



Deadly Tiger's Single Dad Crush (Company 417 Shifters, #49)

Author: *Amelia Wilson*

Category: Fantasy

Description: It's like he's been created just to be the sexiest imaginable man. He's tall and muscular and so handsome! He's a fireman and a single dad... Well, name a way a guy could be attractive, and that describes him!

SAMANTHA

"He's strong and powerful, handsome and muscular. What really makes him attractive, though, is the sight of his eyes when he looks at his sons."

Daniel is a very sexy man.

He's a sexy fireman, maybe the sexiest fireman ever.

And he has to be the best father in the world.

I am so attracted to him.

Hell, I'm desperate for him.

But I'm just the girl watching his kids.

How could I hope to interest him?

So what if I want more?

What do I have to offer an older man like him?

Of course, she has no idea that Daniel is more than just a man. In fact, he's a tiger shifter, part of a firefighting company of shifters. One night, Daniel's sister has the kids and the two of them are left alone in the house. Before she knows it, she and Daniel are right in the middle of powerful passion. Now what will happen?

Find out all about it in *Deadly Tigers Single Dad Crush*, the next exciting tale in the sexy, steamy age gap shifter firefighter romance series *Company 417 Fireman Shifters*!

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Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:30 am

Chapter One

Samantha

The night is just perfect, I think. There's just enough wind to create a kind of atmospheric background noise as I lie in bed but not so much that it's scary. It's going to rain tomorrow night but tonight it's just the hints about the weather to come.

It's the perfect temperature, too. It's just a little bit too cold to go without blankets but not so cold that you feel your body tightening up and you feel chills running all the way through you. You don't have to wrap yourself up as though even a sliver of the air getting under the blankets is going to cause your frostbite or something. You get to be cozy in the blankets without being too hot.

And it's also a perfect night because Daniel's sister is watching the kids so I'm not on call right now. I get to lie in bed under the cozy blankets and just enjoy the warmth.

And thoughts of Daniel.

And my fingertips.

Will you believe me if I tell you I don't masturbate until I'm twenty years old?

What if I tell you that after I turn twenty, I masturbate almost compulsively?

Okay, that all makes it seem like right after I blow out the candles on my birthday cake, I lift up my skirt and shove my hand in my panties. Yeah, no. That doesn't

happen at all. I'm actually twenty years and seventeen days old when I do. Go ahead and make fun of me. I'll wait...

Okay, so here's how it happens. The life story of Samantha Bradley. Well, the life story so far. And I can tell you, life hasn't gone the way I expected it to. From the age of thirteen when I met a recruiter at a spelling bee (and yeah, that gives you another reason to make fun of me, right?) I decided the only college for me was Victoria Clydesdale College. It's an all-girls private college, and it's one of the best business schools out there. It may be the only really good business school when it comes to all-girls schools.

So, I pre-applied as a freshman and got a special course of study from them for my actual application later. I do that application as a junior. I get accepted as long as I don't flunk my senior year. I also get a full-ride scholarship. They love me. Of course, they do. I've spent four years preparing to be everything they might love.

And then it's hit by a tornado.

Yeah, I'm not joking! The university I'm supposed to go to is devastated by a tornado. At least three years of rebuilding before it will be inhabitable. Okay, so new plan. I say home and go to community college. The plan is to get an AA and then transfer. If there's a miracle, I'll be able to go to Victoria Clydesdale. If they're not ready, I'll go somewhere else or wait for the year and then go to VC.

I discover instead that I want to go into business for myself. I want to be like all of my business heroes, people who started their companies before they graduated or even left school to do their companies. So, no problem. I have a job at the zoo I've been working at since tenth grade, and I can build my business on my days off.

Except Mom and Dad, who have heard me say for years that I'll be going to college as soon as I have my AA, have already sold their house, and it's in escrow. So, I

suddenly don't have anywhere to live.

My parents can't afford to pay another rent but they're perfectly willing to take me with them. Instead, I find a room to rent because I have four years at the zoo I don't want to throw away. I make a nice hourly rate. Anyway, I end up with a room from Daniel, a single father. He's a fireman who needs a nanny and really only has a room to offer in return.

