



Shane's
FURY

The Lost Shifters Series Book 10

STEPHANI HECHT

Shane never prepared to do what no other Leopard shifter had done before and that was fall in love. Try telling that to his heart because from the first touch of a certain Panther named Trevor, there was no turning back for Shane. Then just as Shane found his mate and true happiness, Trevor is brutally torn from him when a Cobra shifter, bent on revenge, captures the Panther. Now Shane finds himself helpless as he scrambles to find his lover before the Cobra enacts his final act of vengeance and kills Trevor.

Ever since his captivity, Trevor has known pain. He's known degradation. He's known terror. However, he also knows that Shane will be coming for him. And gods help the Cobra when Shane finally does arrive because hell hath no equal to a Leopard's fury. Trevor only hopes that Shane finds him in time, or else all hope will be lost.

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Shane's Fury
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Shane's Fury

Lost Shifter Ten

By

Stephani Hecht

Dedication

To Nikole. You're the best friend anyone can ask for. Thanks for being there for him.

Chapter One

Funny how one could get used to fear. All they had to do was live with it every day.

Dalton curled his fingers around the bars of the tiny cage as he stared at his newest masters. Like his previous owners, they were snake shifters and, like his previous owners, this new batch was just as mean. It'd only taken a few jolts from their cattle prod for Dalton to reach that conclusion.

His slavers seemed to be part of the same nest ...coven...batch, whatever the hell a group of snakes were called. Unlike the previous gang, a mix of breeds and sexes, this bunch was all male Cottonmouths who were tall, muscular and horrific looking because their bodies were stuck halfway between shift. Not quite human, not quite snake, they were some kind of gross cross. It would seem like they had gathered only the bad features from both forms, too. So Dalton felt pretty certain none of them would be winning any beauty pageants anytime soon. Not even the makeup gurus from Toddlers and Tiaras could cover up that kind of ugly.

One of them glanced in his direction and Dalton felt a shiver slither down his spine as he caught himself locked into the creature's red-eyed gaze. A smile curled the man's thin lips as his forked tongue darted out. His molted brown skin glistened under the poor lighting of the industrial garage. Dalton took in a deep breath and immediately regretted it when he got a nose full of reptile stink mixed with oil and rusted metal.

"The kitty looks tasty," the snake observed, his eyes glowing with hunger.

Damn if a whimper didn't bubble from Dalton's throat. Not exactly his proudest moment, but not even a full-grown Jaguar or Tiger shifter could have been brave when being stared at by a dozen Cottonmouths. What chance did a puny Lynx like him have?

"You can't eat him, Kirk," the biggest snake snarled. A mountain of a man, Dalton immediately pegged him as the leader within ten minutes of the bunch buying him. His assumption was later proven true that same day when the man had killed, then eaten one of the members of his own group. Dalton still had nightmares in which the soundtrack was that snake's final screams for mercy.

"Why not?" Kirk moved closer as that freaky tongue worked over

his mouth.

Even in his human form, Dalton still felt small and defenseless. Add in the fact that he was trapped inside an overly large dog cage and he realized that if Kirk did attack, Dalton could do nothing but scream for help that would never come. He cowered to the back corner of the cage and tucked his knees to his chest.

Since they'd only given him one change of clothing since they'd first captured him eight months ago, his cheap jeans were crusted over with grime and they smelled nearly as bad as the garage. That still didn't stop him from lowering his face onto his knees and hiding his eyes.

Even though he was a mere Lynx, the act of submission made him want to growl in protest. He told his inner predator to get over it. When they'd first murdered his family and taken him to his new life, Dalton quickly learned that defiance only brought pain and humiliation.

"We bought him for breeding, not food," the leader reminded Kirk.

Even though that hadn't been the first time Dalton heard what his new purpose in life was to be, a wave of revulsion and despair still slammed into him. Tears built up in his eyes. Never had he felt so alone...so cold. He just wanted to curl up with his littermates so he could be warm and safe.

