

A close-up portrait of a lion's face, looking directly at the camera. The lion has a thick, dark mane and bright orange eyes. The background is a dramatic sunset or sunrise, with a bright orange and yellow glow behind a dark silhouette of a horizon. The overall mood is majestic and powerful.

Vona Logan

MY
African
PRINCE

MY AFRICAN PRINCE

Prince to a pride of black lion shifters, Zee secretly desires to submit to the big, gorgeous, pale-skinned man with the mysterious scent. He hungers to be taken, filled... and loved.

His pride will probably kill him if they ever discovered his most secret cravings—no sign of weakness is ever tolerated. Yet, with Luka, the risk may be completely worth even one moment in his arms.

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

MY AFRICAN PRINCE

By Vona Logan

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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MY AFRICAN PRINCE

By Vona Logan

Photo Description

A handsome African tribesman stares straight at the camera with light-coloured eyes, fierce, smouldering, and intense. Long, thin, braids hang down his back, and his ears and neck are adorned with tribal jewellery. Lush lips form a slight pout and dark stubble shadows his jaw. The second man is tall, broad-shouldered and muscled - he sure looks capable of fulfilling the dark needs in the first man's eyes.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

I am supposed to be content as a lion. A prince and heir of our pride. We are a fierce, strong, and unique pride of black lions. Humans think it is because of melanism but what they don't know is that we are shifters. All of us.

But Author, that is not my dilemma, HE is my dilemma. That gorgeous, delicious, man over there. I have never seen someone with his skin tone before. And while he doesn't smell like a lion, he also doesn't smell completely... right as a human either. And even more than that he makes me want to give in to my secret, darkest desire, to submit, to be mounted by someone else, to be filled.

I am a prince! The heir of my pride! I am supposed to submit to no man or woman! And yet, with this man? All I want to do is beg him to take me and even more than that... to love me. Even though it may get me killed by my pride.

****Free reign with this except one MC MUST be a black lion shifter and the other must be if a different race (and species-he can be an alien with tentacles for all I care, have fun with it! Just not a lion).*

Thank You, Author.

Sincerely,

Vic

Story Info

Genre: paranormal

Tags: cat shifters, interracial, interspecies, 2 alpha males, soul mates/bonded, outdoor sex, rimming

Word Count: 22,667

MY AFRICAN PRINCE

By Vona Logan

Prologue

The Zulu warrior slowly placed one foot in front of the other as he crept through the long African grass. From the cloudless sky above, the scorching sun beat down on his naked back. His movements made no sound, but his sharp gaze scanned his surroundings, seeing through the browns and yellows to spot his prey.

Making a kill today would feed his family for days and certainly ramp up his esteem with fellow tribe members. Being young and inexperienced went hand in hand with regular frowns, haughty looks, and the shakes of heads from the older leaders on a regular basis. The reality frustrated him to no end.

His vigilant state changed to one of defence in an instant as he dropped his *assegai* and unsheathed an arrow to notch it in the bow with one sweep. Loud snarls, growls, and hisses had him frozen to the spot. When no wild animals came at him through the veld, he cautiously moved forward, stretching his neck to peer around a thorn tree. What he saw chilled him to the bone.

A few feet ahead of him lay the biggest male lion he'd ever seen. Its head and jaws were so huge it should've instilled a terrible fear in him, but the powerful beast was in bad shape. The wounds it bore were usually the result of a fight for domination, the right to rule the pride. Its injuries and weakness explained why five hyenas would've dared attack it head on. Rearing up to swipe at his attackers, the *impi* saw the bloody gashes in the lion's thick coat.

The injustice of the act playing out before him gripped his soul and made him lose all reason. Yelling a war cry, he stormed from his hiding place. Within seconds, he wounded three of the hyenas who backed off in retreat. Poised with another arrow at the ready, he kept his eyes on the ugly, drooling beasts staring back at him in challenge. Bellowing again, he advanced another few steps, pulling back his arm to let the arrow fly. Defeated, they turned their tails and ran off, yapping as they went.

The reality of his precarious situation crashed over him, and he slowly turned around to assess how much longer he had to live. But his fear was unfounded. The lion lay on its side, the massive ribcage rising and falling erratically with each laboured breath.

Falling to his knees, the young warrior carefully edged closer. Golden eyes shot open, and the pupils dilated as they focused on him. A plaintive growl left

the beautiful animal and gave him the courage to reach out a hand. The nose twitched as it took in his scent before the beast closed his eyes once more.

Expecting to lose his hand any moment, he cautiously laid his palm on a warm, quivering flank. The animal's wounds were serious. He reached back to bring forth the hide pouch of water he carried around his waist. With care, he held it suspended above the parted lips and trickled some down, hoping the lion would drink it.

“Kungani angisize?” *Why are you helping me?* The deep voice reverberated in his head, and he almost dropped the precious water as he jerked away in surprise. Looking over his shoulders, he confirmed it was only him and the beast in the field.

Staring into amber eyes he replied, “Isilwane enhle noma mandla, kufanele nifa, ake ukuksiza whena.” *No being so beautiful and powerful should die like this. Let me help you.*

A soft purr reached his ears. “Kunguwe okumisewe khona, lami ukuba. Sibe lapha namhlanje, okumiselwe khona lakho ukuphila eside, umoya ukhuluma nami. Ngizohamba nawe kuze kokuphela.” *It is my destiny to die here... today. Your destiny is to live long. The spirit in you speaks to mine. Leave me be. Go and I will go with you and your descendants forever more.*

The young man's eyes filled with tears that shamelessly flowed down his dark cheeks as he frantically poured water on the wounds to clean them. Infection killed quickly on the *veld*.

A huge paw hit him on the back, claws piercing the skin and digging into his right shoulder blade. The sensation of liquid running down his back told him he was bleeding quite heavily.

The paw pulled him forward until their noses touched, the lion's cold to the touch. “Ayeke! Angiphinde, ngasho hamba!” *Stop! No more. I said go!*

Digging his fingers into the thick, dark mane surrounding the beautiful animal's neck, he sobbed. “Mana njolo unkosi!” *No! Long live the king!*

“Cha! Mana inkosi lesi *Ibhubezi*.” *No! Long live the king of the lions!*

The magnificent animal stared into his eyes as it breathed out, forcing its life force into his lungs. Warmth flowed through his veins, penetrating muscle and bones as the lion's gift of life permeated and reinforced every fibre of his being. Golden eyes held him captive until the beast's eyelids lowered for the

last time, almost pulling him off his feet as its head fell back onto the dry grass, unmoving. Bereft of life.

The warrior sat back on his heels, roughly scraping the tears from his cheeks. Knowing the fate of the animal lying at his feet if he chose to leave it there, spurred him into action. Ignoring the change the lion had caused in him, he fashioned tools from the land around him and started digging. When the sun started to set, he carefully lit a small fire to keep the wild animals at bay. Throughout the chilly night he worked, tediously digging a worthy burial site for his friend.

Hours later, he stood over the site where the lion would now rest forever. His spirit stirred as if to remind him he was different. No longer alone. With a decisive nod, he bowed his head in honour, collected his weapons, and started the journey back to his tribe. He had much to tell them.

A few feet away, unknown to the African tribesman, a young male cub had silently watched the meeting between human and lion. When the younger lion in their pride challenged his sire to a fight for supremacy, the cub had readied himself to leave too, instinctively knowing what his fate would be as the firstborn son of the defeated leader. Following his sire's scent through the veld, he had stumbled across the scene as the man tried to save the beast.

The moment his father's last breath left him, the cub's coat changed to pitch black.

Chapter 1

His head wanted to kill him! Zee groaned, rubbing his temples to help diffuse the agony. Note to self: a drink to avoid at all cost—vodka. That crap went down your throat like silk, then beat you into submission with a jackhammer against your skull the next day. Evil stuff.

The door to his office flew open, Ben, his best friend, and assistant of sorts, barged in. “Hey, Zee! Howzit going this morning?” Just the man’s chipper mood made Zee feel like throwing the hole punch at his head for adding to his misery.

“*Shhhhhhhhhhh*,” he whispered.

Comprehension dawned on Ben’s face, teeth flashing bright white against his black skin. “Oh, man! You look like shit. Where the hell did you go last night?”

“Is that for me?” Zee moved only his eyes to indicate the steaming cup of coffee in Ben’s hand, but even that small movement shot shards of pain through his head like a ricocheting cannonball. He barely withheld a whimper of agony.

As if he’d forgotten he carried it, Ben looked at the mug he carried in surprise. “Yeah, of course.” The coffee’s aroma drifted to his nose as Ben placed it in front of Zee, before dropping his bulk into a chair on the other side of the desk.

“Come on, talk to me. I worried when you took off.”

“It’s the usual, Ben. My uncle is concerned I haven’t shown any interest in settling down and reproducing to continue the royal lineage. I’m a king in the making, remember? How the fuck to do I do this, Ben? I’m bloody gay! There’s no way I’m gonna have sex with a woman for the sake of carrying on the Kekana bloodline. But can you imagine me telling the elders this little thing they didn’t know about their prince?” Lifting the cup to his lips he took a few deep swallows of the heavenly brew.

“Zee, you’ve allowed them to pressure you all your life, man. It’s about time you stood up for yourself and said no—for once. This is your future they’re messing with.” Ben’s unwavering support meant so much to him. Sometimes it was all he had.

“According to them, marrying and having young is the life destined for those of royal blood, Ben. Apparently, I have no choice in the matter.”

“You and I both know you do have a choice. You’re not their puppet, Zee.”

“What about the pride? How do you think our people are gonna feel about having a homosexual king one day, Ben? Society has become more tolerant, but our tribal cultures have not. They still stone gay men to death in some African countries.” Why people chose to hate and discriminate against those who lived in a different way, confounded him.

“The pride may very well object and try to excommunicate you. Maybe even try to kill you,” Ben added. “But don’t you think you have loyal friends and followers here who would stand by your side if that happened? By my count, there would probably be enough to start up a pride of your own.”

“I didn’t even think of that. How people will react will only be revealed in the moment.”

The idea of coming out to the elders and his people made him physically sick to his stomach. The vodka wasn’t helping much either.

Ben rose from the chair, straightening to his considerable height. Locking gazes with Zee, Ben’s eyes flashed green-gold for a split second. He bowed his head in acknowledgement of his leader before he cracked another broad smile and turned towards the door.

“I for one will stand by you, seeing as I have the same problem you do. Even if it is only the two of us, we can start over, Zee. Think about that.” Ben’s words hung in the air as he pulled the door closed behind him.

Zee barely restrained his flinch when it suddenly popped open again, and Ben stuck his head around the corner. “By the way, the new groundskeeper starts tomorrow.” The door shut with a click.

“Groundskeeper? Ben! What groundskeeper?” Ben’s deep chuckles reached his ears through the thin walls, and Zee knew he had left the small building already.

“I know you can hear me Ben! Why the hell am I the leader when no one ever tells me *anything!*!” He emphasized the last word as loudly as he could.

Ben cracked up again.

“Fucker!” Zee yelled back. “Shit, my head.” Time for the big guns. Painkillers hardly affected them, so Zee popped six into his mouth, chasing them down with the now almost-cold coffee. There, that should do the trick.

“Groundskeeper. What the hell?” he grumbled as he turned on the PC to get down to work.

Ben gave a full belly laugh as his acute hearing picked up Zee's soft-spoken curses. Ben would do anything to be present when his friend came face to face with their new employee. Ever since Zee's father, their king, stepped back, handing most daily responsibilities of the tribe over to Zee, his friend had so much on his plate. Under the circumstances, it came as no surprise that Zee had forgotten about asking Ben to hire someone to take care of the upkeep of the wildlife park where they all worked. Not only did Zee run the business now, but he also managed the affairs of the small pride who lived in or not far from the reserve grounds.

Ben didn't have a specific job description. He did anything and everything, pitching in wherever work needed to be done. Earlier this morning, he'd been washing the windows of the curio shop at the entrance of the park when a stranger surprised him. As Zee's second in command, Ben's abilities were highly developed and always on alert. Ben thought back to the encounter, trying to figure out how someone could catch him unawares. Why didn't he hear the footsteps approaching him until the man spoke behind him?

“Excuse me?” The deep, guttural voice and faint accent had Ben spinning around in shock. Surprisingly, Ben didn't have to look down, but straight ahead into the bluest eyes he'd ever seen.

“Hello. How can I help you?” Ben offered while checking the guy out. He was packing. As in muscles. Broad shoulders filled out a light blue T-shirt and a pair of well-worn jeans hugged slim hips and thick tree-trunk thighs. Not to mention the package at the apex of said thighs.

The man looked behind Ben, probably at the shop, into the car park, and over his shoulder at this surroundings before making eye contact again. The slight flare of his nostrils didn't escape Ben's attention. *Mmmm. Interesting.*

“Do you know if there are any job vacancies here?” The big man scanned his surroundings again, and if Ben wasn't mistaken, the bulge in those jeans appeared larger than moments before.

“Why, are you looking for a job?” Ben wondered what had the man so... *interested.*

“Yes.” He gave a brief nod.

“Okay. Would you like to come into my office so we can talk?” Ben indicated the building behind him.

