derrick couldn't decide if she was disappointed that her life had been so sheltered or if that was just the way it was. "You missed a lot growing up with this Escobar, huh?"

She shrugged, crossing her long, graceful legs. "I guess. I learned other things, things the kids who went to the prom never will. Six of one, half a dozen of the other."

Something occurred to Derrick then. "You're not a virgin," he blurted out.

"Even if I was, I wouldn't be anymore," she said as her full lips curved into a sardonic smile.

Derrick reached out and twisted a strand of her black hair between his fingers. "You know what I mean, Martine. If you've never had any friends and you haven't been exposed to life as most of us know it, how did you become so -- so sexually --"

"A good fuck, Derrick?" Her chuckle was throaty and it mocked him.

"Martine..." he warned.

She rolled her green eyes. "I told you, I can cast spells. Not very good ones, but spells nonetheless. When I want a man, I whip one up."

Ahhh. So she could have whatever she wanted, whenever she wanted it. "So sex is just an easy convenience for you. You wiggle your nose and there it is."

"And it's not *easy* for you? It would seem you don't lack sexual partners, wolf man. You just have to work harder than I do. Just because I don't have to stalk my prey doesn't make it any less valid."

Derrick chuckled. She had a point. "So you create men to have sex with?" Had she created many hunks in her man frenzy? That sent a frisson of irritation along Derrick's spine. She didn't need him, she didn't even have to go to the local bar and scope a guy. She didn't even have to bat those pretty eyes. She just had to say poof or snap her fingers, or whatever familiars did when they were horny.

Martine squirmed a bit in her chair. "Yeah, kinda..."

"What are these men like?"

Martine's sigh was rife with exasperation. "Men. Just regular old men. If I see someone on TV that appeals to me, I try to recreate him for myself. It's not a big deal." She shrugged her slim shoulders and looked back out of the window.

"So they're just like any old guy would be. All working *parts*." He emphasized parts because he had a sick desire to really shoot himself in the foot with some fake guy's twelve inches.

"Oh, I see. This is like a pissing contest, right? Who has the biggest sausage or something? Well, look, sometimes the men I create have -- well, issues, but I assure you that they function rather well, thank you. Now this discussion is over!" She got up and stomped off down the hall in a flurry of long limbs and hair that swung around her shoulders.

Derrick smirked. Martine's irritation told him that he'd hit a nerve. He must have *something* these other men didn't and he liked it that way.

\* \* \*

Martine decided she'd like to get to know Derrick's family better and she was going to do just that. Screw Derrick and his questions about her life, sheltered as it was. Yes, she'd spent a lot of time alone. Yes, her life had been small thus far, but it wasn't so bad. Yes, she'd often wondered what "normal" people did in their daily lives, but she'd brushed that aside in favor of security in the kitty condo of life.

Martine had no complaints. She liked her fake men, caviar and the Animal Planet. They didn't get the Animal Planet here in Timbuktu unless someone went up on the roof and held the friggin' antenna in their teeth while standing on one leg, facing north, when the moon was high.

New York had the Animal Planet *and* the Soap Channel...

Martine zipped up her jeans and moved soundlessly down the hall. Peeking around the corner she looked around, trying to locate Derrick. Well, humph. He was nowhere to be found.

Martine scooted out the door and hurried down the path toward Coreen's house. From afar it looked warm and inviting. A curl of smoke wove its way into the cloud-riddled sky. Martine took a deep breath and smiled, then caught herself and frowned.

What was all this country living doing to her? The great outdoors...

She was turning into a redneck.

Oh, God.

As she wandered toward the back of the house she caught sight of the man she'd seen earlier in her stay. He was taking the bunnies out of the big cage and stroking them fondly. He was great looking, Martine remembered, even if his penchant for small creatures was exceptionally odd for a werewolf. Maybe he was really a parakeet or something. God knew this Adams bunch was one helluva pack of weirdos. An eclectic compilation of various animal species.

"Hey," he said without turning around. "I'm Hector. You're Martine, right?"

"Yeah. Nice to meet you, Hector."

He grinned at her over his shoulder, his smile reminiscent of Max's and Derrick's. "You think I'm weird, don't you?"