That would never happen though, because all his littermates had been killed, along with his parents. For some reason only known to the snakes, they'd spared Dalton and frankly he wondered if his family hadn't been the lucky ones.

He peered up from under his dark bangs only to see Kirk still eyeing him up. Now Dalton knew how all those rabbits suffered when he and his siblings used to hunt them down. All he was missing were the long ears, wiggling nose and fluffy tail and the picture would be frigging complete.

He lowered his head again and sucked in a breath as he spotted a shadow of movement from the corner of his eye. What in the hell is that? All of the members of the snake group are already here. Unless they invited company over, but somehow I don't see snakes as the social let's-get-together-for-Scrabble types. Careful to avoid alerting Kirk to what he was doing because some inner instinct screamed to Dalton to keep his discovery a secret, he tilted his head to the side for a better look.

All he saw were the same row of empty cages, the usual beat down couch and card table. That didn't fool him for a moment because he knew for certain that somebody was there. The only thing that remained unanswered was whether that somebody was friend or foe.

Then just as he was about to give up any hope of seeing the newcomer, a small figure slipped from the shadows. Not reaching

six-feet and weighing less than two hundred pounds, the man was tiny compared to most shifter standards. No fear came from the man even though it didn't take a genius to figure the odds were seriously stacked against him. Either this guy was suicidal or he was....nah, just suicidal because there could be no other explanation for somebody willingly walking into a den...coven...nest...damn! Dalton vowed if he ever got free, the first thing he'd do is look that fact up because now it really started to bother him.

Dalton couldn't make out the strange man's features because the hood of the shifter's black hood covered his face, but the pair of short swords in his hands let it be known he didn't come for a coffee date. The way the weapons hung loose in his hands screamed that the weapons were a favored accessory used often.

Kirk turned and took in the newcomer. Recognition flared in the snake's eyes. He even let out a soft whimper of fear. Dalton's nostrils flared as the waves of terror came off not just Kirk but the rest of the snakes. Whoever this shifter was, he must be pretty nasty to generate that kind of reaction from a room full of murdering, heartless monsters. A few of them even took several steps back and one poor sap pissed his pants.

Ha! It doesn't feel so good to be afraid, does it, you forked-tongue freaks? A soft, hysterical sounding chuckle slipped past Dalton's dried lips.

"Shane, what are you doing here?" Kirk asked, his body trembling so violently Dalton could see it from his cage.

Shane? Dalton's heart lurched. He knew that name, although the one who spoke it before had done so in a loving way instead of with the fear that saturated Kirk's voice.

"You know why I'm here," Shane replied in a bone-chilling calm tone.

"We don't have him."

"I already know that, you brain-fucked belly walker. If Trevor was here, I would have him safely recovered and you all would already be dead for touching what is mine."

Trevor! I knew it! With a soft sound of desperation, Dalton surged to the front of the cage and once more curled his fingers around the bars. Fear mixed with hope as he worried that Shane would miss his presence. Since they'd tucked him in a far, dark corner there were no guarantees that Shane wouldn't overlook the poor Lynx in the crate.

Then the snakes all circled Shane and Dalton began to worry that the man wouldn't survive long enough to notice anything let alone a caged Lynx. His throat constricted painfully as he saw six snakes charge the small male.

Shit, there was no way Shane stood a chance. Not only were they all way bigger, but it was just him. While Trevor had always spoken of how skilled a fighter Shane was, nobody could take on six

attackers at once. That only worked out well in action and ninja flicks. Then Dalton detected another feline scent, this one much closer. Turning his head, he spotted a feline shifter crouched within inches of the cage. Dressed head to toe in black fatigues, the man had speckled brown hair and amber eyes. He flashed a reassuring smile before pressing a finger to his own lips in the classic shhh gesture.

Even though Dalton had only ever communicated telepathically with his littermates, sheer desperation made him attempt to do so with the other feline. You have to help him.

