

LORA LEIGH

BENGAL'S HEART

LION'S HEAT

STYX'S STORM

NAVARRO'S PROMISE

LAWE'S JUSTICE

**THE BREED NOVELS,
BOOKS 7-11**

The Breeds Novels 7–11

Bengal's Heart

Lion's Heat

Styx's Storm

Navarro's Promise

Lawe's Justice

Lora Leigh

BENIGAL'S HEART

L O R A L E I G H



BERKLEY SENSATION, NEW YORK

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BENGGAL'S HEART

L O R A L E I G H



BERKLEY SENSATION, NEW YORK

THE BERKLEY PUBLISHING GROUP

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario M4P 2Y3, Canada
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd., 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Group Ireland, 25 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd.)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty. Ltd.)

Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi—110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd.)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty.) Ltd., 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196,
South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd., Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

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BENGAL'S HEART

A Berkley Sensation Book / published by arrangement with the author

PRINTING HISTORY

Berkley Sensation mass-market edition / August 2009

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For information, address: The Berkley Publishing Group,
a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.,
375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014.

eISBN : 978-1-101-10893-2

BERKLEY® SENSATION

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a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.,
375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to my wonderful editor, Cindy, for her patience and understanding. This was a hard one, and your understanding made all the difference.

To Sharon, just because you're you and you know what that means to me.

And to Lee Stepp. Your Munchkin never forgot.

◆ PROLOGUE ◆

BREED PROGRESSIVE TRAINING FACILITY, GERMANY

It was a scene out of a nightmare. Something so horrific, so bloody, as to defy the imagination and leave Cassa gasping in shock.

“We have to find the release,” she screamed in horror as her husband stood beside her, the cameraman on his shoulder trained on the viewing area of the rumored death pit.

It was more than a pit of death. It was a place of such torturous agony and evil that Cassa struggled with the ramifications.

A dozen Breeds, nude, tiger stripes gleaming against their flesh, moved frantically to escape the long, lethally sharp blades that played a horrendous game of hide-and-seek with them.

Blood sprayed against the steel walls, pooled on the floor beneath the bodies of those who’d had the misfortune of not moving quickly enough. And still the others fought to survive and to protect.

A savage roar of rage tore from the tallest, the most powerful of the Bengal Breeds doomed to die and echoed through the intercom. He fought to shove the others aside, to save them, to find some way to stop the mechanical thrust and parry that sliced into vulnerable flesh.

“Douglas, help me,” Cassa sobbed as her husband stood silent and still, the camera recording the brutality of the Genetics Council and their so-called progressive training.

How had this happened? She flipped a switch and slammed her hands onto the release plungers, but the blades continued to slice and dice their way through even more Breeds in their path.

The roars of fury crescendoed, the raw animal rage sending shards of terror racing down her spine as she grabbed her husband’s arm and jerked him toward her.

She saw it then. Frozen, immobile with shock, she saw the morbid pleasure in his gaze and the satisfaction on his face.

Like a key finally releasing the lock on months of suspicion, Cassa blinked at the truths that finally slammed inside her head. The group of men and women who had come to this small country to find this particular lab and rescue the Breeds here had suffered through too many unfortunate accidents and false trails. For days now, the commander, Jonas Wyatt, had treated the group as a whole with icy suspicion. Because of one man.

“You.” She felt herself shaking apart. Felt something breaking inside her at the realization that she too had played a part in the deception that was now killing the very men and women they had been sent to save. “What have you done?” She screamed the accusation at him, watching the smirk that curved at his lips as his pale blue eyes glittered with fanatical anticipation.

“What have I done? No, Cassa, what did you do? I couldn’t have gotten on this team without your help.” He laughed in her face. She felt the amusement, the hated, mocking arrogance in his tone, and more cries echoed through the control room.

He was her husband. He had used her connections, her friends, to ensure that he was chosen as the cameraman to document the rescue of the rarest of the Breeds ever created. The Bengal Breed.

“Help me release them,” she shrieked, her palms slamming into his shoulders, knocking the cameraman loose and jerking it free of its mooring on his shoulder.

The crash of the equipment to the ground was only a distant sound of destruction as Douglas used his fist to send explosions of brutal pain tearing through her head, and she fell to the cement floor.