Martine coughed. "Weird? Um, no, why would you think that?"

"I saw you watching me out of Derrick's window the other day and the vibe I got was definitely whack job stuff."

Martine shoved her hands in her pockets and gave him a sheepish look. "I --"

Hector stroked a bunny against his cheek. "It's okay. Everyone thinks I'm weird because I don't like to hunt when the moon is full, but they love me anyway. That's what makes this pack special. We don't fit into a neat box, but we're a pack and we love each other."

Martine smiled because they *were* whack jobs, especially if they thought she was Derrick's lifemate. A cat and a wolf... "You know what, Hector? I don't think you're weird at all. I think you all love each other in your own way and no one could ask for more."

Hector ran his hand down the back of a fluffy white rabbit, cooing to it. "So does that mean you'll stay?"

Martine couldn't quite explain why, but leaving didn't seem nearly as appealing as staying did. She didn't want to go back to New York and be alone, even if these people were nuts. She liked nuts. She used to only like them in her truffles, but she could adjust.

Martine shrugged. "We'll see, Hector."

"Derrick really likes you. I can tell. He gets mad and stomps all over the place about you. He doesn't want to, but he does. He's never done that when he's been around other women."

*Other women?* Martine didn't want to know about the "other" women. Surely that was a bad sign. The old green-eyed monster.

"I think you should give us a chance, Martine. You just might find that this is where you belong."

Martine cocked her head at Hector and smiled. "Thanks, Hector. I'll give it some thought. Catch you later, okay?"

Hector nodded and went back to his bunnies as Martine made her way toward the house.

She was hesitant to just walk in, so she knocked.

JC answered, her long dark hair in a ponytail and a piece of thin paper sticking out of her mouth. She pulled the paper out and smiled. "Hey, Martine! Sorry," she said

as she held up the paper. "I was giving Max's sisters a perm. C'mon in and I'll introduce you." JC grabbed her by the hand and pulled her into the kitchen where two women sat with curlers in their hair and magazines in their laps. "Avery and Natalie, this is Derrick's lifemate, Martine."

Martine shifted from foot to foot. This lifemate thing was really a kind of big deal with these people. She felt like she had a label stamped on her forehead. Martine raised a shy hand and waved at them.

"Damn..." Avery said. "You're a cat? How cool is that? Nice to meet you."

They accepted her shifted form as if she were simply declaring she was from another country. Martine wondered vaguely what they'd think if she were, say, an armadillo.

Natalie waved and smiled at Martine. "Man, Derrick got lucky, huh, girls? You should see some of the women he comes ho --"

"Natalie!" JC interrupted sharply. "Martine is *the* woman. No more talk of anything else."

Natalie blushed. "I'm sorry, Martine. I didn't mean... Well, it doesn't matter. You *are* the one and we're so glad you're here."

Martine didn't know how to define the warm curl of happiness she was experiencing, so she tried to ignore it even if it did make her chest tight. "It's all right," she assured Natalie. "I like being here too."

JC nodded her consent. "Does this mean that you and Derrick have decided to make nice? I know it's hard for you, Martine. I really never imagined myself living way out here, but I love it now and I love Max."

"How did you *know* you loved Max?" Martine really wanted a simple answer to that.

JC stopped rolling Avery's hair and smiled. "I freaked out at first, when I found out he was a wolf. That was some scary shit, I'll tell you, and then, I went home and Max came back here and all of a sudden none of it mattered. Not that he was a werewolf, not that I was human, none of it. I didn't want to stay in Hoboken without

Max. It just all came together and I knew I didn't want to be without him. I couldn't imagine never talking to him again, being near him again, the -- you know, doing the good stuff again. So here I am." She smiled at Martine, comforting and sweet.

Martine was overwhelmed. If these were signs of love she was in deep kitty litter. Her heart thrashed in her chest and her fingers shook.

JC cocked her head at Martine. "You, okay? You look a little pale."

No, she was not fucking okay. She needed to think.

A lot.

"I'm fine, JC, and thanks. I think I just need to catch my breath here. I'm going to take a walk. I thought I might come hang out for a bit, but now I find that I really need some alone time."

