

MILITARY PARANORMAL  
SHIFTER ROMANCES



# TIGER ON THE HUNT

AN ALPHA ROMEOS NOVELLA



FREYA JACKSON

# **Tiger on the Hunt**

## **An Alpha Romeos Romance**

**by Freya Jackson**

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# **Table of Contents**

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Also by Freya Jackson](#)

[About the Author](#)

## Chapter One

It's not often a man is sent to assassinate the love of his life.

Major Cameron Holt waited in the shadows, still and silent, icily calm. Almost invisible with his black combat suit and jet-black hair, he studied the doorway of the motel unit where the ex-girlfriend he'd hunted halfway across the world had finally gone to ground.

How ironic—and yet fitting—he'd been the first to track her down. Wanted for murder, and for high treason against the Crown, she'd also broken his heart. It was only fair he'd be the one to tear hers apart.

The motel unit was quiet and deserted at this time of night. Holt touched the first two fingers of his right hand to his forehead between his eyebrows, opening up his second sight.

The midnight scene sprang into color, the orange and lemon trees pulsing with a green glow, while smaller, red auras showed nocturnal animals hidden in the

undergrowth.

Holt kept his attention pinned to the motel door. The frame glittered with scarlet dust, illuminated by the protective seal she'd placed on it.

Normally, he would have cursed, knowing any magical seal set by such a powerful witch would be impenetrable. However, the glitter appeared dim, not as vibrant as it should be, dull patches indicating the seal's age.

She hadn't bothered to renew the spell, had no doubt thought she'd be safe for several days. But then she hadn't known he was tracking her.

The phone on Holt's belt vibrated against his hip. He removed it and dropped to his haunches, keeping one eye on the door.

The message on the display came from the New Zealand branch of the S.U.—the Supernatural Unit of the British Army. They wanted to know if he'd found her yet.

Holt studied the text for a moment. His finger hovered over the reply button. Then he slid it back onto his belt.

Even without the seal on the door, he would have known she was in that room. His inner tiger could sense

her power the way other, ordinary men knew their girlfriend's perfume.

But he didn't want to report her as found. Not yet. He'd be damned if he'd let someone else spoil his moment of victory. He wanted to take her down himself.

She'd led him a merry dance, no doubt about that. He'd tracked her across Europe, lost her temporarily in Prague, then picked her up in Rome. He'd trailed her to India and across the seas to Singapore, then finally followed her to the other side of the world, to the islands comprising New Zealand, adrift in the Pacific Ocean.

Here, he'd had trouble pinning her down—she'd left the main cities and holed up in a tiny town in the sub-tropical Northland. She'd clearly thought she was safe, for a while at least.

Hadn't she guessed he would be sent to find her? Perhaps she didn't think she was important enough. She obviously hadn't realized practically the whole of the S.U. was on the hunt for her under the orders of the major-general herself.

Then again, it wasn't often a captain of the S.U.

defected—in fact, this was a first, as far as he knew. And not just any old captain, but the most powerful nature witch the S.U. had seen in a long time.

To lose her to Chaos was a catastrophic disaster for the Forces of Light. He wasn't surprised the whole of the magical army was hunting her.

Checking one last time to make sure nobody was watching, Holt closed his eyes, focused his energy, and shifted into his animal form. He dropped onto all fours, welcoming the power that surged through his body as his tiger took over.

Sexual energy—a by-product of shifting—stirred inside him. He'd been shifting since he was a boy and had no trouble controlling it now he was approaching thirty. Still, a shiver ran through him as if a breeze had ruffled his fur. His tiger remembered the passion that had existed between him and Imogen, and it hungered for her.

He ignored the deep ache inside him and crept up to the building, silent on his large paws. The unit was one of eight belonging to the motel, scattered in a grassy park surrounded by mandarins, kiwifruit, and lemon trees. A

kiwi bird cried, mournful in the night.

Having never been to New Zealand, Holt found he liked the tropical palms and the warm, humid weather. Even now, at midnight in the middle of January, the sultry air caressed him with warm fingers. In better circumstances, he might have enjoyed the trip, but he focused on the task at hand and barely noticed his surroundings.

The resentment and anger that had boiled inside him since the day Imogen had left stirred once again. He harnessed those feelings, welcoming the way they heated his blood. He would need every ounce of power he possessed to fight the witch. He would use the negative feelings she aroused in him against her.

The thought made him smile inside, and his whiskers bristled.

Reaching the doorway, he placed a paw against the frame and concentrated. A silvery light radiated out and spread to the edges, eating away at the sparkling red seal.

Within seconds, he had dispelled the charm, and the door unlocked with a metallic click, silently swinging

open.

He paused on the threshold. A seed of doubt lodged in his chest—the first time he'd hesitated since he'd been given this mission. Had she changed since he'd last seen her over four months ago? What would he feel when he finally faced her? Could he really kill the one woman in his life he'd truly loved?

But it had all been a lie, he told himself fiercely. None of it had been true. All the time they'd dated, she'd been waiting for the moment she could betray them all to the Forces of Darkness. He'd only been a diversion for her, and she'd discarded him without a second thought or a backward glance. He owed her nothing.

The resentment and anger built in his solar plexus. He welcomed the feelings, drawing on the emotions to expand his energy.

He growled deep in his throat, his muscles rippling, his claws and canines lengthening, needle sharp as he flicked his tongue over them. He was going to sink his teeth into her soft flesh and tear it from her body.

Nudging the door wider, he moved into the unit.

He found himself in a small, pitch-dark living room. Luckily, his cat's eyes were already used to the darkness. Scanning the room, he found it empty and padded to the corridor at the other end where the bedroom door stood ajar.

His hackles rose, heat flooding his body. She was in there—he knew it as surely as if he could see her. His heart rate doubled, and blood raced around his body.

He didn't stop to think. His assassin's instincts kicked in, and he went into autopilot.

Jumping at the door, he thrust it open with a crash, and immediately leapt at the figure lying on the bed.

She moved, awoken by a sense more honed than her hearing or sight, and as his front paws landed on the mattress, she hurled herself off the side of the bed.

His claws sank into the duvet cover, missing their target by inches and, as his back paws also landed, the whole bed shook.

He watched her back away from him on the floor until she met the wall with a bump, her eyes wide with shock. *Fuck!* He thought the word, but it came out as a wild

growl.

He'd lost the element of surprise. His success had depended on catching her unawares—now he'd have to fight her.

There had been a time when he'd thought himself more powerful than her, but that was before he'd known she was a spy.

The witch rolled and leapt to her feet. He crouched ready to pounce again, and she held out her palm toward him.

As he leapt, rearing up in the air and mistakenly exposing his belly, thick green vines exploded from her fingers and struck his torso. He gasped as they thrust him back against the dressing table, knocking him off balance.

He yowled and twisted in the air to land on his feet, then sprung at her again hoping to catch her by surprise.

Her fingers traced a pattern in the air, and thin vines snaked up his back legs, anchoring him to the floor. He slashed at the vines with his claws, scattering green ribbons around him that melted away into nothingness.

Anger burned within him, and he let it fire him up,

building energy in his muscles. Before she could raise her power again, he leapt, splaying his claws.

She rolled and ducked behind the bed, but not before his sharp claws met flesh, and she squealed. He'd found his target this time.

He jumped onto the bed. She cowered on the other side, and he crouched, ready to pounce. She glanced up at him, and his gaze locked on her face, which was pale as milk, her eyes wide with pain.

A memory shot through him of her lying beside him, eyes gentle after their lovemaking, laughing at something he'd said, and he faltered. The willpower he had to exercise to keep control of his animal self wavered, and his grip on the tiger slipped.

Damn it! He fought to stay shifted, channeling his anger and trying to build the power back in his solar plexus.

But she'd seen his weakness, and she rose before he could pounce. With a twist of her wrists, she laced another pattern before her, and vines traced up his legs and across his body.

He clawed them away, continuing to build his energy,

but she moved her hands and yanked the vines, pulling his feet out from under him.

He fell backward onto the bed, narrowly missing banging his head on the wall, and collapsed onto the pile of pillows. The shock cut through his concentration.

His tiger vanished, and he shifted into human form before he could stop himself.

The vines moved across him, snaking over his torso and legs and up his arms. He yelled his fury, but something wrenched his hands above his head, and he looked up to see vines wrapping around the headboard, pinning his arms and hands flat against the wooden slats.

With his hands bound and fingers outstretched, he couldn't shift. He was defenseless. He swore and fought with all his strength, but the magic twine was as strong as steel rope, lashing him to the bed.

He swore again, loudly and violently, trying to use his human strength to rip out the vines, but he only succeeded in giving himself rope burns and a couple of wrenched muscles.

He stopped struggling and glared into the dark corner

of the room where she stood. To his right, an outside lamp illuminated the pathway and slanted in through the glass sliding doors, casting a pool of silver between them across the bed.

His stomach twisted with anger and fear as she walked toward him into the light. He'd seen her split daemons apart, forcing branches and thorns through skin and muscle, ignoring their screams until she'd dispatched them back to the hell from which they came. He knew what she was capable of.

She stepped forward until the light completely illuminated her. Her eyes were wide, and her voice, when she spoke, was quiet with disbelief.

“Cameron?”

Holt stared at her. She'd pressed her right hand against her left shoulder, and blood oozed between her fingers. Against her black vest and shorts, her skin looked as white as the sheets on the bed.

Her hair, which was the yellow of ripe corn in the sun, appeared silver in the moonlight, and it curled well past her shoulders, untouched by any form of scissors for the

past few months.