Agony lanced through her, and Cassa couldn't stop the whimper of pain that fell from her lips. Okay, she could forget getting any help from him.

She pulled herself up to the control panel, tears spilling from her eyes now as she began to press punch and slap any lever or button she could find.

Sirens began to blare, strobe lights flashed in red and blue. A mechanical voice began spitting warnings and directions in a coded gibberish that made the pain in her head intensify.

"You damned, stupid bitch!"

Cruel hands latched onto her hair and jerked her to her feet.

Cassa didn't bother to scream. There was no one to hear her cries, there would be no one to care. Her hands jerked to the hand gripping her hair as she began to claw at his fingers with her nails.

Struggling, she was only dimly aware of the enraged, horrific roar that sounded too close, too furious.

"You ignorant little whore!" Douglas yelled again, his expression twisted into lines of rage as he shook her by the hand in her hair. "Do you know what you're doing? They're abominations. Fucking animals pretending to be human." His free hand slapped her across the face, causing her head to ring with explosions of light as another warning blared through the control room, followed by a roar of animalistic rage unlike anything she had ever heard.

Cassa cringed at the sound as Douglas suddenly stilled.

"You knew," he snapped as he flung her away from him.

Her legs wouldn't hold her up. Her head was filled with clashing cymbals reverberating with agony. She collapsed to the floor, shaking her head. "I didn't know," she cried out, forcing herself to stare up at him. "You're a monster, Douglas."

The smile that curved his lips was one of triumph. "You told me the plans to get in here, Cassa. You told me the animals they were going to free, and you told me, dear wife, of the repercussions to the Council if they were freed." He kicked out at her, laughing as the toe of his boot connected with her side and sent her scrambling in an attempt to crawl from his reach.

"Ten million dollars, Cassa, in an overseas account. Who the fuck needs you or your connections now? You gave me the means to betray these crackpot idiots that want to suck up to animals. Now you can live with it."

A piercing animal scream exploded through the room. Through the veil of her hair and the tears filling her eyes, Cassa watched as Douglas paled, glanced to the sealed doors to the pit, then turned and ran.

It happened so fast and yet Cassa swore she watched each detail of movement as though in slow motion. She saw the only Bengal still standing, his enraged, demonic eyes spitting amber fire. Blood dripped along his body. His face, his shoulders, the stripes that extended from his buttocks around his thighs—blood flowed over the heavy muscle and lean lines of his golden body. He lifted a broken steel stake and hurled it past the slowly opening cage door, swashing through the control room windows with deadly force.

The wickedly sharp blade buried itself at the base of Douglas's spine. He screamed as he went down and his head arched back on his shoulders as he screamed again.

The stake protruded from the base of his spine as blood spurted around the wound. He convulsed in agonizing sounds of horror and twisted pain escaping his lips, as Cassa watched the only Bengal escape the pit.

He was the one the others had fought to save. She had seen that much. She had watched as they had sacrificed themselves to save this one.

A mechanical warning sounded through the room. "Alert! Alert! Enemy forces are now entering level zero corridor. You have fifteen seconds to evacuate. Fourteen. Thirteen."

Cassa stared at the creature that turned on her now. Long, once golden hair was streaked black with blood. It hung limply to his shoulders as the golden flecks of rage gleamed in a backdrop of foreboding green eyes.

His lips drew back on a snarl, exposing the wicked canines at the sides of his teeth.

She shook her head. He would kill her now. He'd heard everything Douglas had said, every charge he had made. She had betrayed the very creatures she had fought so hard to save. It didn't matter that she had done so unwittingly. It didn't matter that she would have died to protect them.

"I'm sorry," she cried hoarsely as he paced closer. "Oh God, I'm so sorry."

"Sorry is a weak man's excuse," the creature growled, his voice filled with dark purpose.

Her shoulders shook with the sobs she fought to hold back, the terror that cascaded through her. Blood dripped to the floor in front of her, each small droplet a brilliant, enraged red, as he paced closer.

It dripped to the toe of her boot, the hem of her jeans. The next splattered on the jersey material of the T-shirt that covered her breasts.

She swore that small droplet seared her flesh as she stared up at him, grief and pain racing through every nerve in her body.