I show up for the interview and meet Daniel and his two boys. It's a house full of men and they are all wonderful. His boys, Jacob and Jeremy are five and four and are absolutely adorable. They show me their room and then take me to the playroom where Daniel has built an actual track for them to ride bikes and scooters on. I've never seen anything like it.

The whole time, though, my attention is divided between them and their father. From the moment he opens the door and ushers me inside, I can't stop staring. He's tall, about six foot three I'm guessing, and is very toned, which makes sense with a fireman.

He's also funny and smart and a great dad. I read all of this in just that first interview, and I've seen it validated over and over since I started working for him. Of course, I don't take the job just because I'll be working for a hot guy. The situation is a good one. Because of Daniel's fireman schedule, I'm only on for being a nanny seven out of every fourteen days.

They aren't concurrent, but it's an excellent deal for me because I now have time to focus on my solo business ventures. I don't have to work at the zoo but I just scale back my hours so I can keep the salary. Also, my business is animal-related, educational books and toys for kids about animals.

Anyway, getting back to the main part of this story, I first masturbate after meeting

Daniel. He's absolutely the stuff of fantasies for sure, and I'm ready for a hot one. I go home and clumsily explore the world of masturbation and, after about three or four nights of false starts, I make it to an orgasm.

Now, I've been a nanny for Daniel for just two months and I've been masturbating while thinking of Daniel too many times to count. As I get to know him, I become more enamored. Though, even though he's made me something of a compulsive masturbator, there really is something more to him. He's just sexy as hell, but he's sexy on the inside, too.

Okay, okay, that's corny as hell to say that, but I can't think of any other way to explain the impact Daniel has on me. It's like my mind can't last long without thinking about the man.

Like right now, this whole session started because I have some free time with the kids gone and Daniel is out on the last shift of his rotation. So, the empty house makes me a little bold, I guess. I mean, I'm still in my room. It's not like I'm at the kitchen table just waiting for him to show up and butter my bread.

I do picture him grilling, though, and my hands get busy again. He barbequed for us just last week and he wore this adorable apron that his sister gave him. For some reason, that physique of his with that ridiculous apron just really turns me on and, well, it's been my fuel for fantasy since then.

I start getting really involved in my imagination, moaning softly as I get closer, when I hear a door suddenly open and close. Then, I hear his voice. "Anybody home?"

I freeze. I can hear footsteps and then what sounds like the refrigerator opening and closing. There's the sound of cabinets opening and dishes rattling. I practically hold my breath, waiting for a knock on my door.

But nothing happens.

Things get quieter and fade away and I assume that he's moved to the family room to eat. I hear faint sounds of a TV being switched on.

I let out a long sigh and then, my mind immediately jumped right back to the image of Daniel, half naked and motioning me to his bed. The fantasy unfolds slowly, but my hands start moving faster as he approaches me in my fantasy.

He's all mine in my imagination and I don't want to share him.

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Chapter Two

Daniel

The television says that tigers hunt using a variety of strategies. The announcer trying to sound dramatic says, “These giants of the cat world stalk, ambush, chase, and swim to catch their prey.” It’s an interesting thing for me to watch one of these nature shows. We’ve almost reached the point where natural science has gotten accurate. “Tigers are known for their stealthy approach, where they carefully stalk their prey from behind until they are close enough to pounce.”

I take a sip of my bourbon and let it burn its way down my throat. I have a nice house. All tigers have nice houses, I think. It’s part of our culture, an admiration for beauty and, I suppose, regality. The biggest problem is that our homes tend to stand out against others in the neighborhoods. This is why I have our house set very close to the front property line. This makes it seem like we have a small yard from the front.

The house sits on the lot in a way that the elevation of the front makes someone on the street unaware of how big it is. The backyard is landscaped like a king’s garden with fountains, topiary, and luxury. Only those I know get to see that sort of thing. Although shifters are known to the world, most people still don’t believe in our existence. Most shifters, me included, don’t want our personal nature to be common knowledge.

“Tigers use their powerful legs and sharp claws to hide and launch a quick attack on their prey. However, tigers only chase and pursue prey over short distances when the

prey is already weakened.”

“Well, that’s not true,” a lovely, lilting voice says. I turn my head to see Samantha, who has a towel in her hand and wears a tee shirt and pajama bottoms. She’s dabbing at her beautiful hair. It’s like a princess’s, her hair, almost ringlets of natural curls.