“Thank you.”

Ben turned to lead the way, not liking for one second the feeling of vulnerability at his back. The nape of his neck itched. This man was fucking dangerous, that was for sure, but with no immediate threat, Ben kept walking until they reached his office.

Thirty minutes later he showed their new employee, Luka Vetrov, to his small, but private thatch-roofed *rondavel*, where he would stay for the duration of his employment.

Ben had a gut feeling about this one.

Chapter 2

Luka stood inside the door of his new living room, and took in the tidy interior. He never would've thought a round building could be so spacious inside, especially with the peaked thatch roof. A beautiful golden varnish covered the wooden beams holding up the roof, the earthy colours giving the whole house a warm and comfortable vibe. A settee faced a flat-screen TV to his left, and an open plan kitchenette with a bench top sat on the right. The awnings above the windows would definitely keep the inside cooler during the hot summer months. A door ahead of him would be where the bedroom and ensuite bathroom were, as Ben had informed him. Luka opened it and walked in, dropping his sports bag on the polished floor boards.

The headboard and side tables of the double bed consisted of a dark wood on which a very talented carpenter had skilfully carved a beautiful African sunset, complete with baobab tree and gazelle. A mocha, cream, and black motif decorated the quilt which covered the bed and matching pillows.

To his left, the concrete wall had been fashioned into a fern-like swirl to house the bathroom. It didn't take him long to unpack his few personal belongings before he stepped into the shower to wash off the dust from his trip.

Feeling refreshed, he opted to wear a pair of knee-length cargo shorts and a sleeveless T-shirt, although he hoped his pale skin wouldn't blind the tourists on vacation. Despite his reduced levels of melanin, he had never been sunburnt. The fact had nothing to do with sunblock. Slipping his feet into flip-flops, he stopped to grab his wallet and keys on his way to the door. Tomorrow would be his first work day, so exploring his surroundings seemed like a good idea.

The staff accommodations stood separate and a good distance away from the main entrance and visitors' lodges, sheltered by plenty of trees and shrubs for privacy. In addition, it offered an umbrella against the wild thunderstorms during the tropical summer months.

At the main entrance, he discovered a complex of buildings rather than simply a few shops as he'd initially thought. A stunning restaurant offered an amazing view onto a drinking hole where currently a herd of elephants had gathered to cool down. Exploring further, he found a decent-sized gym with sauna, a small shop selling everything from groceries to swimsuits, a beauty salon and spa offering massages and other pampering treatments such as a

hairdresser. The wildlife park proved equipped for every need a customer could possibly have for the duration of their stay.

On the far side of the complex, he found the swimming pools sized to accommodate all ages. The aromas from the restaurant reminded him of how long it had been since he'd eaten a decent meal, and he turned around to rectify the problem. Afterwards, he would take advantage of the sparkling clear water of the pool to cool down.

Zee wearily rubbed his hands over his face, massaging his temples. The bloody headache threatened to return with full force and it wasn't even four o'clock yet. Maybe he should shut the computer down and call it a day. After answering what felt like close to a hundred emails and phone calls, but which could be considerably less, Zee saw the merits of having a secretary to handle all the small stuff. He made a note of his brilliant idea so Ben could hire someone to lighten his workload, seeing as the man found the new groundskeeper situation so damn funny.

He rose from his chair and stretched his arms over his head, grateful for the tension relief when a few joints popped at the movement. Happy children's voices drew him to his office window, which looked out over the pools. A small walkway framed by neatly pruned hedges on either side separated the office building from the swimming area. A family with two younger kids disappeared around the corner, all wrapped in towels after their swim, laughter accompanying them as they left. Zee loved kids and got a kick out of visitors enjoying their stay at the park.

Suddenly, the water directly ahead of him exploded with the force of a body propelling itself out of the depths. The man landed on the non-slip border around the pool—crouched on the balls of his feet. No hands. Water rolled off his muscled body as he shook his blond head, sending water droplets flying, some hitting the glass in front of Zee.

Zee's gaze stayed locked on the body squatting on the ground. When he looked up, their eyes connecting across the small distance and electricity rippled down Zee's spine. Goose bumps arose all over his body. Shards of ice. Blue summer skies. Zee felt torn between which he saw the most in those arresting eyes. Maybe a bit of both.

Lazily, the man straightened to his full height and Zee almost whimpered. He appeared to be maybe three inches taller than Zee's own six foot two. As a

tall, big man, Zee rarely saw men larger than himself except for his own tribe members. When Zee had sex, he always topped. Always. And yet, deep down he always questioned what being mastered by a strong, confident top would be like. What would it be like to trust someone enough to kneel before, to bend over for, to submit, and be filled—stretched wide—for the first time by another man? In fact, Zee craved the experience, but he wouldn't give himself to just anyone. Zee knew for this man he'd do anything, and the knowledge left him breathless, and his hard cock aching in the confines of his jeans.

They stood staring at each other in complete stillness, a moment frozen in time. Never in his life had Zee seen someone with the stranger's skin tone—light, very much so, but yet full of colour. Zee searched for the right words in his mind... creamy vanilla? Yeah, and oh boy, did Zee crave to lick that smoothness, tasting his flavour.

The way the man scrutinized him in return had his inner cat purring in delight. A small grin tugged at Zee's mouth when his eyes dropped down and saw the huge tent in the man's swim shorts. Good! They were equally affected and afflicted.

The window latch tempted Zee with the possibility of catching a scent, but he knew opening it might shatter the moment, and he wanted to look his fill. When their eyes met, Zee licked his lips in a brazen display of desire. The action got him a full-ass grin. Zee's heart raced, and sweat coated his skin. The man was absolutely stunning. How could shards of ice look so scorching hot all at once? Zee's knees weakened at the passion he saw reflected back at him, forcing him to lean against the window slightly. Inside, his lion tossed his mane, and Zee fought the sudden impulse to allow his eyes to shift.

Voices reached his ears and the man glanced in that direction. More people arrived to take advantage of the pools in the heat. When he turned to face Zee again, he smiled and winked before walking away, grabbing his towel off a nearby lounging chair as he strolled past. Zee sighed in disappointment as the stranger exited the gated area. He had to find out who the hell that was. Normally, Zee's common sense would've kicked in, reminding him how fragile humans were. Shifters tended to be a bit... well, exuberant—a bit on the rough side and insatiable when it came to sex. Humans usually got hurt, or simply couldn't keep up. But Zee would give his left nut to have a go at the tall stranger who made him yearn for the unknown.

Giving in to the earlier urge, he opened the window, his cock pulsed as he abruptly came in his underwear. The other man's pheromones hung in the air outside, and Zee's lion went ballistic inside, roaring to get out—to pursue.

“This is fucking bad!” Why did this have to happen now?

Jabbing a finger at the intercom on his desk, he yelled, “Ben! Get in here. Now!”

Chapter 3

Luka made a beeline for his hut, his towel thankfully hiding his raging erection from the public roaming about. He barely kicked the door shut before the frustrated growly hiss of his cat forced past his straining throat muscles. Leaning his palms against the cool wood of the door, he tried breathing in and out deeply, attempting to soothe his animal side, to calm the fuck down.

While driving past this place on his motorbike yesterday, on the current leg of his road trip, something had beckoned him over. He'd tried to ignore the sensation, but the draw overrode his intent to keep going, especially his inner cat wailing in displeasure. So, he'd turned around.

As soon as his helmet came off, he smelled the delicious scent. Any animal would've, because it surrounded the whole area. The surroundings had been marked as the territory of someone very strong and powerful, that much Luka could tell. The inconvenience of his cock randomly standing at attention had happened quite frequently since his arrival.

Now he knew why. The alluring scent belonged to the incredibly beautiful African man in the office across from the pools. Man? Luka snorted. He recognized another predator when he saw one—a shifter, like him. Maybe another cat, but Luka hadn't gotten close enough to confirm his suspicion.

Calling the guy beautiful did him no justice. Dark ebony skin, light green eyes tinged with yellow, strong cheekbones, white teeth flashing against the contrast of his dark colouring. From where Luka had stood, broad shoulders had tapered down to narrow hips where a belt threaded through the loops of a pair of damn lucky jeans.

The other man's scent faintly infused everywhere Luka had been in the park. A leader of some sorts, but exactly who, and what, he couldn't place yet. Luka also knew from his bodily reaction, as man and beast that he'd experienced nothing like today ever before—with anyone. The stare-off between them had been the single hottest moment of his life. Without one physical touch. Would life be as cruel as to show him his mate, only to find their differences could keep them apart forever?

His erection ached, and his skin stretched tight as his cat fought for dominance to break free. Shifting in the hut could be disastrous. He'd break everything, and probably the door on his way out. Not to mention the humans

he'd send into hysterics. Losing control would be bad for business, and would win him no brownie points with the object of his affection.

Cursing under his breath, he stalked into the shower and turned it on cold. Standing under the cooling spray, he pushed his trunks over his hips and off. Sighing in relief, he stared in annoyance at the disobedient piece of flesh between his legs. Luka prided himself on his ability to control himself at all times, but today he almost lost the strong hold he had on his animal. It hadn't been the time or place to deal with the situation.

He washed his hair and body before getting down to business. With the help of a squirt of conditioner, he took himself in hand, and stroked his leaking dick. He hissed as he touched over-sensitized skin, but kept going as the discomfort, and pleasure, sped him into the fastest orgasm of his life.

Watching his seed disappear down the drain, Luka knew without checking that his eyes had shifted. The tips of his claws peeked through his skin, for shit's sake. His cock was still hard. Not good at all. The quicker he found out more about the other man, the quicker he'd find a release that would, hopefully, last longer than ten seconds. His cat wouldn't settle for anything less.

By the time Ben arrived at Zee's office after being summoned, Zee had no more control over his body than when he'd been staring at the giant walking wet dream outside his window. To be honest, Zee's control teetered on a razor edge, because his damn lion wouldn't stop whining, threatening to break free at any moment. His fucking canines shot through his gums when he tried to close the window to lock out the scent calling to his soul.

"Yes, my liege?" Ben lowered himself into a chair in front of Zee's desk, a frown pulling his brows together when he noticed the sweat running down Zee's face.

"Are you okay, Zee?" He leaned forward in concern.

"No, I'm not. Who the hell was that?" Zee gritted out through the tight clench of his jaws.

"Who?" Ben's confused expression would've been comical at any other time, but not now.

Throwing an arm out in the general direction of the pools, Zee explained. "He was out there earlier, in the pool. A big guy. No scrap that, he's fucking huge. Blond hair, blue eyes, and creamy white skin. Who the hell is he, Ben?" Zee almost pleaded.

Ben's expressive face showed relief. "I have no idea who you're talking about." Something about his friend's innocent reply infuriated Zee.

"Are you lying to me? Your prince? Your future king?" Blackmail might help.

Ben grinned. "What's going on, Zee? What has you tied up in knots so bad I can feel you're fighting not to shift?"

"It's not funny!" Zee stood up from his chair. "This is not fucking funny at all, asshole!" Ben's sharp eyes zoomed in on the huge wet patch on Zee's jeans. Then he folded double with laughter, his hilarity almost shaking him off his chair. Zee fumed as he watched Ben enjoy the moment.

Chortling and wiping tears from his eyes, Ben pointed. "You came in your jeans?" And then, he was off again, overcome with laughter.

Zee couldn't help himself as he grabbed the closest projectile and launched it at Ben's head. The stapler whipped across the distance superfast, but came to a quick stop as Ben put out a hand to halt its advance mid-air. Zee sat down, hoping the act would distract Ben long enough to forget Zee came in his pants like a horny teenager.

Zee waited until Ben eventually calmed down. "Feel better now?"

"Man! I haven't laughed like that in a long time." Ben smiled, shaking his head. "You gonna tell me what happened,"—he gestured in the direction of Zee's lower body under the desk—"other than the obvious."

"Nothing happened. I stood looking out the window and he came out of the water like a bullet from a gun. He saw me and stared back. He's magnificent, Ben. I want him." Zee confessed.

"I can see that." Ben grinned again.

"If you laugh at me again I'm gonna kick your ass." Ben pulled his top lip down between his teeth in an attempt to stop smiling.

"Ummmm... did he like you just as much?" Ben's eyes went round as saucers when Zee swore. "What? It's a fair question."

Grinding his molars together, Zee gave a painful smile. "Yes, Ben. He looked equally troubled going by the tepee in his trunks." When the last word left Zee's lips, Ben did fall off his chair.

"Bwahahaha. Trunks!" He hooted uncontrollably as Zee watched in bemusement.

“You are such a kid, Ben! You know what? Get out! Before I throw you out.” Zee threatened.

“Yep, got that!” Making quick work of shutting the door behind him, Ben lost it again on the other side of the wall.

Zee dropped his head on the cool wood of his desk and repeated the movement a few times. Remnants of his hangover headache taunted him, and the powerful, yet disappointing orgasm and battle for supremacy over his beast, had left him completely exhausted. Time to go home.

He would figure the rest out tomorrow.

Chapter 4

The next morning Luka rose early and stood in front of the window as he drank his coffee and took in the breath-taking African sunrise.