JC smiled and came to hug Martine. "It's all about the acceptance. Acknowledging it is the first step," she assured her.

*Yeah, Martine thought as she headed back out the door, it was like a damn twelve step program with this bunch.*



## Chapter Eight

Martine ran, sprinting over the winter-deadened grass and stretching her feline legs as she went. She needed to think and in her cat form she was free to escape to places no one would look for her.

Crossing a field, Martine skipped through a pasture of horses, avoiding the pucky.

Oh, yuck. Who could live in a place like this? It stunk! This was nothing like her penthouse. Nothing like it, yet as she came upon a tree and circled it, the idea of napping on a limb high above the world below appealed to her.

Reaching her claws upward, she dug them into the bark and scratched for all she was worth.

Love.

What the hell was that about? If Derrick was her lifemate, certainly they could have been properly introduced long before this.

Martine climbed the tree in three long strides, carefully choosing a branch that was thick enough to curl up on.

Think. She needed to think. About Derrick and this country living and being a part of a family she rather liked. She needed to figure out where the hell Escobar fit into this and what would happen to her if whomever had cursed her found out she'd left her warlock.

A chill skittered up her spine. This curse thing... what was it all about anyway? No harm had come to her so far. What was the big deal?

The big deal was Escobar and the fear he'd instilled in her to never stray from him. So she didn't. Not until now and this freedom was a little empowering. Which

brought her full circle to Derrick and this gnawing feeling that he meant more to her than just a good lay.

Martine yawned and curled into a ball. No more Derrick, no more lifemates, no more wacky chicken soup theories.

She needed a nap. Some caviar would be peachy, but a nap would have to do.

\* \* \*

"Where the hell is my cat?" Derrick yelled as he stormed into the Adams house and stopped in front of Max at the kitchen table.

Max looked up from the table and frowned. "Now she's *your* cat? How nice. What's with the sudden change of heart? You starting to like the scoop away, multiple formula cat litter all of a sudden?"

"Shut up, Max. I haven't been able to find her anywhere and she's been gone for hours." Derrick's stomach was in a knot and he couldn't figure out why. He just needed to find Martine. Jesus, she was a pain in the ass.

"She was just here a few hours ago, Derrick. We had a nice chat," JC said as she came from the family room and went to sit with Max at the kitchen table, smiling that secret smile at him only the two could share.

"Hours ago? *Hours?*" Derrick yelped.

JC nodded. "She said she needed to catch her breath -- who wouldn't with you for a lifemate -- and then she left."

"Well she's not at the cabin so where the hell is she?" Derrick erupted, pacing the length of the kitchen.

Max caressed JC's hand and asked, "What time was she here, honey?" He shot an angry look at Derrick. "Quit yelling. She's probably just out wandering somewhere to get away from you."

"It was probably four hours ago, Derrick, and she just said she needed to think. Maybe that might be a good thing for *you* to do too."

"Four hours? Jesus Christ! She's a pampered feline. She's never left her cushy penthouse and she's what? Off hoeing the land now? No, something's wrong," Derrick insisted.

JC snickered. "Why would you care anyway, Derrick? Weren't *you* the one who was just complaining about a cat being your lifemate?"

Max pushed himself out of his seat and slapped Derrick on the shoulder. "C'mon, Derrick, let's go find your kitty." He kissed JC on the lips and grabbed a jacket.

Derrick followed close behind Max as they went out the door and headed down the wide front porch steps. "Shit, Max, she could be hurt."

"Um, yeah, Derrick, she could be, you dipshit. Why didn't you come find her sooner?"

Derrick sighed his exasperation. "Because she was pissed off and I figured I'd better let her have a chance to chill out."

"Good, really good job, Derrick," Max said sarcastically. "Okay, look, can you smell her?"

Derrick flared his nostrils as the wind picked up. "No. Shit. I can't smell a thing!"

Max looked at Derrick pointedly. "If we shift we can cover more ground. Let's do it."

"Max, you don't think she tried to get back to New York, do you?"

"No, I don't think she tried to do that," a voice, soft as a whisper, low and melodic, said from behind Derrick.