“Why, hello,” I say with a smile. She smiles in return and, as always, I remind myself she’s twenty years younger than me and I have no business feeling how I feel about her. “I didn’t think you were home until I heard you in the shower.”

“Yep. I’m boring and have no nightlife,” she says with a giggle.

“So, what’s not true?”

She sits on the other end of the couch and says, “Only.”

“Only?”

“That word. Tigers indeed chase for short distances and they chase weakened or injured prey. But that’s true of every one of the big cats as well as the large cats.”

“Big and large cats?”

“Why do you sound like a professor trying to test me?” She asks, laughing. “A big cat belongs to the genus *Panthera*. That means they can roar. A large cat is just big.”

“So, a big cat has to be like a Cheetah?”

She smiles again and says, “I can’t shake the feeling you already know. Are you teasing me? No, not a big cat. Cheetahs are large cats. Bobcats and other wildcats are large cats. Lynxes, large cats. Cougars, large cats. The big cats are lions, jaguars,

leopards, snow leopards, and tigers.”

“How do you know all this?” I ask.

She shakes her head. “No way, pal. I’m sure you already knew everything I’m saying and you didn’t get it from a television show. Did you do a safari or something?”

As if on cue, the television says, “Tigers have striped coats that help them blend into their surroundings. Tigers in savannahs have a lighter orange color to allow them to blend into the tall grasses.” On-screen, it shows a man in stereotypical safari khaki staring through binoculars.

“I haven’t made that big adventure, no. I don’t have much of a nightlife or any life, either, so no to the safari thing. I just find big cats fascinating, especially tigers.” I hope the goofy answer takes the heat off.

And it does. “Yeah, they’re pretty amazing animals. At the zoo, it’s part of my job to lead the guided tour to the tiger exhibit so, you know, I have all these facts pretty much ingrained in my brain.”

“Well, you do seem to know your stuff.”

She smiles at me and her eyes light up. I’m very aware of the distance between the two of us. The couch feels smaller.

She leans toward me a little and the distance shrinks again. “Hey, you should bring the boys to the zoo next time I’m working. I can get some behind-the-scenes stuff I think you’d really like.”

I cough and lean back a little. I hear the narrator shifting gears on the TV. The female tiger has entered the orbit of the male tiger. He may use many tactics to attract her,

including vocalizing and chemical signaling, which might involve urine spray or gland secretions.

I'm suddenly thinking of Bridget. The narrator drones on. "The tigers will mate up to fifty times a week. They don't mate for life and the male tiger will have many partners ..."

My wife was a rarity, a human, not another shifter, and she was my world. Tigers in the wild may go from female to female, but that isn't how shifter culture usually operates. Bridget was meant to be my one and only.

And then the car accident happened and my world was upended.

So, I haven't made it a habit to have a lot of girls around. Of course, that's because of the boys, too. Jake and Remy deserve to have the best. Honestly, I wasn't sure I wanted to hire a nanny, but with my schedule, it was getting to be too much, relying on relatives and friends.

And with Samantha, well, I think I have found the best.

"Um, I think I've lost you. If you don't think it's a good idea for the boys to come down to the zoo, that's okay."

I look at her and see she seems a bit hurt. Without thinking, I reach over and pat her hand. "Thank you for the offer. I think the boys would absolutely love a special tour."

Samantha smiles at me like she's picking up signals I'm not intending to put out there. "Well, let me know when and I'll get it all taken care of."

I nod and jump up to grab a drink from the bar. Of course, I have a bar. I'm a tiger. I do all I can to make my house seem like a palace. It helps to put some distance

between us. “So, how have things been going for you? Are you finding everything to your liking?”

She tilts her head in a way that makes her even more beautiful. “To my liking? Hmmm, well with that interesting phrase as a descriptive starting point, um, yeah, I’m finding everything to be very much to my liking.”

I turn and pour my drink and remind myself that this girl is only twenty and most likely doesn’t realize that her behavior appears flirty. Of course, it could be that I’ve been without a woman in the house long enough that I’m overreacting to some very innocent banter.