Thankfully, his cat gave up on getting his way sometime during the night, retreating into a corner to sulk. Luka almost enjoyed the silent treatment a bit after the temper tantrum of the day before.

In the kitchen he rinsed his cup and took a water bottle out of the fridge. At the door he placed his Springbok Rugby cap on his head, and grabbed the bunch of keys Ben issued him after his interview. The morning air filled his lungs as he walked towards the storage sheds containing the four-wheeled utility vehicle, along with other tools and equipment he would need to do his work. Although his official job description stated he was the groundskeeper, Ben pretty much explained Luka may be asked to help wherever he could, the same way all employees pitched in when required. Luka liked the possible variance a lot, because mixing things up meant both man and animal never got bored.

Ben had given him a short to-do list complete with an in-depth map of the park, until Luka became more familiar with his surroundings and able to identify jobs for himself. According to Ben, a few fences required mending, and their appearance refreshed with a new coat of paint. In addition, flower beds needed weeding and replanting and large areas of the bricked or cobblestoned walking areas posed a slip hazard due to the moss growing on them.

In the equipment shed, he placed the required items for the day on the back of the UTV and drove to where his map showed the broken fences in big red crosses. With the local radio station as company, he got to work replacing worn broken planks before sanding and staining the new wood.

Engrossed with his task, a now familiar, but torturous aroma reached his nostrils before he heard their voices. If the gorgeous creature from the office came anywhere near Luka, things could turn to shit in seconds. Containing his animal would be near impossible if the other man proved to be his mate. Nothing stood between two mates, and anyone doing so, took a chance on their life, but in this case, the obstacle was him.

Sitting on his knees, he kept his hands moving rhythmically as he painted the planks in front of him. Recognizing Ben's voice, Luka held his breath,

ferverently hoping they'd walk past. The footsteps slowed as they approached his spot, and every muscle in Luka's body went on high alert, with his cock happily taking the lead.

"Oh, here he is. Hey, Luka!" Ben's jovial voice hinted at mischief. Luka hoped the man could move fast enough to get out of the way if the situation turned to hell on him.

Rising slowly, Luka turned around, pulling his cap down further to hide his eyes. And there he stood—the one man in the world who could bring Luka to his knees with a crook of his little finger.

"Howzit, big man!" Ben smiled in welcome. "Zee, this is our new groundskeeper, Luka Vetrov. Luka, meet Zithembe Kekana, our boss. Just call him Zee for short."

Until that very moment, Luka had avoided eye contact, but he finally gave in and looked into smouldering caramel eyes. Zee's hands hung fisted at his sides, his nostrils flaring. A ticking muscle in his square jaw clearly expressed his own inner battle for control.

"Hi, Ben. Nice to meet you, Zee." The taste buds on his tongue exploded as he inhaled Zee's pheromones hanging in the air. Big mistake. His cat hissed, growling in rebellion and frustration, yearning to break free from the constraints which held him back.

Zee swallowed hard, his Adam's apple bobbing. "Hello, Luka. Same here. Ben, I forgot about an important call I have to make." Zee spun around and almost ran in the direction they came from, but not before Luka saw his eyes turn completely golden. Unsuccessfully, he tried to keep his own eyes from changing. His cat wanted to chase down Zee and prove to Zee who owned him. Not able to hide that his eyes had shifted, he turned to Ben who stared in bewilderment at the path Zee had fled down to get away.

"What the hell?" Shaking his head, Ben turned back to Luka... and did a double take.

"Shit! What the fuck is going on, Luka? Who are you?"

"I'm like you, Ben. You knew that the moment you met me. And in a spectacular surprise to you and me... and Zee apparently, I appear to be his mate."

"Like me? Us? You're not one of us. I would've recognized your scent." Ben squared his shoulders in a defensive manner.

“No, but I am a shifter. I live my life on a need-to-know basis, and I have special gifts to mask my identity from those I want to keep in the dark.” For a split second, Luka withdrew his masks and freed his true scent into the air. With the way his cat’s nature threatened to dominate him, the smell was overpowering.

Ben groaned and stumbled back a few steps, his hand going to his crotch where he exerted pressure in an effort to tame his obvious erection. Luka slammed his masks back in place.

“Fuck! Sorry, man. That’s not for you, just a reaction to the pheromones,” Ben offered apologetically.

“I know. I’ve been walking around in the same condition since I stopped here and caught a whiff of Zee. What or who is he? He’s marked the whole damn place.”

Ben breathed a bit easier. “As it should be. He’s our future king and the leader of our pride.”

“A prince? From the way he ran, I assume he’s either straight or gay, but not out to your people?”

Ben chuckled. “Not straight at all, but in the closet. For the moment anyway. I’ve been trying to convince him to spill the truth to them, and let the cards fall where they may, but he’s still thinking on it. Let’s just say the Zulu culture is not forgiving and any form of weakness is quickly eradicated.”

“Whatever rules our world: fate, nature, or God, always has the last say. Nothing ever comes easy, does it? I have a mate—and he’s fucking gorgeous, but we can’t have each other, because he has another destiny to fulfil. As your king. Maybe being gay is the least of their worries. Wait until they hear I’m a different species altogether.” Turning away in disgust, Luka grabbed his cap and threw it down on the ground in frustration.

“What are you?” Ben asked softly. “I know you’re a predator like us. A damn big one.”

Luka faced Ben as he allowed another part of him to show.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Ben whispered in awe when black stripes appeared on Luka’s skin from his face to his feet, his eyes burning like chips of ice.

Ben snorted. “Zee has met his match with you, bro’. His cat is huge, but I’m sure you can give him a run for his money. So, what are you gonna do about it?” Ben asked in all seriousness.

“I am not claiming an unwilling mate, Ben. I don't do rape either. So, it's up to Zee to decide the lengths of the risks he's willing to take and what's more important to him. Being here, smelling him and knowing he's close, it's very difficult for us, and if Zee won't choose us, I'll leave. Soon.”

Leaving would kill him, but Luka had to do what was best for both of them. Maybe distance would lessen the pull between them.

“Luka, no authority trumps that of a true mating. None. Zee is scared out of his mind. I've never seen him become worked up over anyone else, and I've never seen him run from anything in his life. He's my best friend, and I want to see him happy. He needs you.”

“I need him too. Everything in me wants to go after him and take what belongs to me, but not against his will. I'm not living the rest of my life with a mate who'll despise me for claiming him and ruining his life.” Luka wouldn't budge.

Ben appeared sad. “I'll see if I can talk some sense into him. He's stubborn and even worse, he's scared, but hopefully he'll listen to me. I'll talk to you later, man.” Ben gave a determined nod.

“Thanks, Ben.” Luka picked up his paint brush and carried on painting.

Wow, a prince for a mate? Luka burned to call his parents and tell them the good news, but he held back. It would be cruel to get them excited only to shatter their joy if things didn't work out.

Zee had a decision to make, and if he chose Luka, he vowed to make it worth every bit of agony his mate was going through until the day he died.

Chapter 5

Ben found Zee's office empty and headed to Zee's house. As a pride member, Ben had to follow the lead of his prince, but as a friend, Ben couldn't let Zee give up his personal happiness for the sake of their people.

He didn't bother knocking when he reached the front door of Zee's cottage, but walked straight in. Zee lay stretched out on the couch, his arm flung over his eyes, his breathing almost erratic.

"You know you're fighting a losing battle, don't you? There's no way you can deny yourself your mate, Zee. That's crazy shit," Ben started.

Zee didn't move, but growled at him. Ben stood his ground.

"Leave me alone." Zee's voice no longer sounded human, and Ben reminded himself to tread carefully.

"No, I can't. Zee, man. I love you like a brother. I'm not gonna stand back and watch you give Luka up. So many of us never find our mates or wait so long before it happens. We all yearn for that bonding of lovers and friends. He's the other half of your soul, Zee. Don't give him up."

The longer Zee remained unresponsive, the more pissed off Ben became. "So, that's it? The mighty prince of the *Ibhubezi* tribe is a coward? Too shit-scared to choose the destiny laid out before him on a silver platter?"

Zee's attack happened fast. The next moment Ben found himself slammed into the concrete wall of the room, his body suspended a good foot above the ground. Zee's unsheathed claws held him immobilised with a death grip around his throat. Trusting that his friend wouldn't kill him, Ben stared into Zee's striking golden-yellow eyes. The tips of Zee's fangs showed between his parted lips, and his nostrils flared wide in anger.

"I am no coward."

"No, you're not," Ben soothed. "Don't do this, Zee. You need Luka, and God knows, he needs you, too. You can't live this life without your mate."

Zee growled at him, his eyes bleeding back to brown. Slowly, he released Ben's throat before turning away to sit back down.

"Two destinies stretch out before me: one chosen for me by the blood running through my veins, the other offered to me by God! If I choose the first I

lose my mate forever, destroying two souls in one go. If I choose Luka, I disappoint my father, my mother, the elders, and my whole fucking pride! So, either way I'm fucked, Ben!" The anguish on Zee's face cut Ben deeply, and his heart bled for his friend.

"No! God wouldn't be so cruel as to reveal your destiny and then withhold it from you! I don't believe that and deep down, neither do you! There is a damn good reason this is happening after taking over from your dad. This is meant to happen. This is your future and Luka is part of it. Don't be an idiot! Whatever journey lies ahead of you, whether it's with this pride or a new one, you need Luka by your side to accomplish it. I'm done talking to you. If you don't want to believe, then there's nothing else I can do." Ben walked out, slamming the door behind him.

He found Luka in the same place, packing up his equipment to move on to the next job. The white ice of the man's eyes slammed into Ben's gut, the agony in them stealing his breath.

"I've spoken to him, but I'm not sure if that would make any difference to what he does. He's mad and in pain. On Friday night, the elders of our tribe will be here for a meeting with Zee. Afterward, there will be a barbecue and dinner for all staff at the big thatch roof *lapa* behind the staff living area. He'll be there. Don't give up on him too quickly, Luka."

"Thank you. By staff, I gather you mean they're all part of the pride?"

"Yes. A bunch of lions and you." Ben grinned before turning away, heading in the direction of the front gate.

Luka had two days to prepare for his meeting with his mate and Ben hoped he made it count.

No amount of cold showers could get Zee's body to calm down. Neither did jerking off. Only one man could still the raging hunger rushing through his veins and Zee couldn't let that happen.

Luka made him want so many things he could never have. Being a prince and future king of his people meant Zee always had to exude a dominant, powerful persona. He had to lead. Make decisions. Be strong. Show no fear. No weakness.

Seeing the bigger than life Luka had been his undoing. Zee had been seconds away from getting on his hands and knees to beg his mate to claim

him. Zee wanted... no, he needed Luka to take him, fill him, stretch his body to the point of hurting, then fucking him into oblivion.

Zee didn't want to lead, or be strong, and take care of others, for once. He wanted to be taken care of, by someone solid with whom he trusted his life. Zee craved letting go of all his responsibilities, allowing himself to be mastered. Luka looked like that master and Zee would beg for him.

In shorts, sleeveless T-shirt, and hiking boots, Luka's appearance resembled everyone else's, but one glance into those baby blues, and all notion of ordinary fled out the window. Dangerous predator radiated from every inch of Luka's body. Zee wanted to climb the big man like a tree and rip his clothes off, take what belonged to him alone. The idea someone else may touch Luka, if they parted ways, drove Zee crazy with jealousy.

And yet, Zee would have to let Luka go. By no means would the elders or the pride accept a gay king with a mate from another species. Zee couldn't see that happening any day soon.

Frustration roiled inside of him and his pushy cat convinced him to go for a run, but he had to wait for darkness to fall. Up until now, their existence remained a secret and took priority in protecting his people. Many years ago a few reports surfaced on sightings of completely black lions in the wild, but thankfully the rumours died down and went unconfirmed. His ancestors' decision to move their whole tribe to a habitat where they could become more inconspicuous had saved their pride. A large black predator didn't blend very well into the browns and golds of the savannah, so the more tropical vegetation of Kwazulu Natal suited them well.

By the time the last shades of red and orange succumbed to the night, Zee left his cottage and took the shortest route to the wild expanse of land at his doorstep. His bare feet made no sound as he stuck to the shadows, careful to remain undetected by people moving about. On the other side of the high fence, he took off at a slow jog on two feet, but soon fell forward onto all fours. Before his palms slammed into the ground, they had shifted into massive black paws, the change effortlessly rolling through Zee's body. Unable to contain his heartache and irritation any longer, his lion roared its discontent loudly, the sound echoing in the night around him.

Usually, he revelled in letting his animal go, and in the powerful freedom the action granted him, but not tonight. The lion with whom he shared his body and head, had a one track mind, and running in the opposite direction of where his mate waited, proved to be the most draining exercise of his life.

To his utter relief, he found the further he ran, the lesser the pull to turn back became. Approaching a small creek running through the western border of the property, Zee slowed down and walked up to the water. The surrounding Drakensberg mountains fed the creek with fresh spring water, the coolness soothing his tight, dry throat. Drinking his fill, he retreated to lie down and rest on a soft bed of moss nearby.