She'd lost so much weight he barely recognized her. Her lips were bloodless, her eyes wide and dark in her pale face. She looked like a hunted animal that had learned to survive in fear and darkness.

His gaze traced up her figure, lingered on the whiteness of her skin where the vest dipped between her breasts, paused on her soft, pale lips, her dark eyes. She was still the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen.

But she'd given herself to the Forces of Darkness—she'd let her heart be infested with blackness. She was pure evil, and she'd already broken his heart once. He wasn't going to let her do it again.

Hatred burned within him, although with his hands bound he couldn't use it to shift. He cursed himself for the moment of weakness leading to this moment.

He wasn't going to get out of his bonds by force. He was going to have to find some other way.

He saw the confusion in her eyes, the vulnerability, and suddenly he knew what to do.

“Hello, Imogen.” He smiled. “Found you.”



## Chapter Two

Imogen Walsh—no longer a captain now the Supernatural Unit of the Army had taken away her rank—stepped back into the shadows so she could hide her reaction from the man on the bed.

She surveyed him, glad of the privacy of the darkness, relieved he couldn't see the effect he had on her. Her heart thumped against her ribs, the surge causing the wound in her shoulder to pulse. She ignored it, too shocked by his arrival to worry about the pain.

Was it really him? Her brain refused to believe what her eyes were seeing. How could he be here, in New Zealand, thirteen thousand miles away from where she'd left him? And yet, it was him, clearly.

Her eyes scanned the body she knew so well. Broad shoulders, narrow waist, long legs, all encased in the special padded black armor the S.U. had developed for shifters to wear in both their forms.

His well-muscled arms were pinned tightly against the

headboard, making him practically defenseless. He wouldn't like that.

His eyes glittered with anger. His black hair was longer than she'd seen it before—although short up the back and sides, the top didn't stand up in its usual spiky soldier bristle but rather slanted across his forehead, covering one eyebrow.

The energy spilling from his muscular body washed over her like a liquid. His tiger prowled inside him as if straining at a leash, all that sexual energy pouring over her, making the hairs rise on her arms and the back of her neck and her nipples tighten beneath the vest.

She could feel his heated blood coursing around his body from across the room, making her burn. His sheer power made her catch her breath.

She wanted to run up to him, to throw herself in his arms. But the wound in her shoulder throbbed, reminding her of his betrayal.

“They sent you to kill me,” she whispered.

He said nothing, twisting his hands, trying his bonds. She felt a brief bite of fear. She'd seen what his tiger

could do, how his gold eyes hypnotized daemons and left them frozen to the spot with terror, at which point he would tear them apart with one slash of his great claws.

When he shifted, he was huge, heavy, and powerful. Her vines held, though, keeping his hands above him, containing the tiger, while the man's gaze swept like the beam from a lighthouse, searching for her in the darkness.

She moved along the bed to find the shirt she'd taken off a few hours earlier. After folding it into a pad, she pressed it against her shoulder, hissing as pain stabbed through her.

She looked back at him. "They sent a major." She perched on the edge of a table and made her voice icy. "They must really want me dead."

"Can you blame them? A captain of the S.U. seduced by Darkness? Did you think they'd just let you go?"

For a moment, she didn't trust herself to speak. The hate in his eyes tore through her like his claws. She began to shake. It was worse than she'd thought.

"How many of you?" she managed to say finally.

"The whole army's after you, Imogen. I just happened

to find you first.” His lips twisted. “It’s not going to end well. Why don’t you let me finish it here, now? Wouldn’t it be better if it were me? Surely, you don’t want some stranger to terminate you? Come on, for old time’s sake.” He indicated his bound hands with his head. His hazel eyes glinted with gold.

Imogen pressed her shaking hand to her lips. All this time, the months she’d spent hiding, she’d dreamed he was waiting for her. She’d imagined he’d somehow known what had happened to her, and he’d seen through their lies.

She’d assumed that while she was lying in the grimy, dark motel rooms as she slunk her way across the world, he was looking for ways to clear her name.

How naive she’d been. Of course they would have gotten to him. Who better to track her than the best hunter in the S.U.? And how would they have got him to track her other than by convincing him she’d turned?

She glared at him. “Is that what you think? You really believe I’ve gone over to Darkness?”

He moved on the bed, wincing as his arms strained at the vines, which only tightened as he struggled. “That

sounds like something a renegade witch would say.”

“I suppose it does.”

She got up and walked over to the sliding glass doors. Outside, past the weak light illuminating the path, darkness shrouded the park. Were there others out there?

She closed her eyes, sending out a pulse of energy across the grass. He shivered in response, but she ignored him. The pulse found nothing, not for a few hundred yards anyway.

He was alone. He wanted her for himself. But they wouldn't be long. If he was right and the whole army was after her, he would only be a few hours ahead of the others, at most.

Was her long ordeal finally over? Tiredness washed over her. She'd thought herself safe here, for a while, at least. Now she knew she would never be safe again.

He believed she'd betrayed him—he would hunt her down, and one day he'd catch her off guard, and then he would kill her. And if he didn't, one of her other comrades would.

Her hands clenched. They'd all turned on her. Was it

so easy to believe she'd betrayed them?

"Tell me." She let the curtain drop and turned back to him. "Who gave the order?"

"It was Ross herself," he said, naming the major-general. "Right from the top."

Imogen laughed.

He frowned. "What?"

"Of course it was."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

She sighed, thinking back to the day Surina Ross had called her into her office. "It was the major-general who sent me on the mission." She couldn't keep the bitterness out of her voice.

"What mission?"

"The one that took me away from you."

Holt surveyed her, eyes narrowing. "What are you talking about?"

Imogen walked up to the bed. She knelt on the mattress and, ignoring the pain in her shoulder, leaned forward on his chest, looking into his eyes.

"You might be right. This could be it for me, this could

be the end of the line, but I'm not going until you know every little detail, until you know what they did to me. When you know it all, if you still want to kill me, I might let you. But may it always be on your conscience that you killed an innocent woman.”

Holt looked at her, his eyes dark and smoldering, but said nothing. He flexed his hands again and glared at her with a strange mixture of hate and desire. And Imogen caught her breath, transported back to the moment she'd first seen him, not quite a year ago.

## Chapter Three

It was late March, and Imogen was running circuits on the training ground. Rain fell in sheets, plastering her uniform to her body. It was a typical south Devon spring day.

She belly crawled through the mud, sliding under several lengths of barbed wire, then looked up as another member of her platoon nudged her and pointed across the field.

She stopped moving and glanced at the tall figure standing to one side of the circuit. He didn't move or beckon her over, but she could see him staring at her. His aura pulsed with blue, and she cursed, recognizing the command.

She crawled on her front until she cleared the barbed wire, then got to her feet. Walking across the field toward him, she studied his smart, black uniform, dry under his umbrella.

Running a filthy hand across the wet strands of hair

that had escaped her bun and trying to clip them back into place, she sighed at her sweat-and-earth-stained T-shirt and mud-splattered combat trousers. Her appearance wasn't something that usually bothered her, but she must look a complete fright.

Screw it. She lifted her chin as she approached him. She was a soldier—if she'd wanted to look like a fashion model, she would have worked for Vivienne Westwood.

As she approached, she saw the crown on his shoulder. He was a major. She saluted smartly, conscious of his critical gaze.

He returned the salute. "At ease, Captain."

She stood in the classic soldier's pose with hands behind her back. "You wanted me, sir?" Her chest heaved from exertion, her breath misting in the fresh air.

He studied her for a moment, apparently considering her words. Drips from his umbrella splashed onto her top, but he didn't apologize. His gaze slid down her body to her muddy boots, then meandered up to her earth-streaked face. She flushed, aware she was cold and her nipples stood out like buttons.

“You look like you need a bath, Captain,” he said.

His deep voice ran an ice-cube down her spine. He towered over her, intimidating and, frankly, quite scary, and this coming from a witch who’d once fought off a vampire elder hand-to-hand.

“I’m sorry, sir.” She frowned. Why was he criticizing her? “I was training, and it’s a wet day.”

“So I see.” He surveyed her with serious eyes. “Do you need someone to scrub your back?”

Imogen’s eyes widened. He didn’t smile. Had she misheard him?

She glanced at the badge on his shoulder. Above the crown denoting his rank, she could now see the letters A.R. that marked him as an Alternate Race—a shifter, nicknamed fondly by the women in the army as Alpha Romeos because they were arrogant, superior, and frequently hot. The insignia on his shoulder marked his inner animal as a tiger.

This guy certainly fit the bill. He was making no attempt to rein in the sexual energy that poured off him in waves, and he would know she’d be able to sense it.

Her nipples tightened even more as a sexual frisson ran through her, as surely as if he'd reached out and stroked a hand down her body. Warmth pooled between her legs, and her lips parted as she inhaled, struggling to control her witch's response to his power.

She brought her arms forward to fold across her breasts in an attempt to hide her nipples, but as she glanced down she saw sparks jump from the ends of her fingers. Hastily, she put her hands behind her back again. Was he aware of her reaction to him?

His lips curved—he'd seen the sparks. Around his large pupils, his hazel eyes glowed gold, and she finally realized who he was.

Cameron Holt, the infamous captain who'd been promoted to major after an assault on a daemon lair in Soho. He'd led the raid, risked his life to rescue the dozen prisoners the vampires were keeping in the basement, single-handedly fought off daemon reinforcements threatening to overwhelm his squad, and brought his whole team and all the prisoners back to the base unscathed.

Every female in the S.U. was talking about the tall,

dark-haired maniac who was allegedly the most powerful shifter the army had ever had.

And here he was, asking her if she needed someone to scrub her back.

She cleared her throat. “Why, sir, are you offering?”