Bridget has been gone for a little over three years now. I feel that absence every second of every day. I know Samantha doesn’t know my whole background. She knows the boys’ mom passed away and that I’ve been raising them on my own for a bit, but I don’t know if she understands how very lonely of a job that’s been, and how much of an impact she’s already making on our lives in such a short time.

I don’t think she understands that she’s making quite an impact on me.

“Well, okay, I think I should get some sleep. As fascinating as the mating life of tigers may be, it won’t help me when I’m trying to hold it together with the boys tomorrow.”

She gets up and I walk toward her like a silly grade school kid being taught etiquette for the first time. “Yeah, I think I’ll be heading to bed, too.”

“Well, goodnight.” She walks away and heads down the hall to her room.

I watch her as she goes and I do my best to keep my eyes from traveling down to watch her ass. I try my best and fail. What do I think I’m doing behaving like this with

this girl? I hired her for the boys' sake, not so I could relieve some tension.

I berate myself some more and then I switch off the TV.

These nature shows can't teach me a damned thing about tigers.

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Chapter Three

Samantha

The kids shout and scream when I tell them I did the tour. They just watched a different employee do it. In a little while, their aunt will be by to pick them up.

“I did it every shift for two years,” I say with a giggle. “Four hours a day. Two for the Bengal tiger, one for the Antelopes of Southern Africa, and one for the World of Gibbons.”

“In different sections of the zoo?” Daniel asks.

“Yep. I did one tour when I was seventeen, got good reviews, and then I just kind of ended up being the go-to tour lady. I didn’t mind. It was fun, and I loved seeing the looks on everyone’s faces when they saw the animals and learned something.”

“Do a tour!” Jacob shouts.

I blush and say, “I gave them the antelope tour, just without the antelopes.”

“Do a tour!” Now Alex and Lena are shouting together. I swear I must look redder than a tomato.

“All right,” I say. “But you two are going to be on your best behavior tonight!”

The kids promise and instantly sit silently, staring at me. That earns me a look of

adoration from Daniel, which makes me feel really good. I say, “Okay, we’ll do the tigers. You have to imagine seeing things in the exhibit.” I go through the process of describing the tour route and what would be seen and then I start the tour. I love how the kids pay complete attention, utterly unable to look away.

Daniel pays close attention, too, but it isn’t the information, I don’t think. In this case, he’s just... He’s just paying attention to me. I think. Maybe it’s just hopeful thinking. Hell, I don’t know. I know that this crush I have for him is ten times stronger now. It gets to the point where I’m afraid I might moan audibly. I don’t know if I can survive that kind of humiliation.

“The tiger possesses a combination of strength, stealth, speed, and powerful predatory instincts,” I say, “and that’s what allows it to efficiently take down large prey animals with one of the highest success rates in the animal kingdom.” Daniel smiles at me. Alex and Lena look at me with rapt attention. I gesture to the side even though none of the displays are here in the living room. I just do it out of habit.

“Tigers are masters of stealth, often stalking their prey silently before launching a surprise attack from close range.” I feel a little embarrassed when I gesture again. Back at the zoo, I’d be pointing to a four-foot diagram of a tiger’s skull. “With a bite so strong it can crush bone; a tiger’s jaws are capable of instant destruction.”

I feel my cheeks get warm and I blush like crazy. “Goodness. Look at the time. I wanted to do something special for you guys tonight so we have to stop the tour.”

The kids groan but I add, “Okay, who wants to help me make a s’mores cake you can take with you to your Aunt Tina’s house?”

Jacob and Jeremy both leap to their feet. “Me!” they say at the same time. I bring them to the kitchen, grateful for the chance to escape the spotlight, at least this kind of spotlight, and we lay out all of the ingredients.

Well, we make the cake, which is really just s'mores layered on top of each other in a cake pan. Daniel kind of hovers around us and I can't help but think he's doing more than enjoying the sight of his kids. It's dangerous thinking, actually.

I mean, it's dangerous for me to think this way.

What if I'm wrong?

Now, you would imagine I would think that thought and then behave appropriately. That would be the right thing to do. What I do instead is impulsive and risky. I walk back to the house after helping Tina get the kid's seat belted and ready to go. I watch through the kitchen window as they drive away. Then, I walk out of the kitchen and see Daniel, who sits on his big recliner. "I need you," I say.