"Twenty-four Breeds dead," he growled, the sound of his voice so rough, dark and rasping it scraped over her senses. "Bengals. Each one fought every second of their miserable existence for freedom. His lips lifted into a snarl as he glanced to the pit, then back to her. "All dead."

A sob tore from her throat a second before his fingers were latched around her neck, pulling her to her feet as she struggled against the knowledge of death.

He didn't hurt her, when he should have. She had been responsible. She had trusted. She had betrayed.

"I should toss your body in there with them," he roared in her face as she screamed in fear.

His lips curled back from his teeth, and she could almost feel the sensation of those wicked incisors tearing at her neck.

She wanted to excuse the betrayal. She wanted to explain, but there was nothing she could say, nothing she could do to excuse it. She had told her husband. She had discussed it with him. She had overlooked the fact that he wasn't the man she once believed he was; she had tried to believe in the last vestige of humanity she thought he possessed.

Her hand lifted. She touched the blood that ran in a slow, crooked stream down his hard cheek. She touched it, fingers trembling, and bringing it to her lips, closed her eyes.

She tasted the blood she had spilled. Her father had said before his death that men should be made to taste the blood they spill, to experience death, to know the horror they perpetuate.

She knew. She accepted her fate. She tasted his blood as another sob tightened in her throat, never fell past her lips. She hung in his less than gentle hold, expecting the pain at any moment. Expecting death. She had trusted the man she had given her heart to, and she had learned the cost of that trust.

"I own you."

Her eyes jerked open to see his, too close, glaring back at her. Nearly nose to nose, the heat of his breath caressing her cheek, the sharp canines too close to her flesh.

“What?” the question was instinctive.

“I own you,” he growled again. It was the animal, not the man, that she faced. This Breed was nothing like the civilized Breeds she had been following for so many months for the newspaper she worked for.

“No.” She tried to shake her head, but the fingers wrapped so cruelly around her throat refused to allow her to move.

“I know your secrets,” he snarled. “And I’ll know more. This.” He looked around the control room, rage flashing in his face as his gaze landed on the entrance to the pit once more. His eyes flashed back to her. “You owe me for their lives. You owe me for his sins.” His gaze returned to Douglas’s fallen form.

She tried to shake her head again, but his hands only tightened mercilessly, as his expression became harder, colder.

“Brothers and sisters,” he snapped at her. “My family, not my pride, and they lie dead because of his perfidy.”

More tears slipped free. Guilt was a ball of flame in her chest. Grief was the knot of agony in her throat that his fingers clenched into.

She was going to die here. She could feel it, and perhaps a part of her would even prefer it. If she lived, she would have to face this, she would have to deal with it. She had seen the blood, the lives wasted in that pit, and she didn’t know if she could bear the weight of knowing they had ended because of her ignorance.

Dear God. She might as well have killed them with her own hands.



Cabal St. Laurents. They were named in these labs. They were given an identity when it would have been far kinder if they hadn’t been. It was a reminder of what they were not. Never free. A reminder of what they were, always tied to their creators.

He was a Bengal, and the animal inside him refused to relent. It rejoiced in the blood of the enemy. It plotted with his humanity, planned and sought the death of every creature that would stand in the way of escape.

Now the man was ready to kill. The human wanted to taste the blood, and the animal held back.

His captive was female. It was the most corrupt of any species. It was the reason those that shared his blood now lay in that same blood that had gushed from their bodies. He held her now, his fingers gripped around her throat, his teeth aching, his tongue nearly tasting her flesh. And he couldn’t harm her. The animal drew back, the feral intensity that had driven him to escape the pit receding.

He released her slowly, watching as she crumpled at his feet. She wasn’t sobbing for mercy. Her head bent, her long, burnished, dark blond hair flowed around her. It touched the floor, and his blood stained the ends of it.

An agony of rage shuddered through him. The roar that raced through his throat and exploded from his lips brought an unwilling sob past the female’s lips. But still, he didn’t strike. The animal stood back, watched, waited. For what it was waiting, he wasn’t certain, but he admitted he had no desire to take this woman’s blood.

She had been foolish. He could smell the scent of her husband on her body, knew the pain the

tormented her. She had betrayed them unknowingly, but how could he ever forgive the death of those he had held dear?