He raised an eyebrow. “Goodness me, Captain, personal relationships are completely forbidden in the British Army, you know that.”

“Absolutely, sir, prejudicial to good order and discipline.”

“That’s right.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I’m glad we understand each other.”

“Definitely, sir.”

“Good.” He nodded to her formally. “I’d like to see a copy of the report you wrote on training in the Brecon Beacons.”

“Yes, sir. Shall I go and get it now?”

He studied her thoughtfully, running his tongue along his teeth, reminder her that he was a shifter. She shivered.

He glanced off into the distance. “No, Captain, you

may continue your training for the moment. Please bring the report to my room at twenty-one hundred hours.”

“Twenty-one hundred hours... Yes, sir.”

He nodded, and she thought she saw brief humor light his eyes before he walked away casually, twirling his umbrella, pausing as he watched a group of new recruits being put through their paces.

Imogen watched him go, a small smile curving her lips. Cheeky bastard. Ordering her to come to his room! A small part of her wanted to refuse, to see what he'd say, and to prove she didn't come running just because an Alpha Romeo snapped his fingers in her direction.

The other ninety-nine percent of her—located mostly below her navel—shouted it down. So what if he only wanted sex? She hadn't had any for, *oh my God*, over eight months, and frankly she was worried it would go rusty down there. She certainly wasn't going to pass up the opportunity to go to bed with Major Cameron Holt!

She returned to running circuits, only half-concentrating and not at all surprised to discover she was nowhere near her personal best by the time she'd finished.

It was growing dark by then, and she headed for her room and took a long, hot shower, slathered on lotion to make herself as silky as possible, and dabbed her most expensive perfume behind her ears and between her breasts.

After catching a quick dinner in the mess that she could barely remember eating because she was so nervous, she returned to her room to get dressed. What should she wear?

She had no illusions about their rendezvous. It wasn't a date, and she had no expectations of it being anything other than a blissful interlude of sexual release with an extremely hot, hunky shifter, no strings attached.

Relationships in the standard army were discouraged in general and very frowned upon in the same chain of command. The rules tended to be a bit more relaxed in the S.U. for various reasons, but even so, she didn't want to draw attention to herself and get either of them into trouble.

She tried on half a dozen outfits, none of which satisfied her. In the end, she chose a knee-length gray skirt

and a white shirt, prim enough to fool anyone she bumped into on the way, but hopefully still sexy. Lastly, she let her hair down from its bun so it hung around her shoulders.

She undid the shirt buttons lower than she would normally have done when on duty, making sure her cleavage was on show. Then it was time to go.

Picking up the report he'd asked for, she made her way across to his building as stealthily as she could. Female presence in the Alpha Romeo rooms was hardly unknown, but with a bit of sneaking about she managed to get right up to his door without bumping into anyone.

She'd just taken a deep breath and knocked, however, when voices sounded from around the corner of the corridor. Damn it! She knocked again, desperate not to be seen. She didn't want to be sent away before she'd completed the mission!

Turning the handle, she pushed hard on the door. She stumbled into the room and would have fallen flat on her face if Holt—who'd apparently opened the door at the same time she'd pushed—hadn't caught her. He pulled her inside and closed the door with his foot as the two officers

turned the corner.

Holt clasped her tightly to him for a moment as they listened to the voices moving toward them. Holding her breath, Imogen placed her hands on his chest.

He wore jeans and a black T-shirt, the fabric stretching taught across his muscles. Her fingertips sparked in reaction to the raw sexual energy pouring from him. She'd never felt anything like it, and her heart raced as she looked up into his eyes to find them filled with heat, the gold rings burning into her.

The footsteps passed and faded away, and the two of them burst out laughing.

Holt locked the door, then looked at the piece of paper in her hand. "Is that the report, Captain?"

"Yes, sir."

He took it out of her hand and threw it behind him, smirking as the pages fluttered to the floor, then picked her up as if she weighed no more than the paper.

Gasping, Imogen wrapped her legs around his waist. The guy was huge—at least six feet four, and built of solid muscle.

She slid her fingers into his short hair and lowered her mouth to his, her heart thumping as he returned the kiss fiercely. His lips were warm and firm, and he tilted his head, slanting his mouth across hers, hungry and demanding.

He brushed her lips with his tongue, requesting access, and she opened her mouth, inviting him in. The slick slide of his tongue against hers sent a shiver skittering through her, followed by a surge of heat.

His passion was overwhelming—she'd never felt wanted like this before, desired to this extent. Was he like this with everyone he went to bed with? No wonder the guy had a reputation!

He carried her over to the bed, bumping into the table as he passed and knocking a pile of papers and pens to the floor. Laughing, he fell forward heavily on top of her, but he made no attempt to move and seemed happy to imprison her beneath him.

She had difficulty catching the breath he'd squeezed out of her because he crushed his lips to hers again, plunging his tongue into her mouth. He accompanied each

thrust of his tongue with a mirror movement of his hips, and she felt his rock-hard erection against her mound, leaving no doubt in her mind that he had little—if any—interest in her report.

Lifting his head, he surveyed her for a moment. Her chest rose and fell quickly against his, and her cheeks warmed when he tipped his head and smiled.

“I’m being very rude.” He brushed her lips with his while wrapping a strand of her hair around a finger. “Do you want a glass of wine or something first?” His deep voice carried with it the faint echo of a growl deep in his throat. *His tiger.* She shivered.

Keeping her eyes on his, feverish with desire, she shook her head. “Nuh-uh.” She hooked her free leg over his and moved her hips, pressing her mound against his hard length. He rewarded her with an intake of breath, and his hazel irises glowed gold.

He was absolutely gorgeous, and lust shot through her. Part of her recognized it was in reaction to him being a shifter and that he would have this effect on all women, but she didn’t care. She was the one he’d asked back to his

room tonight, and she didn't expect anything more from him.

She moved her hips again, desperate to have him inside her.

“Be careful, Captain.” He glowered the way a tiger would when poised above its prey. “You’re stoking a fire that won’t be extinguished easily.”

“Sir, yes, sir.” She pulled his head down for a kiss.

He growled, rolled so she was on top, and pushed her up so she sat astride him. Taking the sides of her shirt in his hands, he ripped it open, popping the buttons in all directions. She squealed. How was she going to walk back to her own room now?

When he laughed, she made a fake attempt to slap him, but he caught both her hands and pulled them above his head so her breasts were level with his face. He covered a nipple with his hot mouth, and she struggled to catch her breath as his tongue played across the lace of her bra.

“Oh, Goddess. . . .”

He chuckled, released her hands, and slipped her shirt off her arms, letting it drop to the floor. After flicking open

her bra clasp with one hand, he threw that article of clothing onto the floor too.

Covering her breasts with his warm palms, he rolled her nipples between his fingers, and she sighed with pleasure.

The bang on the door made them both jump, and she shot upright, instinctively covering her chest with folded arms.

“What?” he yelled, glaring at the door at the sound of knuckles rapping on wood.

“You all right in there, Holt? Someone reported a crash.” Laughter ensued, followed by hasty shushing.

“Fuck off!” He threw the nearest thing to hand—which happened to be one of her shoes—at the door.

Guffaws echoed, along with raucous comments, fading as the guys headed down the corridor. Imogen looked back at him, and they both laughed ruefully.

“Sorry about that.” He rolled her over again so she was underneath him, stroked up her thigh beneath the skirt, and caressed her backside. “You want to stop?”

“Would it matter if I did?” She tried to remember to

breathe out as well as in when he slipped his fingers beneath her underwear.

“No.” A smile touched his lips. He cupped her mound, then slid his fingers down into the heart of her.

They both groaned. Imogen had suspected she was already wet and swollen, and the way his fingers slipped easily through her folds told her she was right.

Lowering his lips to her breast, he sucked her nipple deep into the warm cavern of his mouth. Imogen slid her hand into his hair and closed her eyes, arching her back and pushing her breasts toward him.

He swapped to her other breast, lifting his hand to stroke the first nipple with his fingers, and his touch on the wet, sensitive skin only deepened the ache between her thighs.

“I need you inside me,” she whispered.

He lifted his head and touched his lips to hers. “So soon? You’ve only just arrived.”

“Sir...”

He laughed. “You can’t keep calling me sir. My name’s Cameron.”

“That’s nice,” she said, a little shyly. “And sorry for being quick, but I can’t help it. It must be your tiger. He’s driving me nuts.”

He pursed his lips thoughtfully, amusement in his eyes. “I haven’t called him yet. What you’re feeling—it’s just us, honey.”

“Oh.” She didn’t know what to say to that. The raw desire coursing through her veins—it wasn’t magical?

Pushing himself up to his knees, he grabbed his T-shirt by the back of the neck and tore it off. Then he unzipped his trousers and kicked them onto the floor. His boxers followed soon after.

She stared at his generous erection, swallowed nervously, then looked at the pile of clothes. “Ever heard of a coat hanger?”

“No time. I want to get naked with you.” He rolled her onto her front and undid the button and zip at the back of her skirt. After tugging it off, he grinned at her and ceremoniously dumped that on the floor too.

Lastly, he slipped his fingers beneath the elastic of her panties, drew them down her legs, and added them to the

pile.

Returning to lean over her, he kissed the back of her neck before trailing his lips down her spine. Reaching her butt, he nibbled the plump muscle down to her thighs, then ran his tongue up the crack of her bottom.

“Jeez. Cameron!”

Laughing, he turned her over. “Get used to it,” he murmured, nuzzling her ear. “I plan to kiss every inch of you and insert my tongue in all your nooks and crannies by the end of the evening.”