He stands up immediately and says, "Sure. What do you need?" He thinks I want a jar open or something.

"You," I say as I step to him. "I need you." I put my hands on his shoulders and kissed him.

There's a moment of hesitation and my heart stops. I feel my face flush hot with embarrassment. But just a half-second later, he returns my kiss, and my heart soars.

Daniel eventually pulls back and, without a word, takes me by the hand and pulls me down the hall to his bedroom. I feel a strange sense of childhood naughtiness, you know, the kind you feel when you go into your parents' bedroom after they made it clear you weren't supposed to ever set foot in there without permission.

But it only lasts as long as it takes for Daniel to start pulling my clothes off. I kiss him hungrily and grab his shirt. Together we get down to just panties and boxers in no time at all. Now, this is a strange thing because I'm not exactly the most

experienced girl when it comes to sex. I stand there awkwardly, not sure if I should be making the next move since I initiated the whole thing. Daniel just gives me a small smile.

He takes my hand again and draws me to him. This time the kiss is softer, slower, and more sensual. I feel it like a thread of energy that travels along my body and lights everything up. Daniel keeps his mouth on mine even as he slowly guides me to his bed. I marvel at how it's like he knows that I got as far as I could on nervous energy and now I've just got the nervous part of that.

He lays me down gently and then kisses along my body. His lips barely seem to touch my skin. He gets to my breasts and kisses each one, taking the time to tease them with his tongue until they get so sensitive that I start to squirm. Then, in a quick and elegant motion, his fingers hook into the waistband of my panties and he slides them down and off.

Before I can freak out about what that means, his mouth is back to its beautiful torment of my nipples.

He looks up at me and gives me that small smile again. It isn't a sly, snarky smile, nothing like that. It's more like he just has to keep checking in to see that I'm real. It feels shockingly powerful each time he peeks at me.

He gets his mouth back to work again but he doesn't limit himself to my breasts. Instead, moving over my stomach, he drives me close to insanity. He kisses along my pelvic bone on either side, making me twist beneath him. I groan each time he gets close to my pussy but passes it. He's like a cat toying with a mouse.

Finally, he kisses softly along my slit, sliding his tongue into me and exploring.

The feel of his mouth on me is beyond anything I've ever imagined.

Wow.

As I said, I'm not exactly the most experienced person, and no guy has ever done anything like this. I can't translate all the sensations flooding my body at the moment. All I can think is that it feels like pleasure distilled into its purest possible form.

Actually, I'm not really thinking poetically. I'm really just thinking, "Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!" as my mind tries to process things. His attention grows more intense and aggressive and my thoughts get even more... Heck, I don't know. Brain melty. I grip the sheet beneath me like I think the bed is about to tilt and I have to hold on. Honestly, the way his mouth is moving on me the bed is already tilting and I'm waiting for the room to start spinning.

It is when his tongue moves to my clit and concentrates all the attention there that I really lose it. Every nerve in my body seems to be electrified. I feel myself getting closer, and without thinking I reach down and curl my fingers in Daniel's hair. He gets even more intense. I feel my orgasm reach the very edge and I groan.

It feels like he pauses for just a moment, and then he just seems to devour my pussy.

My orgasm hits me so hard I can't even cry out. I don't even see anything because my eyes just seem to go vacant as wave after wave of pleasure rolls through me. I shake uncontrollably. I try to find my voice but the best I can manage is to howl as he keeps at me until I feel like I'm going to pass out.

I'm stunned and obliterated and ready to make it his turn for climax.

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Chapter Four

Samantha

And then, he kisses me, I suppose I just feel too out of it to pay attention. After all, I'm in the midst of the most powerful orgasm imaginable. I just don't think too clearly about anything else. I guess, also, I'm sort of innocent. The reason I don't masturbate until I'm twenty-two is because I think sex doesn't feel good. I lose my virginity early, in eighth grade. I'm a few days older than thirteen and so is the boy. It's a really negative experience for me even though I pretend I love it.

I have a neighbor who's sixteen (and therefore very, very wise in the ways of the world.) Katie promised me that sex would get better so I slept with that boy five more times over the next two months. It stops hurting but it's still an awkward and unpleasant experience.