The brown-haired stranger grinned. I wouldn't worry about Shane. He can handle twice that many snakes without breaking a sweat.

Dalton gripped the bars so tight, the thin metal bit into his skin. But they're so much bigger than he is.

If you don't believe me, why don't you take a look and see for yourself? The feline nodded to the center of the room.

Dalton obeyed and let out a soft gasp of shock at the fully engaged battle. One snake already lay on the ground, blood pouring from his chest, while a second was curled into a fetal position, not moving. A grunt made Dalton shift his eyes up in time to see another snake take one of Shane's blades to the gut--that guy soon joined his buddies in the dead body pile.

The snakes began to snarl, curse and yell. All the while, Shane remained eerily silent, letting his weapon do all the communication. As for Dalton, he found himself horrified at the carnage, yet unable to tear his gaze away at the same time.

Shane moved as if his body was made for one purpose only and that was to destroy. He plowed through the snakes like a B-movie karate star would work his way through a bunch of bad-guy wannabe extras. It reminded Dalton of the restaurant scene in Kill Bill, only this was much more intense because he could sense the very real terror rolling from the snakes.

Soon the floor and the air became thick with blood as more of the snakes fell to Shane's swords. The blades no longer glinted in the weak light because red now covered the metal. The hood finally slipped down so Dalton got a good look at Shane. His first thought was how the feline's looks were at such direct odds with his actions.

Soft, sensual features went hand-in-hand with his dark blond, slightly curly hair and big brown eyes. If not for the fact that his full cheeks were covered in blood splatters, Dalton would almost be tempted to call the feline, angelic looking.

Of course, the fact that he was all but massacring a nest of Cottonmouth shifters belayed that impression. Even as that thought passed through Dalton's head, a snake shrieked, then ran at Shane. Despite the fact the feline had over two hundred and fifty pounds of death heading his way, Shane smiled.

"He's frigging crazy," Dalton said aloud.

The other feline grinned. "Yeah, but we can't help but love the little punk anyway."

Dalton turned to give the man a gaped mouth look of astonishment. Several muffled bangs came from outside, making Dalton jerk in response.

"Ah, that'll be the rest of the team taking out the snakes who were guarding the building," the feline observed. "By the way, my name is Brent."

Dalton had heard that name before, too. Although his father never served as a solidier to the local feline coalition, their family did answer to Mitchell, their leader. So Dalton knew that Brent was Mitchell's second-in-command and littermate.

Brent lifted his head and yelled, "Hey, Shane. Are you going to wrap this up anytime soon?"

Shane flicked an irritated glance Brent's way, but otherwise didn't reply. He just continued to whittle away the snakes until only Kirk remained. Even though he knew it was wrong, a savage smile curled Dalton's lips as he watched the snake try to crawl away, wiggling on his stomach just like his animal counterpart.

"Where the fuck do you think you're going?" Shane snarled as he grabbed the snake by the ankle and dragged him back.

Brent slid a worried glance at Dalton. "This part may get kind froggy so you might want to hide your eyes."

Dalton blinked in astonishment. Things were actually going to get worse? Then he recalled the way Kirk had been eyeing him up and the inner predator in him surged to the front. After everything Kirk had done, it would feel so damn good to see the snake experience some of the very pain he was so good at dishing out. Karma was a bitch and today she was using Shane as her weapon.

"No, I want to see him suffer," Dalton said, cringing at the way his voice shook a bit.

Brent cocked a brow. "Are you sure? Shane isn't exactly buddies with the Geneva Convention."

Thinking once again back to his family and all the other feline captives he'd seen suffer while under the snakes care steeled Dalton's resolve. "Yes."

There would be plenty to see, too, going from the savage expression on Shane's face. "I'll give you three seconds to tell me everything you know about the Cobra."

"If I tell you, he'll kill me," Kirk wailed.