When a bushbuck made a hesitant appearance a few minutes later, Zee couldn't muster up any excitement for a hunt. Normally, he enjoyed the chase, but nothing could take his mind off of Luka or the way his body ached to answer the call to be with him. His constant state of arousal since first seeing Luka drove him crazy. No matter how many times he got off by his own hand, complete satisfaction eluded him. Each time his need became greater. A need only his mate could satisfy.

Every inch of Luka oozed self-confidence—and sexual knowledge. Zee had no doubt he would be satiated by his mate. Everything about Luka warned people off; intense blue eyes, his intimidating physique, the square set of his broad shoulders, his slow, measured movements. Such control promised an inferno in the bedroom or danger for anyone else if Luka let go of his self-restraint. A fleeting image flashed across his mind: Zee on his knees in the dirt, one of Luka's hands entangled in Zee's braids as Luka pulled Zee's head back for a brutal kiss while pounding into him from behind. The vision left him weak and painfully horny, a condition very familiar to him by now.

Gradually, the night sounds comforted and calmed him, the crickets chirping, the trees swaying in the wind. Laying his head on his front paws, he drifted off to sleep, completely exhausted from the inner battle of the last few days. Who knew things could change so significantly in the span of one day. With one meeting. Over one man.

Zee woke up with a start, looked around, but saw nothing out of place. He had another drink before turning back, but he took his time by walking. Along the way he rubbed against tree trunks, allowing the leaves of shrubs and grasses to stroke his coat like a lover's kiss as he glided past.

Approaching the place where he had slipped through the fence, Zee allowed his human half to re-emerge. Defeat weighed heavy on his shoulders. He wished he could go to sleep and wake up in an entirely different world—one where he wasn't a prince and had no royal obligations. He wanted to simply be an ordinary person who didn't have to exist in fear, but could live openly with

his friends and his family. A life where he could freely walk side by side with his man, and all knew Luka owned his heart.

Chapter 6

Two days resembled a fucking eternity, and telling himself to be calm or more reasonable made no difference to Luka. Since he last saw Zee, Luka had been fighting a losing battle with his animal counterpart.

Randomly during his work day he'd catch a whiff of Zee, and would become unable to rein the beast in. His eyes would change, his skin and scalp would prickle as the stripes he masked appeared. Facing Zee tonight would tell him exactly where he stood with his beloved mate, and the time couldn't come quick enough. Exhaustion rode him like the devil, and Luka wanted the whole mess over and behind him. From both his encounters with Zee, Luka almost believed he'd never stood a chance, but until Zee refused him to his face, he'd fight for them.

If Zee denied him once more, he'd pack his shit and get out of there. For good. Fuck! Maybe he should go all the way back to bloody Siberia. The cold and distance should deflate his dick for longer than a few minutes, and soothe the hole in his chest threatening to bleed him out.

In an attempt to impress the visiting elders, Luka dressed in his best pair of jeans, a smart black button-down short-sleeved shirt, and his black and blue Patrick Ewing sneakers. Mentally making a note to take them off before getting into a fight tonight, he locked his door at quarter to nine, and walked in the direction of the party he could hear going on. Jovial conversation, laughter and the aroma of delicious char-grilled meat lead the way.

Under the covering of the trees, he slowed to a halt, taking in the scene before him. On the back wall of the braai area, Ben and a few other large men cooked the meat on an open fire made in a brick fireplace.

About thirty odd people, men and women, all dark-skinned, stood around enjoying glasses of wine, beer, or other beverages. Some sat around the rustic wooden tables as they enjoyed their meals.

Luka's eyes honed in on where his mate stood talking to three older, but intimidating-looking men. The elders. Across the distance Luka identified the strain of the last few days on Zee's face. Through the smile Zee gave the men, Luka could see the corners of those luscious lips pull down in sadness. Dark marks marred the skin under his expressive eyes, and his colour appeared pale compared to the first day Luka had seen him. His mate needed him.

Squaring his shoulders, Luka took a deep breath and prayed for his heart to stay intact no matter what happened. At least until he found some privacy to let the pain out. Keeping his eyes pinned on his mate he walked out from the shadows and climbed the few steps before weaving his way through those standing around to where Ben barbecued some steaks and chops.

No wind blew tonight, so Luka took his time watching Zee while the man stayed unaware of his presence. Coming up to Ben he smiled in greeting. "Hey, Ben."

Ben's eyes cut to where Zee stood with his back to them. "Hello, Luka. I'm glad you decided to come. Please help yourself to something to eat and drink."

"Thanks, I'll do that." Luka extracted a chilled beer out of the zinc tub filled with ice. He twisted off the cap and took a swig, the cool bitterness tasted so good. With his lips wrapped around the bottle tip and his head arched slightly back, Luka made eye contact with one of the elders standing across from Zee. He knew his masks were firmly in place, but he should've known his size alone would draw attention very quickly.

Ignoring the probing stare, he wandered back to where Ben and his cooking buddies made light conversation. He took a dinner plate and lifted a few lids and selected a T-bone steak, side salad and grilled bread which he started eating while listening to their conversation. Ben introduced him to a quiet, but friendly man called Jacob, and a shorter stockier guy, Marcus, who had a mischievous look about him.

Looking up in-between bites he froze when he saw Ben's gaze riveted somewhere over Luka's shoulder. Placing his knife and fork down on the plate and wiped his mouth with the serviette. Crunch time.

He slowly turned around, every muscle in his body ready for action. Someone must've picked up on his presence and not liked it at all. But when he turned around to face the threat, Zee's golden cat eyes held him captive—was his mate unable to fight the pull between them any longer?

"Fuck!" Ben spat beside him.

"I'm fucked you mean? I'm on my own, yeah?" Luka snorted.

Not waiting for an answer, Luka took two steps forward, closing the distance between him and Zee. And then things turned to shit very quickly. The three elders moved into position in front of their prince and pushed Zee behind them. Logically, he knew the action to be for protection, but they had a death wish to come between two mates who hadn't consummated said mating.

For once Luka's cat pushed him aside and rose to the forefront. A loud growl escaped his throat and the gasps erupting around him confirmed his stripes were visible. The elders froze, their eyes shifting, their stances ready for attack.

"Zee, who is this man? And what is he doing on our land?" The tallest and broadest of the three elders spoke.

A hiss and chuff rumbled through his chest, but he waited to hear Zee's reply. The man deserved a chance. The party-goers all stood back against the surrounding *lapa* walls, the danger in the air tangible. Confusion, apprehension, and excitement rippled through the crowd. All these people would attack at a moment's notice to defend their leader, and sadly, Luka would fight to the death if they kept him from his mate. Only Zee could refuse him and send him away. If Zee bid him to stay, nothing but death would keep him away. He would wait as long as Zee took to make his decision.

"Luka. Back down my man. I know what you're thinking, but don't. You won't survive." Ben spoke firmly, but gently behind his left shoulder. That Ben and his two friends still stood on his side of the face-off brought him great comfort. He could almost believe Ben and his friends would fight with him instead of against him.

"Zithembe?" The elder growled.

Zee shouldered his way past the wall of muscle standing squarely in front of him. Sweat droplets ran down the side of his face and he stared everywhere but at Luka. At the sky, the flames dancing in the fireplace and even his own feet.

"Zee, you have thirty seconds to explain this or we will remove this intruder from our midst." Luka didn't like the older guy, who obviously thought he ran the show. However, no one had the right to undermine a true mating, not to mention a royal one.

"Uncle..." Zee's hoarse voice broke his heart. "I never knew..." He broke off.

"Knew what?" Uncle Dick spat out, the disrespect for Zee hard to miss.

Luka heard Zee breathe deep. "This man's name is Luka Vetrov and he's a new employee." Zee lifted his head and stared straight at Luka. "And he's also my mate." Whispers and loud exclamations burst from the onlookers.

"Your mate? Are you insane!" Dickhead exploded, swinging around to stare at Zee. "Men don't mate with men, Zithembe Kekana!" Using Zee's full name,

the elder attempted to try and intimidate his man, but Luka stood back, allowing Zee to take the lead. Zee needed to do this for himself in front of his people.

“This one does, Uncle. I would’ve liked to discuss this with my parents first, but I’m obviously out of time.” Luka could feel Zee’s heartache and fear over his parents’ reaction to his sexuality.

Clearing his throat, Zee started at one side of the gathering and let his eyes go from one person to the next, looking them squarely in the eye. Everyone listened as their prince spoke. “This is as good a time as any to tell you I am gay. No, I’m not confused. Yes, I have deceived you all with my silence and I regret doing so. The reasons why are hopefully obvious—a king is expected to carry on the royal lineage of the *Ibhubezi* pride and I’m gay.”

“I never expected to have a mate, believed it to be impossible. I was wrong, because a few days ago, this man walked into my life and changed every preconceived idea I had. Some of us wait years for our mates, while others pass on without ever meeting the other half of their soul. If I remember one thing my father, your king, has taught me, it is if you have a mate, you’re blessed beyond measure.” Zee’s voice wavered, and he swallowed.

Zee took three steps forward, his gaze clashing with Luka’s. “I am blessed beyond measure, although I know many of you may disagree. I’ve fought the inevitable, to deny this man would be suicide, to my heart, and to my soul, and would leave me an empty shell for the rest of my life. I can no more do that than take a knife and end my own life. I won’t do it.”

Luka closed the distance between them and came to a stop in front of Zee. Raising his hand, he laid his palm against Zee’s warm cheek and watched the man’s eyes close in pleasure as he rested his face in Luka’s hand. Within seconds Zee’s pheromones released into the air, and no one could miss the effect they had on each other.

“Zithembe! You can’t do this! Imagine your father’s reaction to this. You’re a disgrace to this tribe and to all your people,” Dick yelled, his face puffed up and his eyes wild.

“I’m sorry, Uncle Frank, but I can and I will. If following my destiny means disgracing my tribe, so be it.” With those final words Zee spun away and headed for the steps leading away from the gathering.

Chapter 7

“Go, Luka. We’ll see you guys tomorrow, and hopefully I can do some damage control here.” Ben nudged his shoulder.

“Thank you. I won’t forget your support, Ben,” Luka declared before going after Zee.

By the time Luka entered the shadows of the tree cover, Zee had disappeared from sight, but his scent led Luka to a *rondavel* similar to his own. The open door invited him in, and Luka started shedding his clothes once the door shut behind him, and the lock clicked in place. Frustration warred within him when he had to stop to toe off his sneakers and pull off his socks. The smell of Zee’s arousal drew him down the dark passage, where a light beckoned from a room to his right.

His breath left in a whoosh when he came to a standstill in the doorway. A completely naked Zee lay stretched out on a red sheet covering a massive bed, a hand firmly wrapped around an impressive erection. Luka had waited long enough. The last few days might only be hours for some, but to him the timespan had resembled an eternity during which he’d been unable to touch his man. No more.

Zee languorously stroked his cock as he watched his larger-than-life mate take him in where he sprawled out on his back on the sheets. The comforter and pillows lay discarded on the floor where he flung them earlier in his haste.

Taking in the raw beauty of Luka as he faced Zee, proudly erect, Zee moaned deep inside his throat at the thought of what was to come. Luka’s nostrils flared and the corner of his mouth hitched up.

“Oh, babe. I can smell your need for submission a mile away and know this: I will satisfy your every desire any time you need me to.” And with that, Zee couldn’t drag his gaze from Luka as he strode forward, placed a knee on the bed and climbed over Zee’s body, straddling his hips. Bending over, Luka met Zee’s mouth, their lips sealing together in a hard kiss. His body spun into realms of unknown pleasure as Luka’s tongue slipped inside to taste. Luka’s flavour assaulted all his senses, Zee’s body screaming satisfaction as it acknowledged and received its mate.

Their tongues met in a dominant display of duels, taking and giving, sucking and licking as the fires of their needs swept them higher. Luka withdrew, pulling on Zee's bottom lip before kissing a line up his jaw. Another nip to his earlobe shot electricity up his spine, but then a rough tongue licked a long stroke up the tender skin of his neck—and Luka purred, the sound resounding through Zee's chest. So unbelievably hot.

“Fuck! I'm gonna come.” Zee tried to grab his dick to stem the threatening eruption of seed, but a strong grip clamped around his wrist stopped him.

“No, you're not!” Luka growled, sitting up. He inched up until he straddled Zee's chest, effectively using his legs to immobilize Zee's arms. Zee couldn't care less, because he only had eyes for the gorgeous cock right in front of him. When the object of his affection came no closer, he looked up. Luka's gaze promised to melt him into a puddle on the bed.

“Can you deliver on the promise you made through the window the other day?” Luka grinned.

Zee remembered the lust slamming through him when Luka came out of the swimming pool like an ancient Viking, strong and hard. How he'd licked his lips in a blatant invitation to suck Luka down.

“Hell, yes!” Zee's mouth watered as he parted his lips, his eyes begging Luka to fill his mouth as he craved to be filled somewhere else.

Taking himself in hand, Luka sat forward, dangling his dick above Zee's parted lips just as a bead of precum dripped off. Bucking against his restraints, Zee craned his neck to catch the precious drop on the tip of his tongue, sighing in bliss as he succeeded.