“I own you,” he repeated, stepping back from her as he felt the weakness of blood loss creeping through his system. “When I call you, you’ll come. Whatever I ask of you, you will give.” He reached down, and gently, so gently, when rage and the need for violence poured through his system, he gripped her chin and lifted her head until he could see into the dove gray of her eyes, inhale the scent of her and know her forever. Know her and always remember this day. The day a woman had destroyed everything he had held dear.

“And one day,” he swore, “you’ll pay.”

He stumbled. Weakness rushed through him.

He’d lost too much blood. His strength was depleted. There was nothing left but the aching rage, the agony of loss and the taste of defeat. He had sworn to save them, and because of this woman’s thoughtlessness, because of her trust in the wrong man, he had lost everything.

He stumbled again, going nearly to his knees before he caught himself. Swaying, he forced himself upright as the sliding metal doors into the control room were pushed open, and the scent of Breed filled the room.

There was no threat, no feeling of danger. The animal inside of him recognized the animals rushing in. The rescue forces the scientists had been so worried about. Headed by a Breed that even the Genetics Council was rumored to fear, Jonas Wyatt.

Cabal lifted his head and stared back at them, noting their expressions of disbelief at the sight of the male dying on the floor and the female staring up at him with equal parts fear and anger.

She recognized him for the animal he was and she knew he had stamped her with his ownership. She would walk his line and by all that was holy, he would ensure that she paid the price if she ever allowed another to touch her.

He almost stopped in shock at that thought. He would have, except one of the men stepped up for the woman. His hand reached out to grip her arm, to pull her to her feet. And Cabal was there.

He locked his fingers around the man’s wrist and snarled out a warning. A primal, feral sound that had the female flinching.

What was this imperative need inside him? What had the animal driving forward once again in rage where this woman was concerned? He should want her out of his sight, out of his mind. Never did he want to have to think of the horrors he had faced here or the mutilations that had occurred within the devil’s pit of death.

He could still smell the blood of his family. They shared his blood. Each of them, created of the same DNA from the same Bengal, created of the sperm from the same donor. They were true family. Blood family. And he had lost them all.

“Mine,” he snarled back at the other Breed male, ignoring the arrogance, the dominance in the swirling gray eyes that stared back at him. “Her debt belongs to me.”

The male looked from his wrist, where Cabal held him firmly, back to Cabal’s eyes. There was an edge of danger in the stranger’s silver eyes. An edge of pure, primal command. The scent of it was in the air and Cabal was aware that even at full strength he would be hard-pressed to defeat the strength and power of the animal.

“You’re wrong.” The dark, even tone had the hairs at the back of Cabal’s neck lifting in warning. “You’re hurt, and weak, Bengal,” he said softly. “I’ll let this one go. But she’s not one you can use and she’s not one you can harm.”

“Her debt is mine,” Cabal hissed again, baring his canines as he pushed his face closer to the other

Breed's. Nearly nose to nose now, the battle of wills was one Cabal feared he might well lose pushed. But he would fight. He would fight to his last drop of blood.

"She owes no debt," the other warned him, his voice lowering further. "Don't make this mistake."

Cabal's gaze moved to her husband and back to the Breed male determined to stand in his way now.

"She trusted him." His tongue felt thick, awkward. "She touched him, followed him. He betrayed you all." There was a sneer in his voice now. The bastard would have never betrayed him. Cabal would have smelled the scent of his deceit from the first meeting. He would have never allowed such a creature to live.

"Her debt is not his," the other repeated.

"She is mine!" Cabal snapped in reply. "Interfere with this Breed and you'll die."

He could smell the weapons trained on him, sense the other Breeds as they watched the confrontation.

"Please." Her voice stroked over his senses. Weak, rough with tears, shaky with fear. "He's right Jonas," she whispered then. "Let it go. Please."

Jonas. *The* Jonas Wyatt. The Bengals had rated him the most commanding of the Breed generals, one of their strongest strategists. Well, wasn't he just feeling satisfied? Wyatt had strategized an entire race of Breeds into extinction.

"Yeah, Wyatt, let it the fuck go," he growled viciously, even as he swayed on his feet.