Shane flipped out a dagger and thrust down.

Kirk let out an inhuman cry as the blade pierced his hand and pinned him to a wood baseboard.

Crouching so his lips were inches from the snake's ear, Shane snarled, "If you don't tell me, then I won't kill you and we both know

that will be worse."

Yeah, because that would mean Shane would be playing with his prey, much like a real-life feline would do in the jungle. If Dalton had to face those options, he knew he sure as hell would become very cooperative. Hell, he'd have offered to lick the entire coalition's boots clean rather than face an angry Shane.

In the end, Kirk picked neither option. Moving so quick his free hand was a mere blur, he pulled a gun out of his coat and put the muzzle to his own head.

Dalton flinched, a whimper jerking from his chest as the loud report filled the air. Shane flinched, too, but that was probably to avoid the shower of blood and snake brains coming his way.

"Fuck!" Shane yelled as he gave the now-dead snake a good kick in the ribs.

"Calm down," Brent urged.

Shane turned his fury onto the feline. "Our only lead just blew his own fucking head off. For all we know, he could have had some information on where Trevor is."

Brent held out his palm in the peace gesture. "Maybe, but I doubt it. Going by this place, I'd say this is a low ranking gang. Certainly not the type that Orion would ever share sensitive information with. They probably haven't even had a face-to-face meeting with the guy and instead, worked through Orion's underlings."

Before Shane could answer, chaos broke out as more felines stormed inside. What had to be at least two dozen, heavily armed men and woman soon filled the garage, a few of them curling up their lips at the sight of so many dead bodies. A couple of them let out low curses as they eyed Shane up like he was some sort of monster or something.

Even though they were all felines and technically on his side, waves of fear still sliced into Dalton. All the black uniforms and weapons brought back too may unhealthy memoires--ones that involved pain and death.

He gave a soft cry of dismay as he cowered to the back of his cage so quickly his body slammed into the metal bars. Stupid, coward! Way to show them how tough you are. Dalton chastised himself, but still couldn't stop his reaction any more than he could stop himself from drawing his knees to his chest again. He tucked in his head again as he silently waited for what would happen next. Please, just let this nightmare be over.

"Hey, Brent, what do you have there?" a soft, feminine voice asked.

"He hasn't told me his name yet, but he smells like a Lynx," Brent replied.

"The poor thing looks terrified."

Dalton lifted his head just enough to catch a peek. A small female

with the same coloring as Brent knelt by Dalton. Reaching her fingers through the bars, she brushed a soft caress over his arm. "Hello, my name is Cassie. What's yours?"

"Dalton," he whispered in return, before tilting his face slightly in her direction.

She had a strange scent about her, something other than feline. His confusion must have shown on his face because she gave him a tender smile. "You're picking up the scent of Chris, my fiancé. He's a wolf, but don't let that put you off. He's actually almost tolerable once you get to know him."

His gaze scanned over the other felines, most of who were staring at him. He directed his face back down. He knew it made him look weak and cowardly, but then again, he was the one in the cage so he already fit that bill no matter how he acted.

"Why don't you come out of there?" Cassie urged.

"That's okay, I kind of like it in here," Dalton lied.

She reached her fingers further inside and stroked his hair. "It's okay, I won't let anyone hurt you."

How Dalton wanted to believe that, but after so many weeks of pain, hunger and degradation, his mind was conditioned to expect otherwise. "Shane," he finally whispered.

Cassie blinked a few times before giving an understanding nod. "You want him to leave the room before you come out?"

"No, I want him to promise to stay. He'll protect me. Trevor promised."

At the word Trevor, all other conversation and activity halted. Cassie held up a hand to the others before turning back to Dalton. "Did you just say Trevor?"

Dalton nodded. "He told me that Shane would come to rescue us. That once he found us, the snakes wouldn't be able to hurt any of us anymore."