Both Max and Derrick turned to find a tall, slender man walking out of the darkness just to the corner of the steps. He wore a tunic and his blond hair was scraped back from his face in a ponytail. His skin literally glowed in the dark of the night, iridescent and pale, and his eyes glinted in the moonlight.

Derrick's nostrils flared and his muscles flexed. "Who the fuck are you?"

The tall man held up his hand in a calm, slow fashion and said, "I'm Escobar, her warlock."

Derrick charged Escobar, snorting like a bull, but Max grabbed him and shoved him hard. "Stop it, Derrick! For Christ's sake, calm down. Maybe he can help us find Martine!"

Derrick shoved Max back. "He's the one who got us into this in the first place!" Derrick yelled over the increasing wind. The night grew colder, a brisk wind picking up and forcing Derrick to pull the collar of his jacket over his throat. Jesus, Martine wasn't used to this kind of weather. She'd freeze to death. He had to find her.

And that's when he knew he wanted Martine forever.

At the very second when he thought he might never see her again. Beautiful, long, graceful, smart-mouthed damned cat.

Derrick knew because the thought of her hurt out there somewhere made his stomach heave and his heart so heavy in his chest he'd rather rip it out than feel like this.

He stalked over to Escobar and jammed his face in his. "How do you know she wouldn't go back to New York, warlock?"

Escobar's face remained as serene and calm as if Derrick had just asked if he liked vanilla or chocolate ice cream. "I know my Martine. She won't venture far, but she's not used to the wilds of the great outdoors either." His statement was a warning.

Derrick placed his face inches from Escobar's and said through clenched teeth, "Then can't you put out the mojo on her or something? Like smell her out with that magic of yours? And why the hell are you showing up now?"

Escobar took a step back and gave Derrick a knowing look. "No, Derrick, I can't just summon her. Martine does as she pleases and obviously she's chosen to go off on her own, which doesn't surprise me, young man. You are a little hot under the collar."

Max yanked on Derrick's coat. "Derrick, stop it. We have to find Martine and we'll deal with this -- this --"

"Warlock," Escobar offered with a gentle tone that Derrick detected held a bit of condescension.

"Don't go anywhere, Escobar," Derrick warned. "When I get back we have some things to talk about, got that?"

Escobar rocked back on his heels and cocked an eyebrow at Derrick. "Oh, indeed."

Derrick gave him one last angry frown and turned to head toward the field with Max following closely behind.

"Escobar, are they gone?"

Escobar chuckled at the sound of his beloved's voice. "Yes, darling, they're off to find my wayward familiar."

A short round woman sidled up to Escobar and he wrapped an arm around her shoulders. She peeked up at him with adoring eyes. "So how long do you think it'll be before they get back here with her? It's been a long day, sweetheart. I'm tired."

Escobar kissed the top of her head with affection. "Patience, my Eva, patience..."

\* \* \*

*You know, life in the backwoods of New Jersey just plain sucks,* Martine mused as she considered her latest predicament. Sighing, she attempted to untangle her hair from the branches and shivered. God, it was cold in Clampetville!

What had she been thinking when she'd shifted to human form? Clearly she hadn't been thinking. Actually, truth be told, she'd been dreaming about farm boy. Nice, very nice. Way to top all of this really good backwater shit off.

Sex, sex, sex. Her fuck buddy was going to be the death of her.

Okay, so she got a little excited and shifted in her sleep, now she was caught on the tree from hell and freezing her ass off, because of course when she'd shifted, she'd ditched her clothes.

Of all the indignities...

Martine struggled to turn her head to get a better look at exactly how badly she was caught, but she couldn't move her head more than an inch or two.



Good.

Fine.

Whatever.

The scratching became louder. Martine heard the bark being torn and the low, hungry continual growl of whatever the fuck was down there.

She could shift! Shift into her cat form and climb higher into the tree! Oh, sometimes it was good to be a shapeshifter. Not that she'd had much success so far. If she had she could have done it much sooner, but Martine couldn't shift if she was stressed and having her hair all caught up in a tree was stressful.

She did, after all, have nice hair that was literally being yanked out by its roots.