Luka lost the semblance of cool restraint, because the next moment his flesh pushed past Zee's moist lips to lodge in the back of his throat. Trusting his mate to take care of him, Zee swallowed, breathing through his nose to hold his gag reflex in check. Approval shone down from Luka's stunning baby blues and Zee desired to please him all the more.

When Luka started pumping in and out of his mouth, Zee let go and allowed himself to be used. So content to be what Luka needed. Saliva wet his lips and crept down his neck, but Zee lost himself in the pleasure reflected on his mate's face.

Minutes later, Luka hissed and withdrew completely, and Zee moaned in disappointment, moving restlessly under Luka's weight. He needed so bad.

“I know,” Luka answered and Zee realised he’d spoken out loud. The bedside drawers opened, first the one, then the other until Luka found the lube Zee kept there. Sniffing the tube briefly, Luka smiled in satisfaction, obviously approving of no one else’s smell on it but Zee’s.

Climbing off Zee’s chest, Luka moved down and spread Zee’s thighs before taking his place between them, propping them up for easier reach. Luka first applied a generous amount of slick to his own cock, before squeezing more onto his fingers.

His hand disappeared between Zee’s legs, a finger brushed over his taint to slowly swirl around and around his pucker before pushing in slightly. Luka took Zee’s hard-on in his other hand and stroked him while preparing his body for penetration. He teased, rubbed and pulled before a second finger joined the play and Zee’s hips lifted off the bed, seeking something much deeper and thicker.

A third thick finger slid in alongside the others and Zee whimpered—the pleasure and pain mingling to form a wicked euphoria he found himself suspended in, waiting, waiting to fly. The next instant Luka’s digits disappeared and two hard hands pushed his thighs up and out.

“Hold them,” Luka ordered him.

Hopelessly caught up in the maelstrom of emotions and sensations far above and beyond any he had ever experienced, Zee grabbed onto his own legs and pulled them back, baring his body and soul to his mate.

Luka used a hand to direct his cock and joined his other with one of Zee’s, linking their fingers together as he slowly applied pressure.

“Breathe, Zee. Bear down,” Luka whispered, his eyes glued to where Zee’s body battled, but steadily overcame the struggle to accept Luka’s erection. Zee squirmed around, lying still almost impossible as the wicked burn threatened to hurtle him over the edge.

“Shit! You’re getting off on the pain?” Luka incredulous eyes locked in on Zee’s hard, pointed nipples and the little pool of precum now gathered on his sweaty abs. “Your skin is like liquid chocolate, I just want to lick you all over.”

The head of Luka’s cock popped through the tightest ring of muscle, and they both groaned loudly as the hardness slid all the way in until Luka’s hips touched the back of Zee’s thighs. Zee’s muscles bunched and quivered with tension, his dick throbbed painfully and his heart threatened to pound out of his

chest. He needed Luka to... move and take and pound into him until he passed out.

“My pleasure, mate.” And with those words, Luka did exactly that. He pulled most of the way out and slammed back in with raw power and strength. As the claiming commenced, Zee’s cat came to the fore, his claws shot through, his fangs descended and his vision cleared to that of the animal inside of him.

As if answering the call of Zee’s lion, Luka’s cat seemed to emerge. His eyes bled out to almost completely silver-blue and the stripes appeared all over his body, from the hair on his head down to his feet.

The sight before him—his soul-mate in his full naked glory, vulnerable and yet so mighty in the power of his beast—undid Zee. His orgasm shot up his legs, through his spine and he cried out, letting go of his legs and wrapping them around Luka’s hips. Rearing up he pulled Luka down and kissed him as his body convulsed, gripping Luka’s cock tight as semen pulsed from the stinging tip of his own.

The sexy smile on Luka’s lips made his stomach flip over. “We’re not done.”

He continued to fuck into Zee, crouching over with his elbows next to Zee’s shoulders while staring into Zee’s eyes. In between their bodies, Zee stayed hard, his skin sensitive, but so ready for more. When the next orgasm rolled through his every cell, Luka smiled again, with fucking huge fangs showing this time. Pushing in deep, Luka stopped moving, the look on his face serious.

“If we do this, there’s no turning back. You still want this. Want me?” The flicker of fear in the bottomless blue pools gripped Zee’s heartstrings. He would tolerate no doubt between them.

“Fuck, yes!” Tightening his grip behind Luka’s neck, Zee pulled Luka down into the crook of his neck. “Do it, please!” Zee begged.

Luka resumed his pumping, the rhythm hard and fast... animalistic in its passion and Zee had no more time to make sense of anything. The same moment his second, more powerful orgasm rocked his body, his cat roared in triumph as Luka’s canines sank into his flesh while he did the same on the other side of Luka’s neck.

Luka’s cat celebrated its conquest when the small hollows at the back of his fangs acted like tiny straws to draw his mate’s blood into his body. Zee claimed

him the same way, the pain overshadowed by the bliss exploding inside of them. And he came, over and over, filling Zee with his cum while their blood and tissues mingled and became one.

Chapter 8

Reality slowly snuck up on them and Luka retracted his teeth, soothing the wounds with gentle licks and kisses, knowing the saliva would speed up the healing. Goose bumps riddled his skin as Zee returned the favour before pulling far enough away for them to see each other.

“That’s the fucking hottest thing I’ve seen in a long time,” Luka said incredulously. “And I’ve just had the most amazing moment of my life, so that’s saying a lot.”

“What is?” Zee still panted, sweat running down his temples into his braids.

“My own eyes looking back at me. Don’t get me wrong, you’re gorgeous with your golden eyes, but man, this is something.” Zee’s eyes had turned icy blue, taking on a characteristic of his mate and Luka felt his chest puff up at the evidence of their joining.

“Really?” Zee pushed at Luka’s shoulders, trying to dislodge him.

“Wait, wait,” Luka laughed as he pulled away, his softened dick sliding from Zee’s warm body. Zee rolled off the bed and strode into the bathroom.

“That is so bloody cool.” He heard Zee’s voice from behind the dividing wall and walked over.

Zee burst out laughing, then cut it short. “Oops!”

Luke chuckled. “What?”

“Laughing is not a good idea after what we just did, but man! Look at you!” Zee pointed as he reached for a cloth and warmed it under the tap to clean himself off.

In front of the mirror Luka discovered an amazing new dark golden tan covering him from head to toe. Those who knew him would immediately notice the undeniable difference. The darker skin colour illuminated his eyes and light hair.

“It is true then,” he mumbled in amazement.

Zee came up behind him in the mirror, pushing up against his naked back as they stared at their shared reflection. “I never doubted, but we all wonder what those exchanges would be.” As Luka watched Zee’s eyes gradually returned to its hazel shade and so did the colour of his skin. “Damn!” he sighed in disappointment.

Zee chuckled. “Maybe you’ll just have to keep me in bed often and you’ll stay that way.”

“Good idea.”

When Luka turned around to grab the man, Zee sprinted away. “Let’s go for a run!”

Coming out of the bedroom Luka saw the front door stood open and Zee nowhere to be seen. Zee hadn’t shifted yet, but he moved damned fast and had slipped past the fence and into the forest already. As if daring Luka to catch him.

Following Zee’s scent he jogged through the foliage, letting his animal senses free. A good few minutes later, the branches and long grass gave way to grass clearing where Zee stood waiting for him.

While Luka watched Zee fell onto all fours and changed forms—into the biggest fucking lion Luka had ever seen. A black lion with golden eyes. Luka shuddered in appreciation of his mate’s cat. There had been rumours about sightings and the existence of completely black lions, but never confirmed since the first witness came forth almost seventy-five years ago.

Zee lay down with his big head on his front paws, as if telling Luka to hurry up and shift already. Which he did standing up, balancing on his hind legs before slowly lowering his front paws to the soft grass underneath. He heard Zee purr loudly in approval.

Zee’s breath stuttered in his chest at the sight of the enormous white tiger standing a few feet away. The emotion in the silver blue irises framed by dark, long lashes cut through his every thought, cell, and emotion, baring his soul. Luka’s tail switched from side to side behind him and Zee longed to feel the softness wrap around him.

Luka came forward and walked all the way around Zee, his tail stroking lovingly across Zee’s flanks before Luka rubbed up against his neck from the side, lifting up his head. Purrs reverberated through the air, the expression of utter bliss and contentment to be free to love each other. A warm, long tongue licked up his neck to his ear before nipping at the tip. Zee did his own familiarising as he bathed Luka’s luxurious coat with his tongue. The pale colour of the tiger matched the man’s pale hair and skin tone. Thick black stripes ran all along the big body and over his mate’s face. A short mane

thickened Luka's neck and Zee longed to sink his fingers into the softness. He slid down the side of Luka's long, muscled body and came up the other side, using his nose to rub under Luka's chin this time.

In amazement, Zee thought of the last few days and how drastically his life had changed. How completely blessed and fortunate he was. He had been given a strong, honourable, loyal and gorgeous mate. A future. A destiny.

The sight of Luka's massive tiger reignited his passion for his lover, his body humming with need. In front of Luka, Zee lay down on his haunches, lifting his tail in invitation and surrender. The warmth of Luka's cat covered him from above, strong paws framing his body, growly purrs making his hair stand on end.

As their skin touched they both shifted back, Luka's chest hot against Zee's naked back. Luka licked across the tender spots where he bit Zee earlier. The bite stung, but also sent exciting shocks straight to his cock nestled on the soft mat of grass underneath his stomach. "I need you, Luka." The moan made him sound almost weak, but he had never been more empowered in his life than this moment. He had a mate and a future he couldn't wait to explore.

"You got me, Zithembe." In one fluid movement Luka reared back, pulled Zee onto his knees and slid inside of him, his entry eased by the remaining cum left in Zee's ass. Zee sunk desperate fingers into tufts of long grass, digging his fingernails into the soil underneath to hold on.

"I love the tattoo. So freakin' hot!" Luka groaned as he slowly withdrew and rocked back in.

Confused, Zee had to think. "Oh, my shoulder?" The cock filling his ass made it hard to form coherent speech. "It's not a tat. That's the mark we all carry from birth. A lion gave it to us, long ago. Can't talk now. Fuck me Luka!"

Zee cried out as Luka slammed into him, this time without restraint. It was fast, hard and rough, and Zee lost and found himself at the same time. Lost because all the demands and expectations of his parents, the elders, and his pride fell away. And he found himself strengthened by his weakness and need to yield and give it all to Luka, who could handle it, otherwise God wouldn't have given them to each other. They fit.

Luka hammered into him from behind, their flesh slapping together each time the man bottomed out in Zee's body, raking across his prostate in the process. Luka came over him, his hot breath fanning Zee's neck before those huge fangs sank into his flesh, his balls pulling up tight and shooting their load

up his dick as he came. The burn. The friction. The discomfort from being claimed twice in one night. The pain from the bite. They combined to launch him into oblivion, his body shaking and clamping down on Luka's cock where he ejaculated deep inside Zee's ass. Luka groaned above him, the sound a mix between a growl and a moan, their skin drenched with sweat where they glided together.

Zee's knees slid out from underneath his body, the cool grass soothing his hot skin. One word came to mind—perfection. Luka kissed his bite marks as he withdrew from Zee's body. Shifting to the side he half-covered Zee as he lay down next to him, wrapping a heavy arm around Zee, tracing the scar indentations of the lion's paw on Zee's shoulder with light touches.

“You drive me crazy.” Luka gave an exhausted sigh.

“Ditto,” Zee mumbled, smiling tiredly when Luka's laughter shook them both.

Minutes or possibly hours later, Zee stirred when Luka picked him up and started walking back. “Put me down.”

Luka ignored his objection and Zee nodded off again, too tired to argue. Once back in Zee's house, Luka pushed Zee under the warm spray of the shower before joining him. Luka washed and dried them both before taking Zee's hand to lead him to bed. Under the covers, Zee cuddled up close, putting his ear on Luka's chest before closing his eyes. He belonged here. In Luka's arms. Forever.

The tantalising aroma of frying bacon drew Zee awake better than any alarm ever could. Memories from the night before came rushing back and Zee experimentally stretched under the covers, wincing when not only his shoulder but also his ass complained.

In the early hours of dawn Luka slid into him from behind where they lay spooned together. Long, steady strokes of his cock from Luka's rough palm mimicked the actions in Zee's tender hole as Luka made love to him. The slower and gentle motions pulled him over into another powerful climax before he succumbed to sleep once more.

Flipping the comforter off he rolled over and inspected the sheets which thankfully had no white spots on them. Luka had cleaned them off.

“Rise and shine, babe.” Luka walked into the room with a large tray of smoky bacon and scrambled eggs on wholegrain toast and two cups of steaming coffee.

“Hey, good morning. I’m so damn hungry I can eat a horse.” Zee smiled as he sat up.

Ravenous, they dug in and shared the meal, finishing it in minutes. While Zee sipped from his mug, he watched Luka pull on his clothes from the night before. He sat down on the side of the bed to tie his shoes before looking over his shoulder at Zee, his blond hair brushing his shoulders with the movement.

“I would love to lie in bed with you all day, but I know you’re sore and my boss is a slave driver. Wouldn’t want to piss him off.” Leaning across he kissed Zee softly, swiping a tongue over Zee’s slightly swollen lips.