Shane walked over and crouched next to Cassie. Though Shane's eyes were so cold and devoid of emotion, Dalton felt no fear. Even with the lingering stench of death and blood still clinging to the feline.

"When did you see Trevor?" Shane demanded.

"Just a few days ago."

"So he's still alive then?" Shane asked, an edge of desperation to his voice.

"Of course he is. Until I was sold, we had the same master. Besides, they wouldn't kill us, at least not yet."

"Why not?"

Dalton shook his head, bewildered the coalition didn't already know. "So they could use us for breeding, of course. You can't exactly knock up somebody if you're dead."

Cassie shook her head. "Why would snakes want to do that?"

"Because it's always easier to eat in rather than go out hunting for your food," Dalton replied simply.

Chapter Two

Trevor didn't know what god he'd pissed off, but he must have done something to end up on the wrong end of the karma meter. How else could he explain why he was presently playing Princess Leia to a Cobra version of Jabba the Hutt.

He pulled irritably at the chain around his neck as he resisted the urge to bite the Cobra shifter's ankles. So help him, if that bastard tried to fit him for a metal bikini, shock prod or not, Trevor was going to attack.

"This is a bit over dramatic. Even for you," Trevor spat at his capture.

The Cobra gave the chain a vicious tug, making Trevor see stars and gasp as he fought for breath. Damn, when would he ever learn to keep his trap shut?

"Watch your mouth, Panther, before I feed you to the Tarantula shifters," Orion warned through clenched teeth.

Orion nodded to one of his snake minions who stood behind a tripod. The snake nodded, then turned the camera on.

"Filming ourselves are we?" Trevor couldn't resist quipping. "Isn't that a bit Bin Laden-ey?"

Orion reached down and grabbed a fistful of Trevor's hair. He pulled back until Trevor had no choice but to tilt his head back. The move exposed his throat in a show of submission that had his feline roaring in protest.

"You know, I've always wondered something?" the Cobra mused. "Why is it they call your kind Panthers? Aren't you really black North American Cougars?"

Trevor swallowed hard as his back began to burn in protest because of the awkward position. "Yes, we're Cougars by birth."

"Then why not just call you that?"

"Because, like with many other breeds of felines, there's always been a stigma attached to our black coloring. The only way Mitchell's father could get the rest of the Cougars to peaceably accept my kind into the coalition was on the condition that we'd be called Panthers."

"So you mean to tell me that you can't even go by your birthright because you were born different? That doesn't sound like a fair and just coalition to me," Orion crooned as he reached down to caress Trevor's cheek.

Trevor jerked back with a feline hiss, the chain biting into his already chaffed skin. "Mitchell is fair. The only reason he continues to go along with it, even after his father's death, is because we agreed with him that it was the best way to keep peace."

"So Mitchell says, but you have to wonder. After all, he doesn't make Noah call himself something different just because he's a black Jaguar." A cunning smile curled over Orion's lips. "But then again, Noah is Mitchell's brother where you're just some stray that he took in out of pity."

"That's not true," Trevor argued, even as the beginnings of doubt began to fester. How many times had he told himself that same exact thing? "I'm a full-fledged member of the coalition and one of his soldiers, so I'm an asset."

"You say that, but we both know it's not true. All they see you for is a bit of fluff. A tramp who will only drag Shane down. They're not even looking for you."

Trevor shook his head, even as that doubt took root and began to grow. Deep down, he knew that Orion was only playing mind games, yet Trevor couldn't deny all the times he'd been called slut, whore or an easy lay. Most of those times had been since he'd joined the coalition, too. True, he'd done more than his fair share of sleeping around, but that didn't mean it still hadn't hurt.

Orion snapped his fingers. "I think Trevor needs something to help relax. He seems too tense to me."

Oh, God. No! Please, not again. I would rather die first. "No, please," Trevor whimpered softly as he shrank back as far as the chain would allow.