Martine closed her eyes and tried to focus on her body, but Old Yeller was down there tearing up the tree for all it was worth and she couldn't feel the vibe of her body.

Oh, shifting don't fail me now!

And suddenly there was silence.

Oh, blessed relief, now maybe she could get some peace. She scrunched her eyes shut.

“Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr!”

Martine popped an eye open and stared into the eyes of the scariest damn dog she'd ever seen in her life. He'd climbed the short distance from the ground and was looking to make her his meal.

Oooh, those were some big teeth he had, dripping with saliva and giving her that “oh what nice gams you have” look. His demonic red eyes narrowed as he lifted his jowls and growled again. His head was tremendous, solid and bulging. He was a golden color, Martine saw in her moment of panic, thinking it was rather pretty in the moonlight.

Death...

Well, okay, so she was going to die. Not a problem, but she would have liked to tell Derrick goodbye just one more time and thank his family for being so kind to her.





## Chapter Nine

"Baby, wake up. C'mon, feline, it's time for you to open those pretty eyes."

Martine fought to fend off the fog that enveloped her head as she pricked her ears to the sound of Derrick's voice.

A hand brushed across her forehead, solid, warm, slightly callused. "C'mon, Martine. Wake up, baby."

*Baby?* Was this Derrick of ye old grumpy exterior? Calling her *baby* no less. This was definitely reason to open her eyes.

Lips, firm and heated, whispered over her cheek, nuzzling her.

Martine opened her eyes in increments. "What happened?" she asked groggily.

"You were almost eaten alive by a big, bad dog because you didn't stay where you belonged. What were you thinking, going off into the woods by yourself, Ms. Park Avenue?" he whispered into her ear.

Martine struggled to sit, but Derrick held her in place with a firm hand to her shoulder. "I was thinking, is what I was doing and I got all caught up on a limb and then... well, then..." She tapered off because it got ugly from there on out.

"Yes, that's exactly what you did and a dog, rabid mind you, came along and decided to make you a midnight snack. Don't ever do that again, Martine. Understand me?" Derrick said, urgent and hissing each word in her ear.

So did this mean like she would *have* the chance to "never do something like that again"?

He moved to lie over her torso, his eyes finding hers, filled with things Martine didn't understand.

"I'm sorry. I couldn't shift and then... you came to get me..." Martine's throat clogged with emotion and she wasn't quite sure why.

Derrick ran a thumb down her cheek, cupping her jaw. "Just like I'll *always* come to get you, familiar."

*Always?* Her confusion must have shown on her face because Derrick said, "Always, Martine. We're lifemates, cat. Adjust."

Martine's heart warmed. "You were pretty impressive there, farm boy," she teased as Derrick slid his arms beneath her and pulled her close.

Derrick chuckled. "Yeah, rednecks and all, ya know?"

Martine giggled and then said with all seriousness. "Thank you, Derrick. I'm sorry I caused so much trouble."

"Well, don't you worry your pretty little head, a head that has a whole lot less hair now too."

Martine's hand flew to her hair. A chunk of it was missing. Of all the goddamned things to lose. "My hair," she wailed into his neck.

"I could have left you there, you know, naked, vulnerable, *with* hair."

"Product," she mumbled.

"Huh?"

"Product. I won't need as much now."

Derrick chuckled again and kissed the top of her half-haired head and laid her back down on the bed. "It'll grow back, lifemate. Now you rest and we'll talk in the morning, okay?"

Who was this man? Tender and gentle, caring for her as if she were as fragile as china?

Who gave a crap? Derrick wasn't grumpy. Things were looking up!

\* \* \*

"Is she awake?" Eva asked.

Escobar smiled. "Yes, and I'm sure once she hears what we've done we're in for some mouthing off."

Eva chuckled. "Who cares as long as they're together?" she said jauntily.

Derrick came around the corner of his living room after making sure Martine was comfortably situated in the shower and stopped short. His face changed from content to a mask of fury. "You!" he shouted at Escobar. "What are you doing here? And what are you doing with my grandmother?"

Eva went to Derrick and hugged him hard to keep him from Escobar. "Don't be a shit, Derrick. Escobar is a good man as you'll soon find out."