“I may have to chat with your boss then. Can’t have him pushing you too hard,” Zee murmured against Luka’s mouth.

Seeing the happiness in his mate’s eyes made Zee become serious all of a sudden. “You know my uncle’s not going to let this rest?”

“I hoped, but from what I saw—no, he won’t.” A rough thumb rubbed against his cheek. “But whatever happens, we have each other, right?”

Zee nodded, Luka’s touch on his skin almost hypnotising. “Yes, and Ben and his cohorts. If we have to leave we can start over somewhere on our own. Somehow.”

Approval shone from Luka’s light eyes and he gave Zee a quick kiss before rising from the bed. “That’s all we need. I’m off to earn my bread and I’ll see you later.” He winked before leaving the room and Zee heard the front door open and close. He had half an hour to show up for work, but first things first. A shower.

Chapter 9

A bow string had nothing on Zee about two hours later. Imagine his surprise when no one barged into his office to rake him over the coals. No emails from his parents, or the elders, or even a phone call from a concerned pride member. None. The literal calm before the storm, he reminded himself, and almost jumped out of his seat when his door swung open. Only to have Ben walk through it with two cups of heavenly brew while he kicked the door shut behind him.

“Jumpy much?” Ben smirked.

“Wouldn’t you be?” Zee flung back, reaching out for his cup of nectar. “Thanks.”

Ben put his cup down on the coaster before walking around the desk. Without reservation his friend pulled his collar away, exposing Zee’s neck.

Ben whistled. “Fuck me! The man’s got some serious jaws, cuz.”

“I think it looks worse than it is.” Zee offered.

“You smell funny.” Ben grinned as he took a seat across from him. “Both of you sort of mixed up. Separate, but together.”

Zee smiled, feeling all fuzzy inside, and trying hard not to act like a sap. “I got him good too.”

Ben’s gaze turned sincere. “I’m honestly so happy for you, Z-man. And so damn relieved you didn’t give in under the pressure from the elders. You can’t live your life for others all the time. Sometimes we have to live it for us.”

Zee nodded his agreement. “But I hope you know the shitstorm is coming from this. Good old Frank will not rest until I’m exposed, ridiculed, and banned from my own pride. Are you still so sure I made the right decision when your support of me may mean the same for you, Jacob, and Marcus?”

“You are my future king and your father threatened to unman me with a blunt axe if I let him down in backing you up. Even without the threat over my head, or balls in this case, you’re my friend. I’m a bit insulted that you are questioning my loyalty.” Ben finished his drink and headed for the door.

“I don’t think I can ever tell you how much that means to me.” Zee spoke softly, the rollercoaster of emotions from the last few days starting to take its physical toll on his body.

“You don’t need to. I know. Go home Zee, you look like shit. Luka kept you up too late.” The door clicked shut behind Ben’s bulk. Zee reached for the phone and dialled his father’s mobile number only to slam it down when the voicemail came on. His mom and dad were officially on vacation after his father’s retirement from managing the pride full time. At their departure, his folks had the Seychelles, Namibia, and Egypt in their sights. Where they could be found stayed a mystery. Not being able to get in touch with them just ramped up his stress levels even more.

Trying to stay busy didn’t work and when he found himself staring out the window at the pool area in a daze several times, he locked up and went home. Once he swapped his jeans for a pair of sleeping shorts, he stretched out on the couch with a pillow under his head and fell asleep.

Throughout the morning Luka ticked off one job after another on his to-do-list. Leaving Zee in the bed this morning, looking all sleepy and fuckable had been hard. Not to mention the worry Zee carried over his parents and the whole threat from the elders circle.

After lunch he sensed Zee’s fatigue and his increased uneasiness. With his mate in distress, work became an obstacle standing between him and going home to see to Zee’s needs. So he worked harder and faster, managing to pack away his tools an hour earlier than planned.

At his place, he took a quick shower to wash of the dust and sweat before packing a bag and heading over to Zee’s house. A high, trimmed hedge lined the path up to Zee’s front door and before the latter came into view, Luka smelled the intruding scent. Not welcome at all.

The man’s presence on Zee’s front steps irritated Luka, but the act he was committing made Luka furious.

“Are you just fucking stupid or do you have a death wish?” The man whipped around so fast, his dick still in hand and the urine cut off mid-stream where he stood spraying the flowers beds and concrete in front of the house. Seeing Luka, the idiot shoved his prick back into his pants and stumbled back, creating a distance between them with terror in his eyes.

“I’m sorry. I’m only doing what I’ve been told.” He stammered, still retreating. Looking closer, Luka noticed he couldn’t be much older than twenty, tops. A kid.

Luka stilled. "Who sent you?" Using kids to hide behind didn't fly by Luka.

"The elders." The youngster whispered. Reaching underneath his arm, he removed a white envelope which he held out to Luka. When Luka stepped closer, the kid dropped the letter and ran off.

The door opened to reveal a sleep-mussed Zee, clad only in sleep shorts and nothing else. The sight of him and the smell of another cat under his nose, drove Luka's hormones into overdrive, stat.

"What is that smell?" Zee screwed up his nose, still trying to wake up.

Luka growled in answer, beyond forming words at present. With a few steps he had the letter in hand and burst through the door. The envelope dropped to the floor as he kicked the door shut and hoisted a gasping Zee up in his arms.

The bedroom was out of the question. Too far. They ended up in the kitchen where Luka spied a bottle of olive oil on the counter and dropped Zee down right next to the lifeline. Zee's shorts hit the ground seconds later.

"Lie back." He ordered.

Zee's now blue eyes singed him on the spot as he obeyed, bringing his feet up and propping them on the edge of the counter. The action splayed him open for Luka's attentions.

"Hold it right there." The olive oil's lid flew off with his rough fumbling and he messed some on the floor, but he managed to get some where he wanted it. Dribbling down Zee ball sac to his ass. Spreading it downwards with his fingers he speared first one then two fingers into Zee's warm body. At Zee's hiss he glanced his way.

"You're sore."

"A bit, but it's good. So good. I want you." Zee's hips lifted to meet the slow thrust of his fingers.

Out of patience, he slathered some of the messed oil on his cock and lined up. Exerting slow, steady pressure he breached the ring of muscle easily, before sliding into heaven. Taking Zee's ass cheeks in his hands, he pulled them apart, his eyes glued to where he penetrated his lover's body.

"That's the hottest thing ever—my white cock moving in and out of your dark, pink hole. It's so damn sexy." Zee moaned and squirmed harder at his words, the man's thickly veined cock hard against his abs where moisture leaked from the slit.

“Imagine me fucking you the same way,” Zee gritted out. The image played in his head and he clenched his jaw to stem off his approaching orgasm.

“Would you let me?” Zee asked.

“There’s nothing I would ever deny you, Zithembe. You’re mine and I’m yours.”

Zee clamped his eyes shut, his knuckles turning pale where he clutched the sides of the cabinet under him. Luka slowed his thrusts, not wanting to hurt Zee any more than necessary. He made sure to angle in just right to graze over Zee’s prostate with every pump, pushing the man closer to the edge with every brush.

From this position he watched his lover—saw every frown, lips parting, the flick of a tongue, panting chest, sweat rolling from mocha skin, the beautiful pulsing erection all for him, and the scrotum underneath as it drew up tight, ready to shoot.

As Zee gave himself over to his release, he opened his eyes. Knowing Zee’s eyes turned blue and seeing them pin him to the floor were two totally different things. Luka groaned, but persevered in pumping through the tightness gripping his dick. When Zee’s body turned limp, Luka pulled out and jerked himself off fast, spraying his semen all over Zee’s stomach and groin until it dripped down over his taint.

Leaning over, he plastered himself to Zee and kissed the living shit out of him. Would this ever change—the burn, the need, the affection? He sucked Zee’s tongue into his mouth, rolling his own around and around it before letting it slide through his lips to pop out.

Zee smiled softly. “You’re so hot, Luka. The stripes, your eyes. You’re more than I could have ever asked for. Darker skin and all.”

Looking at his arms he chuckled. “At least I’ll have a tan some of the time.” He reached under Zee’s shoulder and lifted him off the table, taking them both into the shower where they washed off the remains of their passion.

After pulling on shorts, Luka lay back on the couch to watch as Zee started dinner.

“What is that?” Zee indicated with a wave and Luka saw the discarded white envelope next to his overnight bag by the door.

“Oh, yes! The little shit responsible for my caveman display earlier. He pissed all over your garden beds and front step while dropping this off for you.”

He retrieved the letter from the floor and handed it to Zee who tore it open and pulled out a note.

Zee's nostrils flared and Luka sensed the immediate tension in his mate's muscles. "What is it?"

"A fight-off," Zee said with resignation.

"What? Who?" Luka's heart beat faster.

"The elders are summoning me to a fight-off tomorrow night in the pride meeting area. They have chosen a suitable opponent to challenge my position of up and coming king. My uncle and his cronies seem to believe a faggot cannot be a true king and are therefore asking me to battle it out to prove my supremacy as the leader of this tribe." Zee slammed the letter down on the table and grabbed the whisk, rapidly beating the eggs intended for their omelettes as he fumed.

"I won't let you do this. I can't Zithembe. Don't ask me to." His throat tightened with his words. A match for supremacy usually didn't stop until one fighter died. Luka could not stand by and watch his mate be killed.

"Somewhere deep inside you must have known I am going to ask you to do exactly that. You would not fall for a coward and neither would I. My parents have prepared me all these years for ruling the pride, taught me about who I am, and I have to believe in their words or I will not come out of this alive. As my mate, it means you have to believe with me. I can't not show up for this. Any respect I have with my people will vanish if I don't fight. My strength and ability comes from who I am, and who I was born to be. And from you." Zee spoke calmly as he assembled the omelettes with cheese, mushrooms, spinach and ham. He served it with a small side salad and Luka sat on a bar stool at the kitchen counter while Zee ate his standing up on the other side.

Luka could've been eating cardboard for all he cared, but he finished the food and helped Zee clean the kitchen. The sombre atmosphere hung around all night, but Zee tried hard to lighten things up by giving Luka a successfully distracting blowjob after which he managed to doze off.

Chapter 10

His phone vibrating on the bedside table roused Zee from a restless sleep. The clock display showed 00:37 and on his other side Luka slept undisturbed. At least one of them was getting some much needed rest.

He picked up his phone and swiped across the screen. A tap on the little letter icon opened up the text messages. His dad. At bloody last.

"Son? U ok? Saw missed calls from u. In Egypt now."

He thought long and hard what to say in response.

"All sorted. Don't worry. Luv u."

Almost immediately another came back.

"Zithembe, ur a bad liar. Will sort u out when we're back."

That made him smile. His father's idea of sorting things out usually turned into a tipsy party. Serious men, serious talk. A bit of wine or vodka. And *walla!* Headache the next morning.

"Lol. Sure. G'night."

"Ur Mother says <3."

"<3 u too."

Zee never much got into the mushy shit with his parents, but this may be the last chance he had to tell them, so he did.

Sleep eventually came for him, as did daylight while he did the same down Luka's welcoming throat. Turned on his side afterward, Luka spooned him and got off rubbing up and down between Zee's butt cheeks.

Snuggled or rather glued together they listened as the day began. "You going to work today?" Luka's breath wafted against the back of his neck.

"No. I've got some mental preparing to do and being around people won't help."

"Fair enough. I've got heaps to do, so I'll get out of your way." Luka kissed his nape before rolling away.

"I didn't mean you have to go." Zee apologised.

"I know, but you need your space. I'll come home when you need me to." He sounded so reassuring, but in his eyes a storm raged.

“Thanks.” Zee threw aside the covers and followed him to the shower. They washed each other and shared slow, long kisses.

What night would bring he didn't know. Fear and intimidation wouldn't make him give up everything belonging to him. Giving in without a fight meant Ben, Marcus, and Jacob, wouldn't have a home here. Neither would Luka.

Somehow, he had to believe everything would work out. Or die believing it.

When Luka stormed into the house slightly after four, Ben sat on the couch to welcome him with a wide smile. Not Zee. And Luka much preferred Zee's version of welcome.

“Hey, Luka. Howzit going?” Ben's jovial tone couldn't disguise the seriousness in his gaze.

“Where's Zithembe?”

“In true Zithembe style, he's gone off to be by himself. Away from the noise around here. He'll be fine.”

“I know he will, because I won't let anything happen to him,” Luka growled.

“Coolit, man. I'm not your enemy in this.” Ben strolled to the kitchen and switched on the coffee machine. The rich aroma reminded him of a skipped lunch in an attempt to get home earlier.

Luka sat down and accepted a cup from Ben with a nod of thanks. “Luka, we need to talk.”

“Then talk.”

“No matter what goes down tonight, you can't interfere with the fight. Any help from any of us and Zee will forfeit the challenge. I know you're mates, but this he has to do on his own,” Ben urged.

“Do you know how hard that's going to be? Standing back and not coming to his aid?” Luka swore.

“I know, because I'll be standing next to you fighting not to defend him. Let this be a consolation to you—Zee is far stronger and more skilled than you know. It's the very reason he is the chosen future king of this tribe. I grew up with him and he's fast, damn tough and never gives up. He can take me down in a heartbeat. Trust me on that. The only one here tough enough to beat him is his father and you. Maybe.”