“Oh, fuck.”

“I plan to do that as well.” Still chuckling, he kissed down between her breasts, paused briefly to lick each nipple, then carried on to her stomach.

Moving between her thighs, he settled himself comfortably and pushed up her knees so her feet were flat on the bed. She lifted up onto her elbows. “What are you doing?”

“I want to take my time making love to you, so first I thought we’d get rid of some of your tension.” He placed his hands on her inner thighs and pushed them wide,

opening her to his gaze.

She blew out a breath. “I didn’t expect this.”

“Oh, I’ve been planning this for a long time.”

Any question she wanted to ask about that statement flew out of her mind as he lowered his head and buried his mouth in her.

Her head dropped back and she gasped as he gave her a long, slow lick from her perineum up to her clit.

“*Ohhhh...*”

He murmured his approval, sliding two fingers inside her to collect some of her moisture, then spreading it up through her folds. Parting her inner lips, he licked her again, then swirled his tongue over her clit.

Imogen fell back onto the bed, lifted her arms above her head, and relaxed her thighs. She really had died and gone to heaven. Everything she’d heard about the Alpha Romeos was true—they really were gods in the bedroom.

Even though he’d been generous enough to do this, she’d thought he’d make it quick so he could get on with the good stuff, but he seemed determined to draw it out for her.

His fingers curved inside her and stroked firmly while he continued to pleasure her with his tongue. He gave long, luscious licks up with the flat of his tongue, then circled the tip around her clit, teasing it until she was writhing, clutching at the bedclothes.

Lifting his head for a moment, he kissed each of her thighs before saying, "Come for me, Imogen." Returning his mouth to her clit, he flicked it with the tip of his tongue before sucking the swollen button into his mouth.

Her climax built leisurely, starting deep inside her and then radiating out like a pebble dropped into a pond. The ripples washed over her, and her body tightened around his fingers in warm, delicious pulses. She buried her fingers in his hair and gave a series of *oh, oh, ohhhhs* that he responded to with a guttural growl.

Only when the orgasm died away did he remove his fingers and move up the bed, pausing with a hand either side of her shoulders.

She opened her eyes to see him looking down at her. His irises glowed gold, and as she watched, he licked his lips and wiped the back of his hand across his mouth.

*“Now you’ve woken him,”* he said.

## Chapter Four

Holt's tiger stirred, flooding him with sexual energy. Not that he didn't have enough to go around already—the woman lying beneath him was sexy enough to drive him to the edge even without waking his animal.

But the man and the tiger were inextricably linked, and the tiger's power would always play a part in his sex life, whether he liked it or not. Holt wondered whether it bothered Imogen. Not all girls were comfortable with the notion of having sex with a shifter. Some of them worried it might verge on bestiality, as if he might shift while in the middle of fucking them, and they'd open their eyes to find the four-legged beast's cock inside them and their hand buried in its fur.

He'd never been able to explain what it meant to be a shifter to anyone who wasn't one. How it took great willpower to invoke the spirit of the animal, and how it demanded huge concentration to stay shifted, like walking across a wire fifty feet off the ground.

He couldn't have encouraged the beast out during sex even if he'd wanted to, which he didn't—he was quite happy screwing as a human.

But the innate power of the tiger would always be with him, and there was no doubt the feral nature of the shifting process played a part in lovemaking. It could make it wild, sometimes even savage, and again not every girl was comfortable with that kind of rough sex.

But in answer to his statement of *Now you've woken him*, Imogen just said, “Ooh,” and moistened her lips, her pupils dilating.

Heat flooded his body, but he let his lips curve and lowered himself onto his elbows, lying on top of her. “I see. Shifter sex turns you on, does it?”

“I wouldn't know. I've never had it.”

He felt a surge of pleasure at her comment—he would be her first.

He'd made quiet enquiries about her when he'd spotted her a few months ago. She'd transferred to the head base in Devon from Kent when she'd been promoted, recommended for the role of training other witches due to

her expert control of her nature magic.

Holt had read her file, liking the comments from her direct superior in Kent who'd praised her calmness and level head in a crisis. Members of her platoon had told him she was well respected and liked, but any relationships she'd indulged in had been under the radar, and her comment suggested to him she hadn't slept with anyone since her promotion.

She smoothed her hands down his back to his hips and dug her fingers into the muscles of his butt. "So tell me, what can I expect?"

He placed a soft kiss on her lips. "I won't hurt you." He lifted his head and looked into her eyes—it was important to him she knew that.

She held his gaze for a long while, and gradually their lips curved.

He shrugged and kissed up her jaw to her ear. "Well, unless you want me to," he murmured, and nipped her earlobe.

Inhaling sharply, she pushed up beneath him. He groaned, his erection throbbing, desperate to slide into

her.

“I heard shifters mark their mates during sex,” she whispered. “Is that true?”

“Only the special ones.” His lips quirked. “So for me, the answer’s no, not yet.”

It was true. Until he’d made major, he’d had a pretty active sex life, but it had been a mostly casual one. Although some girls had lasted longer than others, he’d never been with one he would consider marking.

So why did the notion of claiming this girl give him an erection harder than a stone pillar?

Pushing himself up, he leaned over her to the bedside table and retrieved a condom from the drawer.

“A handy stash,” she said, smiling.

He tore the wrapper open and raised an eyebrow. “I bought them this morning. Haven’t bought any since I made major.”

Her eyes widened. “Six months?”

“I’ve been too busy training to think about my love life.” He rolled the condom on and leaned over her again.

“That explains it,” she said breathlessly as he guided

the top of his erection into her soft folds.

He paused. "Explains what?"

"The energy I can feel rolling off you."

"Anything you can feel right now is directly influenced by how much I want you, Imogen, and nothing else." He could see she didn't believe him, but he couldn't think how to convince her other than to show her.

Pushing his hips forward, he sank into her moist flesh.

Imogen dug her fingers into his arms, and her lips parted as she inhaled sharply. He paused, letting her adjust, and placed small kisses on her nose and cheeks while he waited. She was extremely wet and swollen from her orgasm, but he wasn't a small man, and he wanted her to enjoy this.

After a few moments, he pulled back, then pushed forward again. This time, lubricated with her slippery moisture, he slid right inside her.

They both groaned. The sensation of being encased in her tight, wet warmth made his head spin. Kissing her deeply, he set up a pattern of slow, shallow thrusts, wanting to make this last as long as he could.

Imogen wrapped her legs around his waist and welcomed him in. She opened her mouth, and he mimicked the movement of his hips with his tongue, delving it into her mouth and feeling the slide of hers against it.

Lifting his head, he surveyed her with hooded eyes, heat rising inside him. “You’re so fucking beautiful,” he whispered.

She laughed and scraped her nails down his back. “And you’re like a fucking God.”

His breath hissed between his teeth, and he gave an instinctive, hard thrust. Imogen moaned and opened her thighs to let him plunge into her. “Yes, harder,” she whispered.

Pushing himself up to a kneeling position, he clasped her hands. He could already feel the magic rising in her, and as she flexed her fingers in his, sparks jumped from the ends. His tiger stirred and growled low in his throat, and she gasped.

“You want to see him?” He didn’t dare to hope, because he was already half in love with this girl, and knowing she welcomed the shifter side of him would be

like his birthday and Christmas rolled into one.

But Imogen's eyes widened with excitement. "Yes."

Heart thundering, he held the condom and withdrew from her, then moved his finger in a circle. "Turn over."

She did so, lying on her front, and opened her legs for him to kneel in between them. He pushed up her left knee, exposing her glistening flesh, and guided his erection down to her opening. Parting her folds with the tip, he placed his hands either side of her shoulders.

For the first time, he let his tiger rise within him. Sexual energy coursed through his body, and before he could think about it or try to hold back, he surged forward and thrust deeply into her.

Imogen exclaimed and buried her face in the pillow. Holt paused and kissed her shoulder, tracing his tongue up her neck.

"Are you okay?" he said softly.

She lifted her head and looked over her shoulder. Her eyes met his, and the look in them sent a shiver through him.

Her green irises shimmered, and images flickered

through his mind—ancient forests, old oak trees, lush undergrowth; gnarled roots snaking across the ground, wrapping around his feet and ankles, and dragging him down into the moist, rich earth.

Breathless from her power, he dipped his head to kiss her, welcoming the rise of heat inside him, the thunder of blood around his body. He began to thrust, and his hands curled into fists as he plunged into her warm body. The position allowed him deeper access, especially when she widened her thighs and pushed back against him.

He thrust firmly, and when Imogen only sighed in return, he gave in and let the tiger take over. Passion coursed through him like a virus, infecting him with a fever that made him burn.

He thrust deep and hard, almost pulling out of her each time, then pushing forward to the hilt so his hips met her butt, the loud slap of skin against skin as sexy as her answering moans.

He was partly aware of the electricity flow in the room surging and dipping with the fluctuations in their power, Imogen's hands firing sparks and the tips of her

blonde hair glowing red.

Their passion intensified, and heat built in his abdomen until he thought he was going to spontaneously combust. A deep, feral urge to claim this woman as his own rose within him.

When in tiger form, his canines became rich in nerve endings and turned extremely sensitive. Now they lengthened a little, and when he scraped them down her neck, the feral pleasure that rose within him turned his groan into his tiger's growl.

To his shock, Imogen tipped her head to the side, letting her hair fall away to expose the soft skin of her neck and shoulder in a submissive, sexual gesture that nearly made him come on the spot. Struggling to keep control, he placed his hand on the pale skin of her shoulder.

“Yes,” she whispered.

He closed his eyes, heat pouring through his hand, and Imogen squealed. His palm seared her skin, and his tiger roared in approval.