Derrick hugged his grandmother back and then held her at arm's length. "So read any chicken soup lately, Gram? What the hell is going on here?"

Eva looked guiltily up at Derrick, her blue eyes hesitant. "Well, honey bunch, that's what Escobar and I are here to talk about."

"Escobar!" Martine had showered and was now in the middle of the living room, wearing one of Derrick's T-shirts and not looking too happy. She ran to Escobar, first hugging him, then swatting his shoulder. "Where have you been? I've been so worried and how the hell did I get here? What is going on?" Martine shot Eva a confused look.

Eva stepped forward and took Martine's hand, pulling her into an embrace. "I'm Eva, sweetheart, and it's so nice to finally meet you."

"The chicken soup lady?" Martine said in disbelief.

Eva nodded and smiled at Martine. "Yep, that's me."

"Gram," Derrick interrupted. "So what happened to Africa and the Peace Corps?"

Now Escobar looked confused. "Peace Corps, Eva?"

Eva looked at all of them. "Well, I had to tell them *something*, darling. I couldn't tell them that we were off fighting a curse, now could I?"

Derrick wanted an answer and he wanted one now. "Curse? Okay, Gram, fess up. Tell me all about this curse because I have a funny feeling you have something to do with it."

Escobar stepped forward and put his arm around Eva's shoulders. "Yes, she helped me break the curse. Your grandmother is quite the tiger."

Eva smiled coyly up at Escobar and blushed. "You tell them, darling. I'm plum bushed."

"Martine, sweetheart, you know you were sent to me so that I could protect you, right?"

Martine nodded with a slow bob of her head. "Yes."

Escobar smiled. "Well, you know you were given to me by your parents. I was your father's best friend and his dying wish was that I be your guardian. There was a witch named Giselle and she wanted your father at all costs. She was responsible for your parents' deaths... She was a jealous old hag who hated your mother. She cursed you as a result. It was very ugly to say the least. You were cursed to spend your life as a cat, but I managed to intervene to a degree and give you back some of your life. The only trouble was, you could never leave me as a result. It was too much of a risk to let you out of my sight. Giselle could have found you and then I shudder to think of what might have happened, but we fixed that, didn't we, darling," he said to Eva.

Martine took a deep breath. Oh my God. She knew so little about her parents... and now to find this out? Martine grabbed the arm of the couch and Derrick came to wrap a protective arm around her, steadying her.

"Wanna tell me what this darling stuff is about, Gram?" Derrick asked.

Eva rolled her eyes. "Escobar and I are lovers, honey bunch. I've always known about Martine and I've always thought she'd be a perfect mate for you. So when the opportunity came about to break Giselle's spell, it was the perfect time to introduce you to Martine." Eva gave them a smug smile.

"Wait a minute!" Martine shouted. What the hell was going on? "What about the chicken soup?"

Eva waved her hand dismissively. "That's all just garbage to get you to do what I want," she chuckled.

Derrick's face went slack. "What?"

Eva laughed a short bark. "You don't really believe I read your prophecy from chicken soup, do you? You all are too much."

"But Max and JC and..."

Eva scoffed. "Just a bunch of bunk. JC did my hair for me once and I fell in love with her. So I decided she was perfect for Max. Nothing more and no chicken soup involved."

Martine blinked several times and then she managed to spit out, "And me?"

"Oh, sweetie, I've known you forever. You just don't know it. Escobar and I go way back. I knew you were perfect for my Derrick, so when the opportunity presented itself in the way of that bitch Giselle, Escobar walloped you with a spell, shoved you in the cat carrier and dropped you off on the turnpike. Simple. I knew Derrick wouldn't defy a chicken soup prophecy. You had to be somewhere safe. We knew Giselle wouldn't find you way out here. Everything just came together."

Martine knew she should be angry. She knew she should demand more answers, but she was just too stunned to do much but stare aghast at them. Derrick was the first to speak. "I should be really angry with you, Gram. Toying with us like that, but I just can't." He kissed the top of Martine's head and smiled at his grandmother.

"So you and Escobar... all this time?" Martine asked.