A thin, tall man with dark, slicked-back hair stepped forward. With eyes so black, they appeared to have no pupils and red, thin lips, he almost looked like a cartoon version of a villain. He had an evil vibe that never failed to make Trevor shake in fear. Then he smiled and all thoughts of cartoons fled from Trevor's mind.

How was it possible that a grin could look so threatening...scary...evil? Maybe it had to do with the pair of fangs that were hanging over the man's bottom lip. As he moved closer, Trevor could even see droplets of venom forming at the tips of the freak's choppers.

Trevor tried to struggle, but the man was too strong. Before Trevor could even utter a protest, he found himself pinned to the wall. Strong fingers curled into his hair and viciously tugged until Trevor had no choice but to tilt his head back to save from losing a portion of his scalp.

"Please...no," Trevor whispered, hating himself for begging.

More than the upcoming pain and stupor that would follow, Trevor feared the way the venom made him act. He knew he wouldn't be able to fight it and as soon as that toxin hit his bloodstream, he would lose all his inhibitions and start acting like the slut everyone

labeled him.

While he'd never gone so far as to fuck the spider shifter or any of the snakes, there was nothing Trevor feared more than him giving in and going all the way. To commit the ultimate betrayal to Shane. For then Trevor knew he'd never be able to go home to his mate. Not because Shane wouldn't take him back, but rather because Trevor would never be able to face the man he loved again.

Even though he expected it, Trevor still let out a yelp of pain as he felt the fangs pierce the flesh where his neck and shoulder met. After the spider got a good hold, more pain followed as the shifter's venom began to travel through Trevor's bloodstream.

He opened his mouth in a loud scream as wave after wave of burning agony rolled over his body. After what seemed like forever, the pain slowly ebbed away as warm pulses of pleasure took over.

Trevor let his eyes roll back into his head, a goofy laugh bubbling past his parched lips. If his cuffed hands had allowed it, he would have even reached behind so he could loop one hand around the spider's neck in order to hold him closer while he bit.

"Wow," Trevor breathed, his own voice sounding drawn out and distant.

"Does that feel good, Panther?" Orion demanded.

Trevor let out a throaty chuckle. "Not at first, but now it's really nice."

He arched his body back into the spider, smiling when he felt the man's erection pressing into his ass. Some tiny part of him screamed the move was inappropriate and wrong, but that voice sounded so dim and insignificant, Trevor easily pushed it aside.

The spider took his fangs out and gave Trevor's throat a long, lazy lick. "God, I would give anything to fuck you."

"Okay," Trevor moaned, the venom still pulsating through his body.

"Not going to happen, feline," Orion snapped. "Wesley has a nasty habit of biting the heads off his lovers once he's done with them, and I mean that literally. I need you alive for at least a little while longer."

Trevor gave a whimper of frustration. He was so hard, so needy that it hurt. More so than just a normal unanswered hard-on, too. This ache burned so badly, he trembled from it. On its own record, his gaze shifted to Orion. "Then how about you?"

At that moment Trevor barely remembered that this man had torn him from the only one he ever loved. That the snake was the one responsible for the chain now wrapped around his neck. Or that he hated Orion more than anything in the world. All that mattered was getting rid of the hunger that burned him.

Orion gave a sadistic smile. "No, half the fun is watching you suffer."

Trevor let out a cry of distress. Fine, he'd just handle it himself. He

tried to reach down to stroke himself only to be reminded of his cuffed hands. The worst part was they had the cuffs attached to a belt around his waist so he could only move his hands a few inches, certainly not far enough to jack himself off.

"Not fair," Trevor whimpered as he continued to struggle against the bonds.

"Do you want to know what the other half of the fun is?" Orion asked.

Trevor shook his head, his gaze still directed on the cuffs. Surely there must be some way to work things so he could get to his aching cock? Maybe if he twisted his hands to the right...

Orion reached out, gripped Trevor by the chin and jerked his face toward the camera. "The other half is knowing that he is going to watch you suffer."