The lights dimmed and brightened, and he was only

partly conscious of her coming, her tight walls clenching around him as he thrust and thrust.

The bulb in the lamp burst, scattering the floor with fragments of glass and casting them into semi-darkness for a brief second. Then her body lit up like one of the beacons in the report he was never going to read. It burned with heat that made him gasp, consuming him as he shuddered and poured his own passion into her.

For a moment he didn't think the orgasm was ever going to stop—pulse after pulse of intense pleasure washed over him, and he could feel the jets of fluid spurting, the condom stopping the seed from entering her womb.

He surprised himself by feeling a surge of resentment at the barrier, and he finished with a couple of angry thrusts. His tiger wanted to impregnate her. He growled at it and forced himself to stop moving. *Bit early for that*, he told it wryly.

*Maybe one day.*

## Chapter Five

Imogen felt like a piece of boneless chicken that had been beaten with a mallet. Lying limp on the bed, all her energy expended, she felt him touch his lips to the place where he'd marked her, and then he nuzzled her neck.

"You missed a bit of mud," he said, chuckling. "You really do need a bath."

"I had a shower," she protested as he withdrew. The intense pleasure, and all the magic that had coursed through her system, dissipated like a morning mist.

He disposed of the condom, then rolled over and stood, and she heard him clearing up the glass from the light bulb. Sighing, she pushed herself upright. In spite of the fact that she'd never had sex like it, clearly there was to be no post-coital cuddling or small talk.

Swallowing her disappointment, asking herself what she'd expected from an Alpha Romeo, she climbed off the bed and bent to retrieve her clothes from the floor. Her shoulder still burned, and she straightened and

investigated it in the mirror. It looked like a small paw print, the redness rapidly fading to leave a pale stain like a birthmark. What did that mean?

Turning, she gasped. He stood beside her, holding two glasses of red wine, staring at her with one brow raised.

“Going somewhere?” He put the glasses down and climbed back onto the bed.

“I thought...” She flushed, holding the shirt to her breasts. “I assumed we’d completed our transaction.”

“I’ve been waiting for this since I first saw you months ago. Don’t think I’m going to let you go that easily. Get back here.” He pointed to the bed.

Joy flooded her, but she raised an eyebrow. “Don’t think you can boss me around in bed just because you outrank me.”

“Insubordination, eh?” He reached out, grabbed her wrist, and pulled her on top of him, then rolled and pinned her beneath him again. “You’re stunning.” He touched his lips to hers. “I fell for you the first moment I laid eyes on you, when you’d returned after that mission in Holy Island. You looked absolutely exhausted, and yet you were still

the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen.”

“I thought today was the first time you'd seen me.” She looked up at him, her heart loud in her ears. He'd called her captain on the field, although she hadn't been wearing any symbol of her rank. He'd known who she was and had come to find her. Her cheeks grew hot with pleasure.

“Actually I don't make a habit of ordering women to my room,” he pointed out. “I have been watching you for a while.”

“So how come I've never seen you following me around?”

“It was a covert mission.” He winked. “Very hush hush. Camouflage and everything.”

She smiled, but inside her stomach was flipping and she was thinking no, no, no—she couldn't be in love already. But she was. She'd been lost the moment he'd given her that appraising look and asked her *Do you need someone to scrub your back?*

“Was I disappointing after your lengthy clandestine operation?” she whispered.

He nuzzled her neck. “What do you think?” He rolled

her slightly, investigating where he'd marked her. "Did it hurt?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry."

Her lips twitched. "No you're not."

"No I'm not, but it seemed like the right thing to say."

"I've never felt like that before," she said. The memory of their shared passion made her shiver.

"Neither have I. Tiger is very pleased."

She chuckled. "He is very...demanding."

"He knows what he wants. On this occasion, I let him have his way."

"So..." She sucked her bottom lip for a moment.

"Does that make me...yours?"

He hesitated. "Honestly? I don't know what it means. In the cold light of day, I wouldn't presume to make that kind of demand on you." A growl sounded low in his throat, and they both laughed.

"Tiger disagrees," she murmured.

He smiled, tracing her face with his fingers, suddenly tender. "Sweetheart...I'm sorry about tonight. Not about

the sex, but...I should have bought you roses, taken you out to dinner a few times before I leapt on you. You deserve better.”

“Somehow, I don’t think it would have been very romantic sitting in the mess together, even with candles.”

He laughed, albeit ruefully.

She caught his hand in her own. “Look, we don’t lead normal lives. Not only are we in the army, we’re constantly fighting the threat of Darkness. Death is something we live with every day. We don’t have the time for an old-fashioned courtship. And anyway, I’m not complaining. I knew what I was coming here for.”

He touched his fingers to the paw print. “You didn’t expect this, though.”

“No.” The burn throbbed, but its meaning gave her more pleasure than she would have guessed. “Cameron, I don’t mind being yours.”

His hazel eyes widened. “Mine?”

“Yours. If you want me.”

A look of such pure delight crossed his features that she knew the answer before he said it.

“Oh, I want you. Never worry about that.”

## Chapter Six

Ten months later and thirteen thousand miles away, Imogen knelt on the bed and looked into the eyes of the man she loved.

The coldness in them made her shiver, and she pulled away from him and drew up her knees, wincing as pain sliced through her shoulder. Once, he'd claimed her as his. This time, he'd tried to kill her. How much things had changed in such a short time.

They'd convinced him she'd turned to Darkness, and he'd believed them. How could he have done that, after everything they'd been through? She'd thought their love went deeper than that. He'd promised to love her forever.

She'd been quiet for a long time, and Holt frowned. For the first time, uncertainty flickered in his eyes. She suspected it was one thing for them to convince him in her absence that she'd turned—it was another to be lying before her, the woman he'd marked as his own, and listen to her tell him she was innocent.

Her wound throbbed, and she placed a hand on it, trying to summon the dregs of her nature magic to help it heal, but she was too tired, too exhausted.

Holt swallowed, and the muscles in his jaw bunched. He knew he'd wounded her badly. She could sense his tiger prowling, restless and angry with him. The tiger wanted to trust her. The man wasn't so sure.

"Come on then," he said, his voice husky. "Do your best to explain why you did what you did. But I'll know if you're lying, Imogen. This time, I won't be so gullible."

She drew up her knees, wincing as pain sliced through her shoulder. "Ross called me in to see her."

"When?"

"The morning after Pullman's party." Her popular sergeant had turned twenty-four and her platoon had thrown him a birthday party in the mess. Holt had spent the whole evening glowering at her from the bar while she danced the night away with her colleagues, most of them men.

Afterward, he'd dragged her back to his room where he'd spent several hours proving to her he was the most

important thing in her life, and she'd better not forget it. It was the last night they'd been together.

His face told her he was recalling the evening quite clearly. "Go on."

"She told me she had a mission for me—strictly black ops, under the radar. She had some information on Liam Brooks."

"Brooks?" His eyebrows rose sarcastically. "You mean the MP you murdered?"

"I did go to see him, but he was alive when I left him." She got up to pace the room. "Ross told me she'd discovered he was working for the Forces of Darkness."

He stared at her.

"I know. I found it difficult to believe too. But she had evidence: photographs, a transcription of telephone calls, you name it." Imogen took a deep breath. "She told me she wanted him assassinated."

"If that's true, why didn't she come to me?"

"I don't know. I've asked myself the same question a hundred times. I think maybe because she wanted someone she could manipulate, and she thought I'd be easier than

you.”

She peeled off the pad pressed against her shoulder, saw it was soaked with blood, and dropped it on the floor. She needed a doctor, but that was impossible. For now, she had to make do with binding the wound.

After rummaging around in the cupboard, she found a clean sheet and tore it into several strips. She folded one and placed it over the wound as a pad, then bound it with another strip and tied it off in a knot.

Holt watched her as she worked, but she remained quiet, letting him think about what she'd said for a while. He'd ceased to struggle, and she knew he was asking himself whether she was telling the truth.

When she'd bound the wound, she sat on the edge of the bed next to him. “Where was I?”

“You were trying to convince me you weren't evil,” he said wryly.

“Oh yes, that's right. So, Ross wanted me to take out Brooks.”

“And you accepted the mission.”

She rolled her eyes. “Like I had a choice. I had to

leave immediately.”

“Bullshit! You could have gotten a message to me. You’re a captain, for Christ’s sake. You would have had time to send a runner.”

“Cameron,” she said softly, “Ross told me she knew about our relationship and had turned a blind eye to it up until then. She made it clear that if I tried to tell you where I was going, she would send us to opposite ends of the Earth and make sure we’d never see each other again. And anyway, I thought I was coming back.”

He studied her. His eyes were very dark, and she couldn’t read what he was thinking. “So what happened?”

“I found Brooks, infiltrated his house, got right up to him—but he was waiting for me. He had two warlocks posing as security men, and they captured me and took me to him. But he didn’t kill me. He told me he’d discovered that somebody high up in the military was working for Darkness and he was about to reveal who it was to the newspapers.”

“Who was he about to out?”

“Ross.”

He stared at her. “Surina Ross? The major-general of the Supernatural Unit of the British Army is working for Darkness?”

“Now do you see why she wanted him dead?”

“Imogen . . . .”

She stood and began to pace again, her arm throbbing. “I knew he was right, Cam, I just knew it. I don’t know how, maybe because of the way Ross had blackmailed me into going on the mission. But I believed him. I told him I would help him expose her. We worked out a plan—which included bringing you in on the secret, by the way—and I left London, intending to make my way back to HQ.”