Lying his head back on the sofa, Luka breathed deeply, his very being longing to search out his mate and protect him. Giving in to the urge would be wrong, because it would mean betraying his lover's trust in him to do what he'd asked. Talk about setting out on the wrong foot.

"Ben, you're gonna have to hold me back and I'm gonna fight you. And if he dies, all bets are off. I'll kill as many of your tribe before they take me down, starting with Uncle Dick." Just the thought of the smug, condescending asshole sent his temper into overdrive.

"We'll hold each other back and if the worst happens, I'll help you take them out. Zee is like a brother to me and I will avenge him." The wild look on Ben's features made Luka relieved to call the man friend. He would hate to stand opposite Ben in a fight.

Ben rolled his head on his neck, a few bones cracking as he did. "Well, come on then. Get ready to head out by seven. We're due to meet at the clearing by seven thirty. I'll wait for you outside." Luka didn't answer as Ben left.

His cell phoned went off in his pocket and he pulled it out. "Hello."

"Luka, what's going on? I can sense something's wrong." His father never beat around the bush and his mother even less. He heard her mumbles in the background.

"Hey, Dad. The shit has proverbially hit the fan in my life."

"Tell me... wait... what? Just wait. Your mother wants you on speaker phone. Okay, carry on," his dad barked.

"Mikhail, *shush!* Luka, honey? Are you okay?" As a physically small woman, his mother's personality made up for it in spades.

"Hi, Mom. Yes, I'm okay, for now anyway. Before you go off, I'll tell you this, because I know you'll be happy. At least I hope you will. I've met my mate." There, he said it.

His mother gasped. "Oh, that's great news!"

"Dad?"

"Luka, you know I've always supported you and always will. I'm really thrilled for you, but what has this got to do with the danger I feel heading your way?"

In the shortest way possible he explained the situation to them, watching the clock on the wall.

“Well, that’s just stupid. He’ll be a better king to his people with you by his side,” his mother huffed.

“I wish everyone felt that way. The challenge is tonight, so I’ll have to go soon.”

“Luka, wait!” His father sounded panicked. “Don’t get yourself killed, son.”

Luka loved them all the more for their concern. “Dad, this is my mate. If they kill him tonight, I’m going in. I wouldn’t be your son if I stand by and do nothing.”

Silence met his declaration and then his dad sighed. “We’re getting on the first flight out of here tonight. Stay alive until I get there. God knows, you’re as stubborn as your mother so hang in there.”

“Hey!” He heard the slap his mother delivered probably to the back of his father’s head.

“Gotta go, Dad. I’ll see you when you get here. I’ll send the address through shortly so you can Google it.”

“Honey! I love you.”

“Love you too Mom, Dad. Bye.”

Into the stillness of the room he addressed his mate. “Let’s do this, Zithembe.”

From his vantage point where he crouched amongst the dense vegetation, his scent masked, Zee watched the show. He purposefully waited ten minutes past the required time to show himself to the people assembled at the designated clearing for the challenge. One thing stood out to him though. His mate was missing.

Praying to God to keep him safe, he squared his shoulders, withdrew his masks and walked proudly into the clearing. A hush fell over the group—his closest friends stood on one side, battle ready and they smiled when they spotted him. The rest of his pride formed a circle around the group of elders who stood deep in discussion in the middle. Wild gestures accompanied their hushed words, the contention amongst them clearly evident. His uncle’s head whipped around as the crowd parted to allow Zee through. The whispers

ramped up in volume and surprise, outrage and excitement skittered all around when his mate appeared from his right side, coming up behind Ben, Jacob, and Marcus. Luka's pale skin identified him as an outsider in the sea of black surrounding him. Zee's heart swelled with pride over the ease with which his closest friends accepted Luka into their midst.

Zee walked to where they stood, placing himself a few steps in front of them and turned to face the elders in the middle.

His uncle dramatically cleared his throat, and the crowd quieted down. "Thank you all for being here for this crucial event tonight. Two nights ago the true nature of our future king was revealed. In the history of this pride there has never been a homosexual in our midst. Let alone allowing one to rule our people. This atrocity will not be tolerated and I am confident my brother, your present king, will be appalled at the turn of events upon his return." The man turned and pinned Zee with his gaze before looking over Zee's shoulder to do the same to Luka.

Outrageously, Ben snorted. Loudly. "My ass." Zee almost gave in to the grin tucking at the corners of his mouth.

"After careful deliberation the council of elders have decided unanimously to call forward Zithembe Kekana to defend his position as leader of the *Ibhubezi* tribe. A suitable challenger has been found, and if victorious, this man would make a true, powerful ruler who will be able to carry on our lineage. If Zithembe is truly destined to be our next king, he will have no trouble proving his supremacy in this battle. A battle to the death."

In the crowd some roared their outrage while others appeared shocked and a few even smug. These were his people, and he hated the confusion displayed on their faces.

"I call forward the two contenders." Frank's voice boomed in the stillness.

Before Zee could move the crowd, the far side of the circle parted and out walked a large, golden lion, tail switching from side to side. The size of the head alone should've frightened Zee just a little bit. Frank chose well, because Zee had his job cut out to defeat this mother of a beast.

Zee pulled his shirt over his head and released the button on his fly before lowering the zipper. Without taking his eyes off the animal in the ring, he removed the rest of his clothes until he stood naked and unashamed. Someone fondled his ass from behind, and he knew it to be his lover, because someone else would've lost a hand by now.

“You go, Zee. We’ll be here when it’s all over.” Ben spoke gravely.

Zee stepped into the ring, shifting between one step and the next. He shook his head, and his skin rippled as he became comfortable with his cat. Murmurs and gasps of appreciation could be heard amongst the people as he circled his opponent. He may not be quite as bulky as the other fighter, but you didn’t have to be big to win.

“Let the best fighter win!” Frank yelled, and all hell broke loose.

Chapter 11

Goldie launched himself at Zee and despite stepping aside, he managed to hit Zee in the back left flank and they both went down. With Zee pinned at the bottom, he struggled to keep deadly fangs from piercing his throat. With his right paw he lashed out and dislodged his attacker, the other cat hitting the ground a few feet away.

Coming to his feet Zee focused his senses, drawing on the strengths of his beast. Across the distance he saw his mate pacing furiously, his three friends forming a barrier between the fighting arena and Luka.

Goldie stormed towards Zee again, and this time he was ready. Using his weight and strength from his back legs, he attacked the cat head-on, going straight for the neck. His teeth sank in, and the lion roared his pain. Kicks to Zee's stomach and sides pushed him away, giving the fighter time to get up, and then Zee hit again, this time with his claws.

Both on their hind legs, raking lashes fell wildly, and Zee felt his flesh peel open as the other animal did his own damage. Their roars and growls deafened out any noise from the pride. Dust and grass flew up as they clashed, clawed and rolled on the ground. Blood dripped down his opponents face, a few gashes visible above his eyes and the bridge of his nose. Warmth flowed down Zee's front legs from the burning muscles of his shoulders.

Falling down onto all fours, they circled each other. Goldie charged, and Zee swung away, the movement almost causing the beast to stumble into the crowd. Instead he managed to catch himself, and Zee noticed he came to a stop in front of Ben, Jacob, and Marcus who joined forces in holding back a furious Luka whose stripes and darker skin spoke volumes.

If Zee didn't know any better, he would've thought the golden lion had a death wish. Or belonged in an asylum, because what he did next meant game over.

The crazy animal stormed up to Luka's face and roared at him, teeth dripping with Zee's blood. A red flag in front of the proverbial bull. His mate lost it. The next moment the white Siberian tiger stood in front of the lion, pieces of Luka's clothing scattered around at the speed of his shift. With immense satisfaction Zee noticed Luka trumped the guy in size. Luka let rip a brutal roar, and Goldie stepped back. Fast.

“Fuck Luka! Stop! Remember what I told you!” Ben yelled, the three men frantically trying to hold back the enormous cat foaming at the mouth to kill the beast responsible for injuring his mate.

With Luka successfully contained, Goldie must've thought the danger over, but he visibly took a step back when he faced Zee again. The surprised yells from the bystanders meant his blue eyes had showed up. If the people ever doubted the truth of their mating, they now had their confirmation. Only true mates traded characteristics.

From far away he heard Frank scream in anger at the proof before their eyes. His opponent came at him, and Zee watched him swing a paw. With precision Zee hit, his claws sinking into a thick shoulder joint and then he ripped downwards—slicing through fur, muscle and sinew to scrape against bone. When his claws came free, Zee shouldered the lion off his feet, the loose flesh on his wrecked leg flopping obscenely as he slammed to the ground.

Zee stood over him, eyes honing in on where the jugular visibly pumped in his neck. Killing this guy would go against everything his father ever taught him. Seeing Frank's true colours the last few days had Zee believing the man in front of him might have innocently been pulled into this whole mess by Frank's greed. Lowering his head he touched noses with the other animal, staring into liquid yellow eyes very similar to his own.

Zee stepped aside and paced, walking off the adrenaline pumping through his system ultra-fast. The flash to his left caught his eye, and he had enough. Unwilling to accept defeat, the lion came at him once more. Rearing up, Zee tackled the other beast to the ground, this time his fangs hitting true and hard. Sinking deep. Buried in warm flesh, blood flowing into his mouth, Zee felt the vibrations caused by the pumping of the jugular millimetres away. Cutting off every thought of his father's teaching and how he would deal with the guilt after, he closed his jaws.

“Zithembe! Don't!” Ben yelled. The sound human enough to break through the utter stillness in his head and froze him on the spot. “I know you don't want to do this. So, don't.”

Indecision mind fucked him for split seconds before the human side of him forced the wild animal to retreat. Agonisingly slow he withdrew his fangs, blood dripping from his mouth as he lifted his head and surveyed the crowd.

“Kill him!” Frank demanded.

Zee watched his crazy relative. "Finish him off!" Spit flew as Frank yelled maniacally.

When Zee made no move to comply the man went ballistic. "If you're too weak to do it, you don't deserve to live. I should've done this myself." In seconds Frank undressed and shifted, his lion black, huge and threatening. Saliva dripped from his fangs as Zee looked on, and an odd, rancid scent filled the air.

Zee could've fought his uncle at any other time, but twice in one night without having time to heal, meant certain death for him. The massive black beast charged at Zee, but a chorus of furious roars stopped him in his tracks. Ben, Jacob, Marcus and Luka stood united in shifted form, at the ready to join the battle to save their prince. Everyone else around the circle looked on in horror as the drama unfolded.

However, nothing seemed to penetrate Frank's fanatical mind as he chuffed at the group in defiance and advanced on Zee.

For as long as he lived Zee would never forget the sound that rippled through the atmosphere the very next moment. The words escaped him to describe the wrath of the deafening roar penetrating the night. Zee recognized the sound and every bit of tension flowed from his sore body as his father burst through the crowd, getting right up in Frank's face.

No one with a sane mind would even attempt to compare the two brothers. There was no contest. King of the beasts clearly screamed from every hair and oozed out of every pore on David's body. He stood head and shoulders above his now timid sibling, the size of his head and mane clearly reminding each and every person of his status as king.

Without preamble David lashed out, and Frank's body flew through the air like a limp soft toy and came to a hard crash against a tree trunk several metres away. David shifted back, stalking to where his brother cowered on the ground.

"The only disgrace in this tribe is you, Frank! Your greed has made you an abomination and no amount of power and money is ever enough for you. The moment I turned my back you tried to kill my son! You call him weak and an abomination, you hypocrite! I am convinced you have betrayed the *Ibhubezi* tribe, and disregarded the values which form the very foundations of what we stand for. You are banished from this pride and are never to return. Get out of my sight!" Never had Zee seen his loving, affectionate father this enraged.

Dismissing his brother, David entered the clearing again, the man as proportionally big as the beast. Seeing his father naked weirded Zee out, but he couldn't lie. David's wide shoulders tapered down to a narrow waist, a deep chest flowed into rippled washboard abs, thick tree-trunk arms hung at his sides and thighs bulged as he walked. No wonder his mother smiled a lot—David was one hell of a catch.

“Son. Your mother and I have raised you to be strong, confident and honourable. You have never disappointed us. I don't know why you never told us you are gay, because it makes no difference to us as we already knew. Your name, Zithembe, means ‘trust in yourself’. We hoped the name will give you courage to do what is right, even when other options appear much easier. The last few days, you trusted in yourself and stood firm against Frank. We are so proud of you.” David's words dissolved any doubt he had about their love and acceptance and brought tears to his tired eyes.

Just when Zee thought he could go home and let his mate nurse him, the earth quaked. Literally. And thunder rolled in without the sign of one cloud in the dark sky above. Under him, the ground trembled with the vibrations of hundreds of pounding paws and the air throbbed with a deafening rumble. Panic gripped the tribe members, and they ran to one side, grouping together to form a wall of protection, the men out front and the women behind.

As the sounds came closer, the volume escalated. Branches and twigs snapped. Leaves shook loose and fell to the ground. Zee pulled on his reserves and turned to face the unknown threat, sensing his mate and his friends at his back. The king followed suit, placing himself right in front of his people. Not that the formation would offer a sufficient defence, because they were completely surrounded.