Escobar nodded his head. "Yes, Martine, and now you're free from Giselle. It took some doing, but Eva came up with a plan and we utilized it!"

Eva clapped her hands together. "We kicked her ass all over northern Europe, evil woman. So go on, now. You two go make happy and we'll split."

"Wait!" Martine stopped them. "What about my parents? What happens now? All those years I lived in the penthouse? Will I still be able to shift?" Martine had a million questions swirling in her head. They made her dizzy and tired.

Escobar held his arms out to Martine and she went to him and let him envelop her in an embrace. "It's all fine now, Martine. I did what I had to -- to protect you. I know it meant keeping you from the world, but that was just the way it had to be. I trusted no one until I met Eva. Your parents were good people and they loved you enough to entrust me with your care. I know you have lots of questions and I'll be happy to answer them when we have more time to visit."

"Will you go away now? Will I see much of you again?" Martine's throat was clogged with trepidation. She'd never been without Escobar and the world was pretty darn scary after last night.

"Yes, my spoiled one. I'm sure you'll see Eva and I often. For now you make nice with your handsome man."

Martine looked up into Escobar's mischievous eyes. "What were you thinking when you hooked me up with a wolf?"

Escobar laughed, hearty and rich to Martine's ears. "I was thinking someone had to take the spoiled out of you, young lady, and Derrick was just the man to do it."

Martine hugged him one last time. "Thanks, Escobar, for taking care of me, for keeping me from harm and *I guess*, for finding me Derrick."

Derrick stuck his hand out to Escobar and took Martine with the other. "Thanks, Escobar, and what do you mean, *you guess*? What kind of a thing is that to say to the man who saved your feline hide last night?"

Martine whirled around and faced Derrick, a gleam in her eye. "You ripped my hair out. Look at it!" Martine held up a strand that was ragged.

Derrick pulled her to him and said, "Let's shave it off. You could be like one of those hairless cats."

"Derrick Adams, shut up now!"

"But, baby, think about all the money we'll save on product," he teased.

"I'll product you, farm boy. I'd bet I can't even get product out here in Clampetville!"

Derrick tugged her by the hand toward the bedroom, waving to Escobar and Eva as he did. "C'mon and I'll show you *my* product." Derrick wiggled his eyebrows at her.

Martine's laughter rang out through the small cabin as she followed him down the hall.

"Well, darling," Escobar said to Eva, "I think you done good."

"Think they'll kill each other?"

Escobar ran his finger down Eva's nose. "I don't want to stay to find out. C'mon, let's go find another part of northern Europe to raise hell in."

Eva chuckled at Escobar. "Oh, darling, I love when you talk dirty to me..."

\* \* \*

Derrick deposited Martine on the bed and stripped his clothes off. "C'mon, lifemate, let's get naked."

Martine giggled. "Oh, all right, but listen up, farm boy, there will be no more talk of me going without product out here in the hills, even if we have to airlift it in. Are we clear?"

Derrick shrugged out of his shirt and Martine gave him an appreciative look as he threw it to the floor. "Deal, feline. Now let's get busy."

Martine sat up and lifted her shirt over her head as Derrick tore at his jeans and flopped down beside her, pulling her into his embrace and kissing her soundly. Martine sighed into his mouth contentedly.

"What was that for, cat?"

Martine slid her body along his, letting the heat of his skin seep into hers. "It was a happy sigh, so shut up, farm boy, and like it." She grinned at him.

Derrick slid his tongue over her lower lip and cupped her breast, thumbing her throbbing nipple to a stiff peak. Martine squirmed beneath his touch and let her hand stray to his cock, stiff and hot. She grasped him firmly and stroked him in long pulls, pulling from his mouth and nipping her way along his rippled abdomen to graze her lips over his shaft.

Derrick's hips pushed upward, seeking her mouth, and Martine smiled the smile of the utterly wicked as she took him in her mouth as far as her throat would allow and closed her lips around his silken length.

Derrick's hands found her hair and clutched it as she moved her lips in long passes over him, kneading his balls, tightened in anticipation, with slight pressure. Derrick hissed as her teeth grazed him, murmuring her name as she turned to straddle him, bracketing his strong thighs with her hands.