She poured herself a glass of water and drank it in one go. She felt dizzy and knew she was losing too much blood. But she had to hang on. She had to tell him what had happened.

“I was driving down the M4 in the middle of the night, and I was hit full on by a black military van. My car rolled, but luckily I was unhurt, and I managed to crawl out of the window. At first I thought it was an accident, but then I saw them looking for me—six of Ross’s personal

guard. I made it over the bank and into a copse of trees on the other side, and I was able to obscure in the trees.” She had shown him on one of the missions they’d carried out together how she could camouflage herself in natural surroundings.

A frown appeared above his eyes. How could she make him believe her?

“What happened then?” he said.

“I tried to contact Brooks and found out he’d been murdered.”

“By you.”

“So the papers said.”

He glared at her. “So you took off? You didn’t try and contact me?”

She stepped forward into the light. She was so angry she could have punched him. “Of course I tried! I came to HQ, but they’d set up a perimeter watch. Tim Mitchell was one of the guards, and I went up to talk to him, not realizing he was there to keep me out! He chased me through half of goddamn Devon before I managed to bring him down.”

“You put him in hospital.”

“The bastard was trying to kill me!” She sat back on the bed, rubbing her wounded shoulder. “I’d lost my mobile phone, and when I tried to ring you from a new one, I could hear they were listening in and I couldn’t risk talking to you. After the incident with Tim, I realized they’d turned everyone against me. I couldn’t have stayed in England. They would’ve hunted me down eventually. I went to France, hoping to find help, but Ross had gotten to them too. In every country I’ve passed through, I’ve been hunted, shot at, attacked, and chased out.”

She sat there, head bowed, the knowledge of her fate as sharp in her chest as the wound in her shoulder. “I can’t keep running. They’re too powerful.” She glanced over at him. “I should have let you kill me when you came in.”

## Chapter Seven

“Imogen...” Holt went to move, but the vines held fast. He grunted. “Come on, let me go.”

Imogen said nothing. In spite of her words, her survival instinct stopped her from releasing the vines. She didn’t trust him. Despite their previous relationship, his first loyalty was to the S.U. She had no doubt he would kill her, the first chance he got.

She gave him a small smile. “I can’t believe you really thought I’d gone over to Darkness.”

He frowned. “You vanished, remember? No warning, no explanation. And they showed me evidence.”

“What sort of evidence?”

“Photos.” His eyes darkened, as if he were recalling difficult memories. “Of you...with a werewolf.”

“Doing what?” she snapped. He looked at her and she gave a sarcastic laugh. “You didn’t think they might have been altered?”

“They were pretty convincing.”

“Cam...”

“It wasn’t just that. Do you think I didn’t argue it was a mistake? Repeatedly? But there were taped phone conversations, documents showing places you’d been, talking with people I didn’t know. Videos of you in Europe meeting people known to work for Darkness. Shots of you going into Brooks’ house. They told me you’d seduced me because you wanted to get to someone close to Ross.”

“You came up to me at the training field and ordered me to your room!” She shook with indignation.

He closed his eyes briefly. “I know. It’s just...”

“What?” Her temper flared.

“I’d never felt about anyone the way I felt about you. When I wasn’t with you, I thought about you all the time. I couldn’t wait until you were back in my arms again. I felt like I’d been bewitched, and when they told me that’s what you’d done...it made sense.”

“You thought I’d cast a spell on you?” She was furious, although not really at him. “Bastards!” She stood and took the glass from the table and threw it with all her might at the opposite wall. It smashed into pieces, and he flinched.

She clenched her fists, anger bubbling in her stomach, her hands growing hot.

“Careful,” he said. “You’ll bring the whole place down if you don’t relax.”

She spun to glare at him. “They took it away from me.” She was close to tears.

“What?”

*Love.* She opened her mouth to tell him but bit the word back. She sank onto the bed, her head in her hands. What was she going to do?

“You need to get that wound healed,” he said after a short pause. “Imogen, let me go. I can do it for you.”

“No.” She stood and moved away from him, back into the darkness.

“I believe you. I didn’t know, that’s all. You can trust me.”

“No, I can’t. I really can’t.”

“So what are you going to do? Run forever? Or give up? There are others not far behind me—if I let you go, they’ll soon hunt you down. You need my help—you won’t get far without it.”

Imogen said nothing. His words had triggered a memory, and her brain worked furiously, trying to make sense of it. *You need my help...* Why did that phrase ring something deep within her? How could he help her? What could he do to get her out of this situation?

And then it came to her. She looked at him lying on the bed, six feet four of vibrant, virile male. She couldn't do it. It was a ridiculous thought. There was no way she could bring herself to go through with such a mad plan, and it probably wouldn't work anyway.

But if it did, it would save her life. Temporarily at least.

Holt frowned, looking wary as she went still. "What?" She turned to pace across the room. "I was thinking..." "About?"

She faced him and took a deep breath. "Virginia Clarke."

He frowned, and then his eyes widened as realization sank in. "You're thinking about Article Six."

"Yes. It worked for her, and she was a Vampire."

He studied her, irritation on his face. "Imogen, it's an

interesting idea, but there's no time to get yourself pregnant; they're going to be here in less than an hour. You've run out of time."

"Have I?" Her gaze drifted to below his black leather belt.

He followed her eyes, stared at his groin for a few seconds and then raised his gaze to look at her. "You're kidding me."

"Article Six doesn't specify how far along the pregnancy has to be. Clarke conceived purposefully and the embryo was only hours old—but when the S.U. broke down the door and found her, they couldn't kill her. The Covenant forbids it."

"Look..."

"I'm serious, Cam. This is my life we're talking about."

He seemed lost for words. He flexed his hands and arms, looking up at the vines tying him to the bed. "Well, I can't do anything about it tied up like this."

"On the contrary. It's not your hands I need."

His eyes widened. "Imogen... Come on, you can let

me go. I believe you. I'll help you, I promise.”

“Nuh-uh. I can't trust you.”

“Of course you can.”

“You came here to kill me!”

“That was before I knew what happened to you.” He looked panicky. “Don't do it, not like this.”

She stood in front of him, and, before he could say anything, pulled her black vest over her head, wincing as she moved her wounded shoulder, and dropped it to the floor. “Keep talking and I'll put one of those vines across your mouth.”

He stared as she stood there, naked from the waist up. She lifted her hand, watching the moonlight illuminate her white skin and turn it to mother-of-pearl, conscious of his gaze on her. Slowly, she slid her black shorts down her legs and kicked them to one side.

“Holy fuck.” He looked at her in alarm. “That doesn't count, it was a comment. I wasn't talking.”

She walked up to the bed and climbed onto the mattress. Sitting astride his legs, below his knees, she lifted her left hand, palm facing toward him.

He stared as a sharp, black thorn appeared above his throat.

“Imogen . . . .”

“Shh.” She moved her right hand to the side and the vines strapping his chest retreated slightly, although they were still tight across his shoulders and legs. She moved her left hand downward. The tip of the thorn nicked the top of his body armor then cut right through the front of the Kevlar chest-piece as if it were made of butter.

She sliced right down the front of his chest, watching him hold his breath as she stopped above his belt. She then carved up the sides of the armor until she had removed the chest-piece completely. Taking the two pieces in her hands, she tossed them onto the floor. She ripped apart the buttons of his black shirt, exposing his wide chest with the dark scattering of hair disappearing in a thin line into his pants. “That’s for my white shirt.”

Holt stared at her, breathing hard. “This is crazy.”

She glared at him, drawing a line in the air with a finger, and a wide strip of vine hovered above his mouth. “I’m not kidding, Cam. This is my life at stake. Say one

more thing and I'm gagging you.”

She undid his belt, pulling it out from under him, and threw that onto the floor too. Holt cursed under his breath and yanked at the vines pinning his hands to the headboard, but they tightened the more he struggled until eventually he could hardly move at all. As she began to undo the top button of his fly, he stopped moving and swore, looking up at the ceiling, fuming with humiliation.

Her breath coming more quickly now, Imogen began to pull down his zipper. She could already feel him hard beneath her hand and was unable to quell a surge of relief so strong that tears welled in her eyes. He still wanted her, still desired her, in spite of everything that had happened.

He opened his mouth to say something, looked at the strip of vine hovering above him, and obviously thought better of it because he tightened his jaw. His eyes met hers. They were pools of molten gold, and she inhaled as, in spite of her perilous situation, desire swept through her. She caught his gaze and held it as she slid his underwear down, releasing him.

Holt's gaze returned to the ceiling. He looked furious,

and embarrassed at being aroused by what she was doing. Imogen felt a surge of pleasure. Part of her wanted to make him suffer for turning on her, for believing she'd gone over to Darkness. She didn't have long before the other S.U. soldiers found them. But she wanted to torture him—just a little bit.

Lowering her head, she ran her tongue lightly up his erection, and he rewarded her with a sharp intake of breath. When she reached the tip, she enclosed him in her mouth.

“Oh for fuck's sake . . . .” His strained whisper trailed off as she began to move her mouth up and down. The muscles in his legs tensed under her, and when she glanced up at him, he was looking up, holding his breath.

Pleasure washed over her, and she sighed, taking him deeper into her mouth. She could feel the heat building inside him. She wanted to drive him wild—not too wild, obviously, as that would defeat the object of the exercise—but wild enough, until he was begging her to sit astride him and bring them both to release.

Suddenly, she had a flash of memory of his room back

in England and the first time she'd done this, exploring his body with her hands and mouth, wanting to drive him as mad with desire as he had her. Regret knifed through her, and she stopped kissing him, lifted her head to look up at him. His eyes were closed now, his breathing shallow.