He damned the weakness of his own body. He damned Wyatt to hell for not planning better and as he stared at where the woman gazed back at him, tears and regret mingling in her eyes, he damned himself for not killing her, just as he had killed that bastard of a husband she possessed.

He inhaled roughly. She stank of that human. The smell of him was an affront to Cabal's senses, an affront to his sense of justice.

"Remember me." His whisper was more of a hiss. "Never forget, woman, because I won't. And the day will come . . ." Darkness swirled through his vision then. His knees buckled. He'd lost one ounce too much of precious blood.

He was unaware of his body crumpling to the floor or of the cry the woman gave as she tried to catch him. He didn't feel her hands touch him, he didn't feel the racing of her heart or the tears that touched his neck.

"Cassa, we have him."

Cassa was only barely aware of Jonas lifting her away from the fallen form and handing her to another Breed. She felt numb inside, even as the fear exploded and ricocheted through her. She felt cold, yet she was flushed with heat. She felt dead, yet she knew she was still living.

Tremors worked through her body as the Breed that held her helped her out of the room. He lifted her into his arms as he stepped over her husband's body. Cassa wanted to feel remorse. She should have felt grief. But instead, she felt only hatred and a sense of freedom.

Douglas was dead. He had been the instrument of his own death, just as he had been the instrument of her fears for so many months.

God, she should have known. When he was chosen for this team, she should have warned the Breeds that she no longer trusted him as a husband. The problem was, she had trusted him as a supporter of the Breeds. He had been there with her when news of the incredible creatures first hit. He had been there during the first of the riots against Breed Law, and had expressed his outrage, his concern on their behalf. And all the while, he had been selling them out.

She should have suspected. It wasn't the first assignment they'd had that had gone horribly wrong. Each time, the blame had fallen to others. Just as the blame would fall to her now.

She had trusted him, as the Bengal had stated. She had led him here, she had allowed him the opportunity to deceive and to plot against the Breeds. He'd tried to profit from their deaths, and he had paid for it.

As they exited the room and headed along the corridors, she was aware of the majority of the Breeds staying behind. They were like that. They cleared out those who weren't Breeds, and they grieved for those lost before wrapping their bodies and carrying them to a safety that would be eternal. The Breed cemetery in Virginia, not far from Arlington, was a testament to the dedication that the Breeds felt for one another. They had fought for it, won it, and they carried out their own ceremonies without the benefit of any humans in attendance. As at Sanctuary, the Feline Breed compound, they grieved the loss of their own and buried them with all the gentleness and humanity that they hadn't known in their lives.

"He won't let me live," she whispered, more to herself than to the one who sat her slowly back on her feet and began leading her through the corridors she had raced through earlier.

Her life was forfeit. Once that Breed healed and regained his strength, she would die. She had seen it in his eyes. Hell, she had tasted it in his blood. She could still taste it. Dark and feral against her tongue. She was marked, and she knew it.

"Breeds have an amazing sense of justice," the one that led her through the facility stated softly. "You'll live. But only because he knows you'll suffer more for it."

She looked up at him. There was an edge of wisdom in his amber gaze, a sense of regret. Mercurius Warrant. His lionlike features were stoic and solemn, his gaze understanding despite the fact that she feared she didn't deserve such a thing.

"I have no doubt he's right," she said tonelessly, forcing herself to walk, to place one foot in front of the other, to leave the facility and to face the blood and death that awaited outside as well.

Breeds and humans alike had died here, because the labs had been warned of the rescue force's arrival. The Coyote and human soldiers that had awaited them had shown no mercy. Not that the rescue force hadn't expected it once they realized what they were up against.

Many had known they would die. It had been par for the course in the past months, as betrayal after betrayal had marked each facility they had breached. It seemed there were as many willing to kill the Breeds among the humans as there were those willing to save them. And telling the difference between the two would never be easy.

"He was my husband," she whispered.

"They're usually the ones you can trust the least," he responded.

She almost laughed. And how would he know? How could he ever understand that even though Douglas hadn't been a good husband, still, he hadn't been one she had seen as evil.

Abusive? Yes. A killer? No. She would have never imagined that he could see death in terms of profit.

"I'm so screwed," she whispered painfully.