Another whimper slipped from Trevor, this one laced with shame. Now Shane would know that they'd all been right. That Trevor wasn't worthy. That he was nothing more than a used up fuck toy who'd been cast aside by so many others.

That still didn't ease the arousal flooding Trevor. He let out a choked sob as he begged for something completely different, "Please, just kill me and get it over with. Finish me off before I betray him."

Orion grabbed Trevor's hair, cruelly pulling back so Trevor found himself once more looking into the damning lens of the camera. Leaning down so his lips were inches from Trevor's ear, Orion hissed, "Don't plead with me. Plead with him. Let him know how much pain you're in."

So Trevor did. Gazing into that cursed camera, he babbled, "I'm so sorry, Shane. I should have been stronger...better for you. Kevin was right when he told me to stay away from you."

"Who's Kevin?" Orion urged.

"A Panther. He and his partner, Jared, took in first me and then, later on, Shane. They taught us how to be part of the coalition."

"So, you and Shane lived there together then?"

Even though Trevor realized he was walking into a verbal trap in his dopy state, he couldn't avoid it. "No, once Shane came, they asked me to move away."

Orion shifted his fingers and began to stroke Trevor's hair in a manner one could almost call...caring? "They didn't want you anymore? Just like your foster parents when they kicked you out when you turned eighteen."

The whole situation was taking on a whole Clarice and Hannibal vibe, but damn if Trevor could put the brakes on. "Yes."

"How did that make you feel?" Orion continued to caress Trevor's hair and it took an oddly comforting feel to it.

"It hurt." Trevor sucked in a breath. "Really bad. I thought they..."

He trailed off as he swallowed several times.

"You thought they could be the family you never had. Brothers who understood what you were going through," Orion supplied.

"Yeah," Trevor nodded. Maybe Orion wasn't all bad. After all, before then, nobody had really taken the effort to delve into Trevor's feelings--not his old roommates, not Jared or Kevin and certainly not the rest of the coalition.

Trevor shifted his gaze up into Orion's red-tinged eyes and confessed. "Kevin told me he didn't want me to see Shane anymore. At first, I thought it was because Shane was a Leopard and that breed of felines is known to be a bit off."

"That wasn't the real reason though, was it?"

"No. Kevin didn't think I was good enough for Shane. That I'd fucked around too much and that I'd end up hurting him." Trevor blinked away the tears that were threatening to build.

Orion cupped Trevor's cheek. "You would have never done that though. I know better."

Against all better sense, Trevor felt himself leaning into the touch. It felt so comforting and nurturing, something he couldn't remember not craving to be on the receiving end of. "I'm not bad."

"No, you just want to be loved."

Wow, Orion did understand him. Better than anyone ever had before. How was it that Mitchell and Shane could think this guy was so bad? He was almost nice. Much kinder than so many of the others from the coalition.

Trevor shook his head, trying to remind himself that Orion had also kidnapped him. Not just Trevor either, but numerous others. Trevor had lost count of all the feline captives he'd encountered in the past eight weeks. Not only that, but Orion had gone out of his way to dish added doses of humiliation to Trevor. First by making him sit on the ground like a trained dog and then by subjecting him to all the spider bites.

Still...Orion could be nice at times, too. Like right now. He even leaned down and placed a chaste kiss on top of Trevor's head.

"My poor Panther. Nobody understands him."

Totally forgetting the camera continued to film everything, Trevor nodded. "Only you do, Orion."

He then laid his cheek on the Cobra's knee and let out a contented sigh.

Chapter Three

Shane paced the width of the small examining room in the infirmary as he fought to keep his impatience in check. It proved to be one of the greatest tests to his discipline, however, because each tick from the clock served as a painful reminder that Trevor was still out there, waiting for Shane to rescue him.

Eight weeks, five days, thirteen hours and twenty-five minutes.

That's how long it'd been since Shane's world had collapsed.