She moved slowly up him, brushing her breasts against his chest, until her face was level with his.

Holt opened his eyes, and they weren't filled with hate—they were warm with love and passion, and Imogen's own eyes blurred with tears.

She pushed herself upright, her hand coming up to cover her mouth. "Oh, Goddess." She slid off him, sitting on the side of the bed, and covered her face with her hands. "What am I doing?" Tears streamed down her face.

Silence hung between them for a moment.

"Imogen," Holt said finally, his voice soft.

Without turning, she traced a pattern in the air with her hands, and the vines slowly receded from his body.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I surrender, major. Do with me what you will."



## Chapter Eight

Holt gasped as the vines withdrew and his body was released. He lowered his arms, flexing the stiff muscles, circling his wrists. *Now she stops?* He cursed under his breath, glaring at his erection, then looked across at Imogen, at her white, slender body. She made no sound, but her shoulders quivered, and he knew she was crying.

He sat up, wincing and tucking himself back into his pants as he did so. Her hair had fallen forward, revealing the back of her slim, white neck. She looked so extremely fragile. He'd dreamed of placing a thick, metal band around it and tightening it until she stopped breathing, of doing a hundred terrible things to end her life. He'd thought he hated her, but now he knew he'd mistaken hatred for hurt and frustration. His tiger hadn't stopped loving her. It had been the man who'd needed convincing.

Until that moment, he hadn't been sure what he'd do if she released him.

Now, he moved beside her and, turning her gently,

wrapped her in his arms.

Imogen sat stiffly for a moment, then, like ice cream left on a radiator, she melted against him. He cradled her, worried about her shoulder, her tears soaking into his shirt.

Pushing her back onto the bed, he knelt above her. He unwrapped the makeshift bandage she'd wound around her shoulder and peeled off the blood-soaked pad. "I'm going to try to heal you," he said. He wasn't a natural healer, but his shifter energy should at least start the process.

He placed his left hand on her breastbone, pressing her into the bed, then put his right palm over the wound. His eyes met hers, watching the tears trailing across her cheeks, all resistance gone, and he held her gaze as he built the energy in his solar plexus and directed it down his arm. He closed his eyes and summoned his tiger. Feral energy roared through him, hot and intense. As it burned into her, she groaned, then cried out, then screamed. He increased his pressure on her breastbone, refusing to let her move, imagining the skin and muscle meshing together.

She went limp, and he lifted his hand. The wound had

closed and, though red, the skin looked clean and free of infection. Quickly, he tore up the remains of the sheet she'd ripped up earlier and made a pad. He pressed it against the wound, then bound it tightly over her shoulder, across her chest above her breasts and around her back, making her gasp as he pulled the bandage taught and tied it with a tight knot.

“Done,” he said, sitting back.

At that moment, he felt his phone vibrate where it was hooked onto his belt.

He unclipped it and read the message. *Fifteen minutes away.*

Too late to escape. The squad had fast transport and superior electronic means of tracking as well as magical ways. Imogen had finally reached the end of the rails.

She looked up at him, her face as white as the sheet wrapped around her, her eyes huge and dark.

“I'm sorry,” she whispered.

Anger welled deep within him, a surge of fury against Ross and the rest of them responsible for destroying their happiness. And he had been happy. He loved her, he

realized, had loved her from the moment she stood before him with her hands behind her back, streaked with mud and hair plastered to her head, eyes wide as he asked if she needed anyone to scrub her back. She'd been the most beautiful creature he'd ever seen. She still was.

And suddenly he knew what he wanted to do.

He picked her up easily—she weighed almost nothing—and moved so he was fully on the bed, then lay back, pulling her on top of him.

Her cheeks were wet with tears, and dark shadows marred the skin under her eyes. “I love you,” she said.

“I know. Me too. Now shut up. I’m trying to save your life.” He cupped the back of her head and brought her mouth down. He kissed her hard, letting the full heat of his desire course through him. He knew she would be able to feel it, and he wasn’t disappointed—she gasped, her mouth opening, and he deepened his kiss in response, his tongue delving into her warmth. His tiger stirred as she tried to catch her breath. He was ready for her now, but he wanted to make sure she was ready too. There was something they had to do, and the timing had to be right.

Gently, he rolled until she lay half underneath him, her wounded shoulder untouched. He lowered his head to her breasts and traced his tongue around her nipples, sliding his hand up her thigh as he did so. He threaded his fingers through her pubic hair, slipping into the warmth and wetness of her. She sighed, opening her legs, letting him stroke her, and he caressed her for a while, waiting until he felt her shiver and he sensed the energy within her begin to build.

With no time to spare, he got to his feet, discarded his clothes quickly, then climbed back onto the bed. He lowered himself on top of her, supporting himself on his elbows, trying not to touch her shoulder. Gently, he pushed into her. She was crying again, but he kissed the tears away. “No tears,” he whispered. “Babies should be made with happy thoughts.” He remembered the favorite day he’d spent with her, one of the rare summer days they’d both had town passes. They’d sneaked into Exeter and gone up into Rougemont Gardens. There, they’d found a quiet corner to lie on the grass and kiss lazily in the hot sun.

“Remember the summer solstice?” He brushed his lips across her forehead, traced a line to her mouth. “You taught me to juggle with oranges.” He planted small kisses on her smile.

“I remember.” She let him kiss her, her mouth opening automatically, her tongue caressing his in a deep embrace.

He moved inside her as they kissed, stroking rhythmically, feeling both their auras begin to blend as their power grew.

“Cameron...” Her breathing grew faster, matching his, the energy pooling between them. He caught her left hand in his right, linking their fingers. Concentrating, he summoned his tiger.

“Use me,” he said as the feral energy flooded him. “You’re a nature witch. You know what to do.”

“I can’t—”

“Do it!” He kissed her. “I still outrank you.”

She stared at him, then gave a small nod, closing her eyes. He increased his rhythm, watching her tip her head back as her muscles began to pulse. As she came, he gave into the surge that had been simmering inside him for

several minutes. They'd had fun with this before, he recalled in a haze, remembering how they'd tried making light bulbs pop as they both came together, or make the candles around them burn brighter. Now, they directed their energy inward, and he looked down to see a white ball of light growing between their hands.

Imogen's legs tightened around him, and he gasped, spilling into her. The ball of light brightened like a supernova as she directed all her passion, all her love for him into her solar plexus. He gasped aloud as white-hot heat burned against his stomach. She was holding back, he could feel it, and then she relented, and her magic swelled, washing over him like a wave. His hand, clasped with hers, felt like he had plunged it into boiling water. Pleasure and pain blended, and his tiger roared as she extracted every ounce of power from him, draining him, gathering his energy inside her. She shuddered, and her abdomen glowed, absorbing the power. They exclaimed loudly at the tortuous, exquisite feeling, looking in awe at the magic they'd created between them.

Then, gradually, the ball of light faded, and Holt felt

himself return to normal. He held her tightly against him as the last of the light dimmed, and she went limp in his arms.

“Don’t move,” she said.

“Okay.” His hands glowed with the last of the energy.

He rested his palm on her shoulder, letting the last dregs of the heat soak into her wound.

Her eyes were light, tiny sparks glittering in their depths. “Did it work?”

He withdrew from her slowly. Pushing himself up, he touched the space between his eyebrows, activating his second sight. He examined her aura. It pulsed a deep purple and red, reflecting the passion that had passed between them. Her abdomen glimmered from the fertilization process the energy had speeded up. And there, inside her womb, he saw a tiny, golden glow.

Unfamiliar emotions rushed through him. His eyes met hers. He couldn’t trust himself to speak, and instead, he just nodded. He watched, his throat tight, as the embryo’s glow brightened, spilling out, encasing her aura in the telltale golden ring that marked her as a pregnant woman. The development usually took a couple of days, but their

combined energy had sped up the fertilization process. With the energy now dissipated, the rest of the gestation period would progress normally, but the damage had been done, and now the authorities couldn't touch her.

Imogen suddenly tensed.

Holt's eyes narrowed. "Is it them?"

She pushed herself upright, wincing at her sore shoulder, then closed her eyes and sent out a pulse of energy. Immediately, she got to her feet, looking around for her vest and shorts. "They're here. Get dressed."

Hurriedly, he slid on his trousers and pulled on what remained of the black jacket, then yanked on his socks and shoes. His heart began to thunder. She was safe, but he... When they found out what he'd done, that would be it for him. Well, he wasn't going to go without a fight.

He turned around and stopped, staring at her in shock. Scarlet energy balled between her hands.

"What the f—"

"Sorry. But I'm not letting you die for me. If they think I took you out, you'll be safe."

She flicked her wrists. The energy flew like a

cannonball into his torso, catapulting him back against the wardrobe, which splintered beneath him. The last thing he saw before he passed out was her standing above him, outlined in her golden glow.

## Chapter Nine

*Three months later*

Imogen took the bunch of daisies between her fingers and hummed softly as she fed energy into their white petals. Slowly, they grew several inches, and she smiled, brushing their beautiful heads before casting them away from her, where they landed on the concrete floor and glimmered as they melted into nothingness.

It was a game she never grew tired of. Since getting pregnant, she'd tried to turn her powers toward growth and healing, hoping the positive energy would somehow rub off on the baby. She was starting to cast some roses when a knock came at her cell door.

She frowned and got to her feet, brushing her gray trousers. "Come in."

The door opened, and a wide form filled the frame. Imogen didn't recognize the man, but a quick glimpse at his lapel showed him to be a field marshal—the top rank

possible in the British Army. He was in his dress uniform, used only for special occasions. She stiffened and saluted him, her heart pounding.