Derrick's hands ran over her legs, kneading them, caressing the sensitive skin of her inner thighs as he pulled her to his mouth.

His tongue connected with her pussy and sharp arrows of heat lit their way along her exposed flesh as Martine sank into the warmth of his mouth, gliding over his tongue as they pleased each other.

A sharp tide of sweet heat wove its way over her nerve endings as Derrick suckled her clit, alternately licking it, then nibbling her until Martine's muscles clenched and a growl came from deep in her throat. When Derrick slipped a thick finger inside of her, plunging deeply into her slick passage, Martine bucked, riding it as her hips rolled toward the slide of them.

When Martine came it slithered over her, picking up a pace she couldn't keep up with as her skin burned and Derrick's tongue brought her to orgasm. Her mouth clamped around him and he shuddered beneath her, pulling at her hips until she released him, sagging against his hard body.

He soothed her with hot hands, strong and sure, until Martine was able to breathe.

Derrick sat up, pulling Martine to him so that her back was against his chest, cupping her breasts as he held her to him. Martine's eyes slid shut as a new heat rose in her.

The need to have Derrick imbedded in her deep, hard, fast.

Martine rolled away from him and lay on her belly, lifting herself high in the air, begging Derrick to enter her.

Derrick complied and soon she felt the hot press of his cock between the folds of her pussy, his big hands gripping her hips as he lay flush against her.

"Christ, Martine, I need to fuck you."

Martine gritted her teeth at his words, beguiling, sensuous. "Then fuck me, Derrick," she demanded, husky and low, her throat raw from pent up need.

Her thighs trembled as she braced herself for his thick entry. Derrick sat between her thighs and drove into her in one fluid thrust.



Martine's cry was sharp upon entry and she pushed her hips back at him with force, so he knew she wanted this as much, if not more, than he did.

Derrick growled, low and eerily feral as his hips moved to match Martine's thrusts. The clap of sticky flesh further pushed Martine to an edge she'd yet to stand at. An army of chills skittered up her spine and when he spread her flesh, dipping into it to caress her clit Martine could no longer hold back. She reared her head up and reached around to grab his neck as she came yet again.

Derrick tensed. His cock pumping into her grew harder with each stroke until he too let go, a hot stream of release that flooded Martine and had her groaning along with him. They fell forward together on the bed, heaving for breath. Derrick ran his hand over her head, brushing her hair from her face as he held her securely against him.

"Well, cat, that was really something, huh?" Derrick asked on a fresh gasp for breath.

Martine chuckled from beneath him. "Yeah, you're all right, farm boy."

He pinched her ass playfully. "This would be the part where you tell me you love me, Garfield."

Martine lifted her head to find Derrick's gaze intent and waiting. "Really, wolf man? I don't remember you telling me you loved me..."

He kissed the tip of her nose and grinned. "Nope, I didn't."

Martine pursed her lips and shot him a dirty look. "Nope, you didn't."

"Oh, fine, I'll go first. I love you, feline. I don't know why and I don't know how, but I do. There, how was that?"

"Oh, okaaaay, I love you too, farm boy."

Derrick withdrew from her and dragged her into his strong embrace as Martine snuggled against him, and then she had a thought. "You know, if we have children..."

"Yeah?"

Martine giggled. "We can call them cat dog, you know like the cartoon."

Derrick's laughter rumbled in his chest, vibrating against her own. "My pack just keeps getting weirder and weirder."

“Well, now that I’m here we’ll have to see what I can do about that. I’ll introduce them to caviar and the finer things in life like penthouse shopping and --”

“Sweetheart. There will be absolutely no catnip involved, will there?”

Martine chuckled as she kissed his lips. “I swear on my multiple formula cat litter...”

**The End**

## **Dakota Cassidy**

Dakota Cassidy found writing quite by accident and it's "been madness ever since." Who knew writing the grocery list would turn into this?

Dakota loves anything funny and nothing pleases her more than to hear she's made someone laugh. She loves to write in many genres with a contemporary flair.

Dakota lives with her two handsome sons, a dog and a cat. (None of them shape shift -- that we know of.) She'd love to hear from you -- she always answers her e-mail!  
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