"I have no doubt," he agreed, his voice cooler now. "It's the price you pay, Cassa. And it's not always a kind one."

No, the price she would pay wouldn't be a kind one.

◆ CHAPTER 1 ◆

WOLF MOUNTAIN, COLORADO WOLF BREED BASE, HAVEN ELEVEN YEARS LATER

Cassa Hawkins slipped silently through the shadows of the Wolf Breed compound of Haven as she tried to ignore the misty rain falling and her own sense of anticipation. She felt like a ghost, like a shadow, unseen, unheard. It was a heady sensation to slip past Breed after Breed, undetected.

The chill night air wrapped around her and penetrated the black clothing she wore. Even the snug black cap that covered her hair did little to keep out the cold or the dampness. It added to the thrill, the sense of disbelief and impending danger. She was insane, creeping around like this and she knew it. She couldn't get far. It wasn't possible that a drug had actually been created that could fool the Breed senses and allow her to get much farther past the sentries posted throughout Haven.

Someone was playing with her, allowing her to get only so far. That was the only explanation for the distance she had gained between the cabin she was assigned and the main offices of the compound because there were too many Breed sentries posted. Breeds who had an incredible sense of smell. They were chosen for their positions simply because they were impossible to get past.

It wasn't possible that such a drug could have been created, a drug that would fool the Breed's superior ability to scent others. Was it?

According to the emails she had received and the small bottle of round white pills that had arrived at her apartment the week before, it was definitely possible. And she had been crazy enough tonight to actually take one. To slip it onto her tongue, to allow it to dissolve and enter her system before she left her cabin.

The reckless decision had concerned her, but only for brief moments. As many of her fellow reporters knew, Cassa had often been known to dare death. It was one of her faults, many said. She considered it one of her strengths. After all, her days were numbered and she knew it. She might as well get away with as much as possible until the day of reckoning arrived. Cabal may have allowed her to live this long, but she doubted that decision would last much longer.

In this case, intuition had spurred her on. The pictures of bloody bodies, the emails that had warned her that a rogue Breed was taking vengeance for some unknown crimes, and then the drug that arrived with the unsigned note that said the past always returned no matter how hard one fought it. The past was indeed always there. It hovered at her shoulder, ran through her nightmares and glittered in the golden flecks of Cabal St. Laurents's eyes every time he looked at her. The past was alive and well. She didn't need a killer to remind her of that. Just as she didn't need anyone to remind her of the truth of her own actions.

The truth.

The truth was, Cassa had spilled blood herself. The truth was, once her secrets were revealed, she would die. The Breeds would never allow her to live once they knew the truth. She was lucky that the small team of Breeds who knew the truth had kept their mouths shut all these years.

She slipped past yet another Breed guard. Mordecai. One of their best trackers, rumored to be one

their most merciless Coyote Breeds. On silent feet, she moved slowly through the shadows, along the wet ground, heart racing, mouth dry, until she was a safe distance from him.

The chilly winter air gave no hint that spring was just around the corner. The cold penetrated flesh and bone, but nothing could still the excitement racing through her now. It was working. They hadn't scented her, they hadn't sensed her.

God, this couldn't be possible.

Pressing her back tight to the thick trunk of a pine, she stared up at the moonless sky and whispered a silent prayer that neither one of the Breeds patrolling the area would scent her.

A drug like this could be deadly, just as her source had warned her.

Pushing away from the tree, Cassa skirted around several maples bare of leaves and dripping with chilly rain. She slid through the night.

There was a whisper of voices ahead, the sound of soft footfalls coming nearer. Ducking behind the evergreen shrubs that grew around an enclosed picnic area, she waited for them to pass.

"Are you certain of your information?" Jonas Wyatt's voice came through the night clearly as the pair grew closer.

"Five dead, Jonas, that's hard to mistake. Each one was rumored to be a part of a twelve-man hunting party that came together several times a year to hunt down escaped Breeds. Each one was killed in the same manner, using the same pattern. There's no mistake."

The voice that answered had Cassa's heart tripping, then speeding up in awareness. She fought back the response, bit her lip and prayed that little miracle pill would cover the scent of arousal as well.