The pounding slowed as the group neared and growls and chuffs filled the air. As a unit they revealed themselves, closing in on those gathered in the clearing. Of those visible to Zee, he estimated close to a hundred assembled before them, but he sensed more watching from the darkness beyond.

Black lions.

Not shifters. Fucking huge, untamed, genuine lions and lionesses. True predators of the African plains.

One enormous, majestic male stood taller than the rest—the leader. Solemn orange eyes studied them closely, then walked to where Frank sat propped up against the tree trunk. One chilling roar from Simba had the coward scrambling

to his feet and running off into the night. Each and every person on the elder panel who betrayed Zee this day, received the same treatment. They quickly learned in no uncertain terms to get out or they would die there.

The massive cat's head swung around and honed in on Zee. He walked up to Zee, stared into his eyes, and Zee understood the command to shift. So he did and lowered to his knees, his body giving in.

A scuffle sounded to his side, and a stunning lioness nudged Luka forward to stand beside Zee. Luka gave up his animal, returning to human form next to Zee. Strong arms came around his shoulder and pulled him close. He almost pulled away, not wanting Luka to be touched by the blood, spit and other dirt covering him from head to toe. The iron-laced scent hung heavy in the air, but he returned the gesture anyway.

"Are you okay?" The possessiveness in his lover's voice comforted him and attempted to stir up other things below the waist, but Zee kept a handle on it. Barely.

"I'll survive," he whispered before facing their judge and jury.

One by one the dominant lioness went around to face the tribe members, scaring off the traitors and bigots before she re-joined her pride.

Simba walked up to David and licked his cheek. What the hell? More bizarre behaviour followed when man and beast stood looking at each other, not twitching a muscle. Zee jumped when his father's voice bellowed into the quiet.

"We all know the story how we came into existence. This here in front of me is the first born son of the golden lion who joined spirits with our tribal ancestor many years ago. Only the first born of every litter inherits the black gene, and assembled here tonight is the totality of the true black lions in the wild. They have come here tonight because they sensed the pending evil, and Zithembe's distress called to them."

Within seconds Zee's people, every last one of them, went down on one knee in a show of respect for the majestic beasts standing before them. From somewhere behind his dad, the lions parted and his mother appeared to stand proudly beside her husband. His father took her hand in his and together they bowed to show honour.

Simba turned away from his parents and approached him and Luka as his father spoke. "Everyone here needs to understand that this couple carry their

blessing and the mating is true. The time has come for our prides to join forces with other beasts of nature and discontinue keeping ourselves apart. The mating of Zithembe Kekana and Luka Vetrov is vital for the destiny of our people and divinely predetermined. Anyone unable to deal with that, needs to leave. Right now, or forfeit your life.” No one moved and Zee assumed the bigots had all been rooted out.

“Zithembe, they want you and your mate to know they’re always near. Listening and watching over you and this pride. They always will. You won’t see or hear them, but they are there. We are their people and together we are one.”

The splendid black creature then reciprocated their gesture by bowing his enormous head before Zee and Luka. Call him crazy, but Zee couldn’t resist. He carefully reached out and locked his fingers in the coal-black mane, the texture amazingly soft against his palms and his face when he leaned against the warmth. As the lion breathed out, Zee made out a soft purr-like sound. The enormity of the gift of acceptance and respect from these wild animals combined with the overload of adrenaline of the last few days and turned him into a sap. Before he knew what happened, tears ran down his cheeks into the thick fur he held close.

Around him, in true African spirit the people wept, rejoiced, and clapped in elation. The big cat lay down by Zee and Luka’s knees.

“Okay, people. This show is over. The meeting is dismissed.” The group reluctantly broke up and started wandering off in the direction of their dwellings. And still the black cats remained until only the royal couple, Zee and Luka, and Ben, Marcus and Jacob remained.

“Thank you for coming here this evening. No one who witnessed the events tonight would ever doubt my son and his mate again.”

Simba rose and made his way to where he had first appeared from the trees. “Ngiyabonga. Hambani kahle.” *Thank you. Go well.* The king spoke for the tribe as all the lions left quietly, almost in silence as if they’d never even been there.

The single big roar echoed in the darkness moments later. Zee smiled. They would be back.

One day.

Chapter 12

Unable to sleep, Zee left their bed, moving quietly to not disturb Luka, who slept soundly next to him after their eventful night. For some reason the adrenaline still burned in his veins and only afforded him a couple of hours sleep before waking him up.

He padded barefoot into the bathroom and grabbed a towel and his swimming shorts from where he'd hung them out to dry. In the lounge he pulled them on, the fabric slightly damp against his heated skin. The humid night air clung to him, so he hoped a dip in the pool would cool him off, or drain him enough to get some decent sleep.

On his way to the gated pool area, he found the place completely deserted. He let himself in and dropped his towel on a lounge in the darkest shadows. Entering the pool by the shallow end, he slowly immersed himself by walking down the gradually declining bottom. The light from the moon turned the surface into liquid silver and ripples formed as his body waded through. Eventually he couldn't stand anymore and ducked underneath, enjoying the rush of coolness over his scalp.

Using the capacity of his strong lungs, he spent some time underwater to swim laps, only surfacing to breathe, turn around and head in the opposite direction. Lost in the sensation of the stillness below the surface and the gliding pressure against his skin, he only became aware someone else had joined him when big hands gripped his hips. A touch he recognized.

They surfaced together, Luka with a smile, which disappeared as Zee attacked his lips the moment they cleared water—kissing the grin off them. Luka ought to know Zee teetered on the edge of harshness. In one day, one man had almost succeeded in taking everything he valued from him—made Zee doubt his ability to stop him. He would've lost his parents, his friends, his people, his lover and his life. His respect and honour. His lion wouldn't settle down—the anger at letting his enemy get away, too overwhelming to process.

Luka met him head-on while their hands frantically pushed down the confining swim shorts. Luka wrapped his thick arms around Zee's back, drawing Zee's legs to wrap around his Luka's waist. His fingers probed Zee's anus as he walked them towards the shallow end, where he lowered them to the ground, with Zee on his lap.

Zee ground his raging hard-on against Luka's ridged abs, but wanted more. His desire to take, conquer and own made him frantic. He pulled Luka's tongue into his mouth and sucked on the thickness, nipping and licking at his lips. Gripping Luka's head between his hands, he painted wet kisses along the strong cords in his neck, marking his man.

Pushing Luka up into shallower water, he encouraged him to lie back against the bottom. Luka's nipples beckoned him. Using his teeth to torment them, Zee heard Luka gasp and felt his bodily shudder, but Zee hungered for more. Sitting up, he grabbed Luka by the shoulder and pushed him over. He parted Luka's thighs before climbing between them.

"Up!" he growled, pulling on Luka's hips until his lover's ass lifted into the air where he wanted it. Pulling Luka's muscled cheeks apart, Zee dove in. Luka moaned where he leaned on his forearms, the rumble echoing in the quiet, but the only other sounds Zee heard were those of crickets and frogs. Dragging his tongue over Luka's hole, he wet the entrance thoroughly, humming his pleasure. When the taut muscle gave way, Zee pushed through—pointed his tongue and fucked Luka with short, deep stabs.

"I can't take much of this, Zee. Too good." Luka gasped his pleasure.

"Don't you dare come," Zee almost snarled.

He rubbed his thumbs around the perimeter, slowly exerting pressure until gradually, they both slid in beside his tongue. He pulled outwards with his fingers, stretching Luka's opening further, lightly nipping on the surrounding skin with his teeth.

"Fuck! Zee!" The desperation in Luka's grunt drove him wild.

Sitting up, he gripped his cock and lined up and started to push into the ready warmth, the cool water lapping at his ankles. For a moment he caught himself, comprehending his intentions. He stopped.

"Shit! I'm sorry, Luka. Can't take you like this out here in the open. No lube either," he mumbled almost drunkenly.

"Forget sorry, Zee. I fucked you out in the bush too, there's no one here. I knew you needed this tonight and I came to you. I'm wet and more ready than I'll ever be. Do it!"

Zee didn't wait to be asked twice. He lodged the head of his cock in place and applied the necessary pressure to breach Luka's ass. Once past the tightest part, he slid home, bottoming out when his hips touched Luka's cool skin. The

heat he buried himself in contrasted deliciously with the cool liquid they crouched in.

Luka sighed in bliss. "So bloody good." He pushed back against Zee, asking for movement.

Zee indulged him—pulled back before slamming back in, their flesh connecting at the impact. Luka cursed and braced himself.

"Like that?" Zee asked.

"Yeah. Give it to me," Luka moaned.

The words ended, and the mating took over. Zee made love to Luka as he'd never done before in his life. He used his blunt nails and dragged them down Luka's pale back while he rammed into him from behind. Reaching below their bodies, he fondled and squeezed Luka's balls in his hand, rolling the globes in his palm. Remembering their conversation from a few days back, he parted Luka's ass cheeks, his superior eyesight affording him the best view even by moonlight.

His thick black erection glistened where he shuttled back and forth into Luka's pale-pink flesh—the sexiest thing ever and a serious kink. The contrast drove him insane with lust. Only one thing could make the image better—his come dribbling from the opening. So, he set about making it happen.

Hearing Luka express his pleasure at the rough handling, Zee knew he could never hurt him, so he let go and went with instinct. Angling his hips on the next thrust, he grinned when Luka swore under his breath. *Hello prostate!* Keeping the position, he kept up his movements, enjoying the tight grip Luka's channel had on his dick.

Feeling the tingles coming up his legs and hearing Luka's moans, Zee knew he couldn't last much longer. He pulled Luka up with two arms under his shoulders so they kneeled back to front, ramming Luka the whole time. Reaching around, he took Luka's cock in his right hand and stroked its hardness in time with his pumps. He knotted the fingers of his other hand in the long hair at Luka's nape and bared the right side of his neck.

His orgasm burst over him as he bit into the strong muscle at the back of Luka's neck. Further below, he buried his cock deep as his balls emptied their load deep into Luka's contracting channel. In front of their bodies, warmth flowed over his fingers as Luka came, his soul-deep groan resonating in the courtyard around them.

As he came down from the pheromone high, Zee retracted his fangs and soothed the wounds with his tongue. Luka shuddered in his arms, his breathing uneven as he grinded his ass back against Zee's hips, wringing every last drop from Zee's dick.

Luka pulled off.

"Wait!" Zee held Luka still, watching his seed dribble out of Luka's ass to run down his thighs. "Damn! That's so hot!"

Luka turned around, wrapping his arms around Zee. Sighing, he laid his head on Luka's shoulder. "Thank you for being what I needed tonight."

"You did exactly what I wanted you to, but anytime you need to vent, I'm here. Whatever you desire. Anytime. Anywhere. I can handle it." Luka kissed him hard and deep, their sighs of satisfaction mingling as their hearts followed.

With their knees a bit stiff, they awkwardly helped each other up, chuckling at the discomfort. "You're shameless," Luka teased. "In the public swimming pool. Tsk, tsk."

"Haha! Pot meet kettle." Zee snorted. Luka swam into the pool like a fish, retrieving their shorts where they drifted on top of the water. After wringing them out, they wrapped towels around their waists and slowly wandered home.

Their future together overflowed with promises, but Zee knew they couldn't forget the battle of the day before. Hate and greed were powerful motivations for people like Frank and his buddies. Would he try again? Who knew, but whatever tomorrow brought they would fight.

Together.

In the shadows cast by the trees, Ben watched Zee make rough love to his mate. He obviously hadn't been the only one unable to sleep after their exciting day. Taking a walk in the cool evening air had seemed like a great idea to burn off some steam, until he came around the corner and walked in on his friends' wild bout of sex.

He should leave, but found himself rooted to the spot—unable to look aside from the hot display a few feet away. Watching Luka take the pounding Zee dished out turned Ben inside out. As a gay man, he had always harboured the hope he would be gifted with a mate of his own one day.

Leaning back against the tree trunk behind him, his presence masked, Ben pushed down his the elastic waist of his pants and exposed his cock. Watching

Zee slam into Luka's body, Ben imagined himself to be on the receiving end of said pounding—a nameless, faceless stranger giving it to him from behind. The vision flashing before his mind's eye almost pulled him out of his orgasm, the weirdness and timing couldn't have been more wrong. A thick slice of white bread, slathered in butter while golden syrup drizzled onto it from above. Completely disappointed in his interrupted orgasm, he tucked his sticky dick back in, grimacing in confusion.

“What the fuck?”

The End

Author Bio

Vona Logan grew up in South Africa and has always been a romantic at heart. Then one day a whole new world opened up to her when she sneaked off with one of her mother's Mills & Boons. Her love for reading was born and continued to grow until about two years ago when she discovered the world of m/m writing for the first time. Always on the backburner, her desire to write her own love stories ignited and wouldn't be silenced. So, she wrote her first short story in 2012 and her dream became a reality.

Vona lives in stunning New Zealand with the man of her dreams, a bunch of busy kids, four cats, a dog, and too many guinea pigs to even start counting.

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