He saluted back, then smiled, throwing her completely off guard. “At ease, captain.”

She blinked, dropped the salute, and stood with her hands behind her. Captain?

He walked in, threw his hat onto the small table in her cell, and then turned to perch on the edge. He was not a big man, an inch or so taller than she was, although his shoulders were broad and his muscled arms filled his jacket. He had gray hair and a gray moustache, and the corners of his eyes crinkled with laughter lines. She liked him immediately.

“Captain Williamson,” he said, “I’m Field Marshal John Richardson, in charge of the Supernatural Unit of the British Army.”

She glanced at his badge again, seeing the letters A.R. and the insignia denoting he was a lion shifter. “Glad to meet you, sir.”

“How are you feeling, Imogen?”

She swallowed. “Very well, thanks, sir.”

“Your shoulder healed?”

“It’s well on the way, sir.”

“And the baby?”

She followed his gaze to where her stomach swelled slightly above her pubic bone. “Doing very well, thank you, sir.”

“I’m glad to hear it.” He glanced around her cell.

“Have you been treated well in here?”

“I can’t complain, sir.”

He smiled. “A good answer.” He studied her for a moment.

Imogen studied him back. Her mouth had gone dry. She’d been isolated for the three months since she’d been brought back to England after being captured in New Zealand, and she had no idea what had been going on in the outside world. Her days had consisted of exercise in the high-walled yard, followed by more hours spent confined in her cell, with only a couple of visits from the army doctor to break up the monotony. She didn’t have a clue what had happened to Holt, or how Ross had reacted

when she found out Imogen was pregnant and couldn't be terminated. The guards wouldn't tell her anything. She was surprised she hadn't been court-martialed yet. Why was Richardson here? What had he come to tell her?

He gave a loud sigh. "You've given us quite a bit of trouble, young lady."

"I am sorry if that's the case, sir."

"Yes, it is the case. Exposing a major-general's involvement with Darkness has caused me no end of a headache."

Imogen stared at him. "Are you talking about—?"

"Ms. Ross, yes."

"She had defected?"

"Yes."

"How did you know?"

He raised an eyebrow. "Let us just say Major Holt made it an objective of his to expose her. It took a few months, but ultimately, he did succeed."

Her legs wobbled. Richardson stood and brought over a chair for her. "Why don't you sit down, my dear?"

"Thank you." She sank into the seat. "What...how...?"

“He staged a coup,” said the field marshal, adding wryly, “Which I do not condone, but nevertheless am thankful for, in retrospect.”

“A coup?”

“He found out she was about to help the Forces of Darkness launch an invasion. It would have been catastrophic for us if she’d succeeded. He mounted an attack on the major-general and her accomplices. There was quite a spectacular battle, during which, I must say, Major Holt acted more than a little irrationally and more than a little spectacularly, bringing down Ross himself after an hour-long, hand-to-hand battle.”

“Is he okay?”

Richardson regarded her solemnly. “He is fit and well, Captain Williamson, thanks to you.” He scratched his chin. “His tiger was about to batter the door down to see you. I had to have him restrained.”

Imogen flushed, and unbidden tears flooded her eyes. “Sorry,” she said when he smiled at her. “It’s the pregnancy. I’m not normally this emotional.”

He fixed her with a steady gaze. “What you two did is

directly against army regulations. Having a relationship in the forces is forbidden; you know that.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Seducing an officer to get yourself pregnant is not strictly ethical either.”

“Um, no, sir.”

His lips twitched. “I understand Major Holt did not object overmuch.”

Imogen restrained a smile. “No, sir. He was very... obliging.”

Richardson nodded, then sighed. “Young lady, I’m sorry you’ve been through such a difficult time. I’m also sorry you’ve been held in here for so long, but there is a formal process to things, and we had to carry it through.”

“I understand, sir.”

“Normally, you would have to go through a lengthy court martial before you were cleared to leave. However, Major Holt has spoken for you already—at length, I might add—and, as such, you’ve been cleared of all blame and are reinstated in your rank of captain, and are free to go.”

She stared at him. “I can go?”

“Yes, young lady.” He stood, went to the door, and opened it. A soldier stood outside, holding her dress uniform on a hanger in one hand, her boots in the other. Richardson took both, and held them out to her. “May I suggest you get dressed before you leave?”

“Yes, I will, thank you, sir.” She stood up and took the hanger and boots, her hand shaking.

“Knock on the door when you’re ready.”

“Yes, sir.”

He gave her a smile and a salute, then spun on his heels and left before she had a chance to respond.

Imogen stood in the middle of the room, clutching the hanger and boots, too stunned to move. One thought jumped into her mind, spurring her into action. *Cameron. I have to see Cameron.* She quickly began to undress. Tears prickled her eyelids, but she forced them back, pulling on her white shirt and smart, black trousers. Someone had put elastic on the button, enabling the band to stretch over her slightly swollen stomach. Why did she need her dress uniform?

She slipped on the black jacket and buttoned it up. Her

fingers brushed the three pips on her shoulder, and the oak leaf above them marking her as a nature witch. She was immensely proud of her rank, and she bit her lip as the thought swept over her that she was once again a captain.

She pulled on her boots and quickly ran a brush through her hair, catching it back with a clip. Her heart pounded. The field marshal had said Holt was trying to batter the door down to see her. Would he be waiting outside?

She donned her black cap, took a deep breath, and knocked on the door. It opened and she stepped outside into the corridor.

A lone sergeant stood sentry, and he saluted smartly as she came out. "Field Marshal Richardson said to go straight to the exit, Captain Williamson," he said, standing back.

"Thank you, sergeant." She walked along the short corridor. The building housed a small cellblock, lightly guarded due to the extensive magical seals placed around it to keep in any aberrant witches. It wasn't far to the door, and she paused with her hand on it for a moment before

opening it.

She stepped outside and breathed in the smell of freshly mown grass. The tarmac between the fields glittered from the recent April shower, but the clouds had vanished and the sun caressed her face with warm fingers. She paused, blinking in the bright sunlight, then stared, shocked. Every member of her company lined the parade ground, everyone standing to attention.

As she stepped out, her fellow soldiers cheered. Imogen froze as they all clapped and shouted. Ahead of her stood Field Marshal Richardson, talking to someone in the middle of the parade ground. She stopped, heart hammering, as Holt glanced over at her. He stared at her for a moment, then looked back at Richardson. The Field Marshal nodded, and Holt turned and started walking toward her.

Imogen's mouth went dry. He looked amazing in his No. 1 dress uniform, complete with peaked cap, and her heart swelled as he approached. He stopped about three feet away from her and saluted.

She saluted back. Her eyes went to the crown and pip

on his shoulder. “Lieutenant Colonel?”

“Yes, ma’am. Got myself a promotion.”

“Congratulations, sir.”

“Thank you, Captain.” His eyes were very warm, although concerned. “How are you?”

“Well enough, sir. Better now.”

“Both of you?”

She smiled. “Yes, sir.”

He nodded. “Well enough to cope with a small shock?”

“Um... I suppose so.”

He produced a small box from behind his back and opened it. It contained a rank slide with a small crown underneath the oak leaf. She stared at him, wide-eyed, as he unbuttoned the strap on her shoulder, took off the old slide and slipped on the new one.

“Congratulations, major.” He held out a hand and grinned as the company watching them clapped.

She shook his hand, shocked. “Thank you, sir.”

“It looks good on you. Although I’m not sure you deserve it. I believe blasting a superior officer with a

nature bomb counts as treason.”

“Yes, sir.” She smiled. “Hopefully that superior officer realizes I did it to save his life.”

“He does, and he is very grateful, in spite of the fact that you hit him remarkably close to the crown jewels.”

Her lips twitched. He smiled back, then glanced back over his shoulder again at the waiting army. She frowned. He cleared his throat and seemed—although she couldn’t believe it—nervous. His eyes were dark under the shade of his hat brim. “Now, I understand Field Marshal Richardson had a private word with you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I believe he reminded you having a relationship with another officer is strictly forbidden in the British Army.”

“He did, sir.”

“And it’s against the rules for a lower-ranking officer to come to a higher-ranking officer’s room late at night.”

“That was about the gist of it, sir.”

He cleared his throat again. “In that case, the field marshal thought it might be better if he were to offer us married quarters.”

Imogen's mind went blank. She stared at him. Her play at formality went out the window as she stuttered: "M-married quarters?"

"Yes, major."

"But...you have to be married to get married quarters."

"Yes, major."

"I...I don't understand."

"Oh for the love of..." He sighed and, taking her completely by surprise, went down on one knee.

Behind him, the company cheered, and Field Marshal Richardson grinned. Cameron ignored them all and extracted another small box from his jacket pocket.

"I know this isn't as exciting as the other one," he said, opening it. She stared. This one didn't have a badge, but the diamond twinkled gently in the sunlight.

"Imogen?" He placed a gentle hand on her rounded abdomen. "Will you marry me? And my tiger?"

She glanced across at the regiment, laughing as she saw the members of her platoon cheering.

She looked back at Holt, thinking of everything he'd

done to save her. “Are you trying to get in my panties again?”

“Well, obviously. And don’t get cheeky—I still outrank you. Just answer the damn question.”

“Yes, sir,” she said, bending to kiss him, the happiness in his eyes warming her like the bright April sun.



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## About the Author

Freya Jackson is a popular contemporary romance author of over forty novels who's always had a secret passion for shifter stories, and has now decided to pen some of her own. She used to live near Dartmoor National Park in England, and spent many a summer's day walking over the moors (and eating Devonshire cream teas). You can find out more about Freya, and the big cats that have been spotted on Dartmoor, on her website [here](#).