If he lived for three hundred years, he still doubted he'd be able to forget the horror that'd slammed into him when he'd gone to Trevor's apartment. How he'd found the place in shambles, reeking of Cobra and fear. He couldn't forget that any more than he could forget the sight of the small puddle of blood already coagulating in the center of the small kitchen. It'd taken just one sniff for Shane to realize it belonged to his mate.

His mate. Trevor. The man Shane loved more than life itself. Now that he was gone and in danger, it felt as if a part of Shane had died.

In the meantime, the small, brat of a Lynx shifter couldn't look more relaxed. He sat, perched on the edge of an exam table, drinking milk through a straw. A frigging straw! Who did that besides little kids in kindergarten class? All that was missing were the graham crackers and the picture would be complete. The punk even swung his feet back and forth a few times as he surveyed his surroundings.

Shane wanted to go over and demand some answers from the Lynx. No, better yet, he wanted to grab Dalton by his adorable ankles and shake until those I'm-so-cute-I'm-puke-inducing doe eyes wobbled a bit.

As if sensing his thoughts, Brent stepped forward a bit, placing his body partially between Dalton and Shane. Shane let out a low snarl that grew louder as Dalton grinned at him. It wasn't a snarky or nasty smile, but rather what he'd seen cubs give a big brother or something. More so it was a grin that Shane never had directed his way, so to have it happen now confused him. Hadn't Dalton just seen him slice and dice his way through a nest of snakes? Most others would be trembling in fear of him, instead Dalton stared up at Shane with those cute-as-a-button eyes of his.

Shane curled his lip up. Great, just what he needed, a Lynx stalker

who had a seriously displaced case of hero worship.

"When did you last see Trevor?" Brent asked Dalton.

Finally, they were getting down to business. Shane had wanted to start the questioning immediately, but the Jaguar siblings insisted on bringing Dalton back to the infirmary first. So now Shane found himself having to practice good manners, something he'd never been able to display even on his best day.

Dalton took one more sip before replying, "I spoke to him an hour before I was sold to my new master."

Shane held in a sound of irritation. Getting a concrete response from Dalton was proving to be as difficult as washing an elephant with nothing more than a toothbrush. Brent didn't appear flustered at all, but then again, the guy had half a billion brothers, plus one sister. Maybe that's where he learned patience.

Giving an encouraging smile, Brent pressed, "Okay, so when did they sell you?"

The Lynx took another sip, the loud gurgling sound that came from a near empty drink filling the room. "About a week ago. That's when I gave up hope."

"Why? Was Trevor protecting you or something?" Brent asked.

"Yeah, he kept away the more aggressive slaves. But it was more than that. He kept talking about how Shane would be coming to get him. So I figured if I stuck by Trevor's side, then maybe Shane wouldn't mind rescuing me, too."

Dalton grinned up at Shane, much like a little kid would gaze at a rescuing fireman or something. Shane blinked a few times as genuine confusion hit him. Once again it hit him that nobody ever stared at him that way. He'd had terror-filled gazes, looks of loathing and more than a few tearstained ones. It reminded him a bit of the way Noah and Andrew looked at Mitchell or Brent from time-to-time. If he didn't know better, he would have sworn...

"Oh God! You actually have a big brother, hero worship thing going with Shane!" Brent exclaimed his eyes growing wide.

"But we're not related. We're not even the same breed of feline," Shane pointed out, still lost as to why the kid would want to latch on to him of all felines.

"I like Trevor, too," Dalton eagerly added.

A low growl rumbled in Shane's throat. "You should know that Trevor and I are mated and neither one of us likes to share."

Dalton shook his head, his dark hair flopping in his eyes. "I know that, silly. I just want you to protect me and teach me how to be mean like you. You're funny when you get that grumpy look on your face."

Shane found himself speechless. The last time somebody other than the Jaguars or Trevor spoke to him that way had been a snarky Raven shifter. Shane had punched the guy so hard in the gut, the