Cabal St. Laurents had a voice that made women want to melt to the floor in a puddle of orgasmic bliss. It rasped over the senses with a velvet cadence Cassa had never been able to ignore. It was a seducer's voice, and she had been seduced long ago, even when he'd stared at her with death in his eyes.

"Hell." Jonas paused, no more than four feet from where she crouched.

As badly as she wanted to peek over the border of shrubs, she didn't dare. The scent of her body might be masked, but there would be no way in hell she would escape their exceptional eyesight.

"That's a good description of what we're facing," Cabal answered. "It's not over. The hunters are becoming the prey, and if the first five are any indication, we could be looking at some pretty high profile individuals. The former mayor that disappeared last week was a well-known individual throughout the nation. We're looking at a PR nightmare here."

Cassa felt her mouth dry. The former mayor who had disappeared recently was David Banks, a proponent of Breed rights. He had argued for Breed Law, and had been known to host several charity parties a year in honor of the Breeds. Now he was also rumored to have been a member of a group of men that once hunted Breeds?

She could believe it. She had never liked Banks, but she knew his popularity. His smooth, charming smile and soft-spoken voice had fooled more than one journalist.

"PR is your brother's area," Jonas growled. "I'll let Tanner worry about the sugar coating. I want the killer caught, Cabal. That's your job."

Jonas's voice was commanding, harsh in its reminder. Yes, that was Cabal's job, to do the things that the more public enforcers couldn't do.

"It's hard to do a job when there's no evidence to go on, Jonas," Cabal snapped, irritation clear in his voice. "There's no DNA left on the scene, and no scent. We were notified within hours of the mayor's disappearance. When we arrived, you could smell the scent of his terror, but the scent of his kidnapper was nowhere to be found."

“Find something, Cabal,” he was ordered. “We’re working on borrowed time here. If you don’t find the killer before news of these murders, possibly committed by a Breed, leaks to the press, then we’re fucked.”

“It looks to me as though we’re fucked either way,” Cabal informed him, his voice cold. “Horacio Engalls and Phillip Brandenmore are making certain of that.”

Brandenmore and Engalls, the owners of a pharmaceutical and drug research company, were under indictment for the drugging of the Breed doctor, Elyiana Morrey, and conspiracy to murder in several Breed deaths. They had been caught attempting to buy from her two assistants research conducted by Dr. Morrey, and were rumored to be researching a de-aging phenomenon the Breeds and their wives were supposedly experiencing.

There was no supposition to it. Cassa knew the truth of it. The Breeds were experiencing an aging decrease once they went into mating heat. The phenomenon was making Breed doctors crazy trying to figure it out, and sending the Breed Ruling Cabinet into a frenzy each time the gossip tabloids came up with another angle to tell the story from.

So far, it wasn’t being taken seriously. But that couldn’t continue much longer. It had been eleven years since the Feline Breed alpha had announced the existence of the Breeds. Ten years since he and his wife had aged in any noticeable way.

Cassa was one of the few people who knew the truth, and she knew the consequences of ever writing that story or revealing her knowledge of it. The nondisclosure agreement she had signed, in return for special consideration in interviews and breaking Breed stories, had been frightening. She was certain she might have signed away her soul, her firstborn child and her cat’s blood. Or something close.

“Engalls and Brandenmore are being dealt with,” Jonas drawled, his tone one of pure ice. “I’m more concerned with a rogue Breed’s indiscriminate killings. Find him, Cabal, or we could all be up shits and creek without a paddle.”

Cabal grunted at that. “I thought we already were.”

“No, at the moment, we have a paddle,” Jonas informed him sarcastically. “Now find that bastard before he kills again. I’ll be damned if I want to try to clean up another mess like the last one. I’m certain there are still pieces of him missing.”

Cassa forced herself to silence. She had the pictures of that killing, she was certain she did. The one, and three others. Pictures that had been sent via secured, untraceable emails that accused the Breeds of hiding a killer.

She hadn’t doubted they were capable of it. She just hadn’t imagined that even a Breed could do the damage that had been done in those pictures.

Trepidation built inside her as she felt the sweat that began to trickle down her temple at the thought of being caught now. She knew Breed Law, and she knew the price of eavesdropping on the conversation. Like David Banks, she could disappear and her fate never be known.

There was once a rumor that Jonas had a fondness for throwing his enemies into volcanoes. She really didn’t doubt it. It sounded like a very “Jonas” thing to do.

“You’re pissing in the wind, Jonas,” Cabal informed him. “We have nothing to go on here. No suspects, no clues. Until I have one or the other, then there’s not a lot I can do.”

“Get it.” Jonas’s voice became dangerous, clipped. “Quickly, Cabal.”

“Yeah, I’ll get right on that, Director, just as soon as you tell me who the hell I’m looking for.” Cabal’s voice lowered until it vibrated with suppressed menace. “Until then, there’s not a hell of a lot more I can do.”

“Banks was from Glen Ferris. Get back there, see what you can find out. We’re supposed to be

searching for him. Investigate it from that angle.”

“Just what I need, you telling me how to do my fucking job,” Cabal grunted.

“I could be telling you how to find your mate,” Jonas drawled with a hint of amusement. “I’m certain she’s around here somewhere. What do you think?”

A dangerous growl filled the air as Cassa felt her heart sink in her chest. Cabal was mated? No, that couldn’t be true. Breeds did not ignore their mates, and they sure as hell didn’t fuck around with anything in a skirt as Cabal was known to do. The man had a virtual harem kneeling at his feet begging for the privilege of pleasing him. It was enough to make her teeth clench in irritation.

Jonas had to be talking about a mate in general, not one in particular. Such as in a seek and ye shall find, why aren’t you looking for your mate type of thing. That had to be it.

“Don’t fuck with me, Jonas,” Cabal warned him. “I’m not in the mood.”

Jonas chuckled. It wasn’t a comfortable or amused sound. It was, frankly, frightening.

“I’m not the one you have to worry about fucking with you, my friend,” he drawled. “I do believe though that our intrepid little reporter, Ms. Hawkins, could give you lessons in it.”

Cassa felt her lips part in shock. There was a hint of amusement in Jonas’s voice now, but none in Cabal’s rumbled snarl. The sound was sexy as hell even as it sent chills racing up Cassa’s spine—and a flood of warmth between her thighs.

Jonas knew exactly how Cabal felt about her; he had been there the morning Cabal had killed her husband and nearly killed her. She could still feel Cabal’s hands around her throat, see the fury and the need for blood in his eyes.

“Drop it, Jonas,” Cabal warned him.

Yes, Jonas, please drop it, Cassa moaned silently. She was becoming aroused by his voice, despite her best efforts not to do so. She was worried that whatever that pill did, it would be little defense against the scent of her need. And she was definitely needy. In the eleven years since her husband’s death, she had never been so turned on as she was when she was around Cabal St. Laurents.

“Fine, consider it dropped.” She heard the shrug in Jonas’s voice. “The heli-jet will be ready to fly you to Glen Ferris in the morning. Investigate Banks’s disappearance further. We might get lucky and you’ll find a suspect while you’re there.”

“Keep hoping,” Cabal grunted. “Trust me, if they’re hiding a feral Breed in their midst, they’re not going to turn him over simply because I ask nicely.”

The residents of Glen Ferris would be more likely to shelter and protect a feral Breed, no matter the risk to themselves. Hell, they’d been doing it for years; there was no reason to believe they wouldn’t do it now.

“You know how to ask nicely?” There was a wealth of sarcasm in Jonas’s voice.

“Go to hell.” There was a wealth of arrogance in Cabal’s.

Cassa wanted to laugh at the confrontation, even as she filed away the surprising information that had come her way. Everyone suspected that Banks was dead at this point. It had been a week since his disappearance, and there were no leads on what had happened to him. The river had been dragged and search efforts were still ongoing, but there wasn’t a clue to his whereabouts.

David Banks had gone for his evening walk one night in the little town of Glen Ferris, West Virginia. He hadn’t been seen again. His body hadn’t been found. There was no trace, no clue where he might have gone or what might have happened to him. Until now.

“I’ll return to hell, you check on our nosy reporter.” Jonas’s voice echoed with command once again as Cassa gave a small start of fear. “She was too jumpy at the reception tonight. Make sure she’s where she’s supposed to be rather than someplace where she shouldn’t be.”

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