What happens is I just give up sex altogether. I mean, I don't obsess about it like my friends and I don't care. I have boyfriends and they get blowjobs or hand jobs. I stay dressed at all times. Until Daniel, no guy since the junior high boy ever sees my pussy. Sex is never really on the table at all.

And so, I don't pay attention to what's going on because... Well, I don't know if it's fair to say I forget that I'm going to have sex but it's pretty close to what happens.

And Daniel's enormous cock slides right into my pussy as he kisses me.

It's the most shocking thing that ever happened to me. Okay, I know that Daniel

putting his mouth on me is the most shocking thing that ever happened to me but you'll have to forgive me because it all feels impossible and shocking. I just lock up as I try to deal with the sensations.

Wait... There's no pain.

There's no awkwardness. And...

"Daniel!" I screech against his kiss as my orgasm grows even stronger, something I can't comprehend as even possible!

This is it!

This is what sex is supposed to be, the thing Katie was talking about! Oh wow. It doesn't just get better. It's so much better that I can barely think. The orgasm from his mouth is sharp and powerful but mostly something I feel over the surface of my pussy, if that makes sense. I mean, sure, my whole body gets involved but it's still a very external kind of thing. It's pleasurable and intense but sharp, right on the edge of oversensitive from the very beginning.

And then, his cock slides into me.

And the orgasm is still as intense but it isn't sharp anymore. Instead, it grows deep, like a kind of... I don't know how to explain it. It's like there's an element of the pleasure missing before and when his cock fills me up the way it does, the orgasm becomes complete. I guess that's probably a silly way for me to put things but that's how it feels. I feel like the pleasure is complete now, and the completeness feels really, really good.

It's when he pulls back that I realize all of these thoughts and all of my impactful feelings about the presentation are based on just one single thrust. I gasp just from the

realization of what's coming next and then I cry out against his mouth as he thrusts again.

He immediately sets a steady pace, and each time he moves, my orgasm seems to spike. Without actively deciding to do it, I move beneath him. I just cling to his back and lift my butt up off the mattress to meet his thrusts. When I notice I'm doing that, I want to lift my leg up and hook it over his waist or something. I just can't coordinate well enough so I'm splayed out beneath him, moving kind of haphazardly and very happy that he's kissing me so he doesn't see how uncoordinated I look.

Daniel picks up the pace again and I hear a low growl in his chest like... Okay, know this is weird but it's the first thought I have. The sound is like a muted roar. It's strange but it turns me on like crazy and I start to moan and move and encourage him to give me more and more.

He picks up on my energy and grabs me from the bed and lifts me up into his lap as he sits on the edge of the mattress. The change is swift and takes my breath away. I stare at his face as his cock slides up into me again, The feeling of his cock moving inside me while I straddle him is even more intense. I buckle in his arms with another orgasm.

He slides his hands down, grips my hips, and thrusts hard. I feel his cock throbbing hard inside me and then a wonderful warmth moves through me. We fall back onto the bed, but I hold onto him tightly. "Please stay inside me." He kisses my head and pulls me close.

With every shift of our bodies, I beg him, "Please stay inside me." I feel really foolish like people don't say that. But I can't help myself. I'm overwhelmed. I'm feeling aftershocks of my orgasm and those are mingled with the sweetness of being wrapped up in his arm. I just don't want it to end.

Finally, he scoots to the edge of the bed. He finally slips out of me as he stands. He doesn't put me down, though. I remain in his arms and he carries me to the shower.

We shower together, and it's one of the most intensely intimate moments of my life. After, we step out and dry off and I realize that I'm in his room and I don't have any of my clothes in there. He seems to realize the same thing because he just tosses me a tee shirt from his dresser. I smile as I slip it on with nothing else.

He takes my hand and we walk out to the living room. He starts a movie, but I blurt out, "I'll cook something!" I don't know what's making me feel so domestic at the moment, but I go over to the kitchen and start pulling ingredients out for some southwest omelets. It was one of the first "fancy" things I learned to cook as a kid and it's still a favorite.

"Smells delicious, Sam!" He calls a little later. It's silly how good that makes me feel.

I grin but call back, "It's just omelets."

"Well, I can't wait to try it."

I grin and feel happier than I've felt in a long while. I spend a little extra time plating the omelets and even dot some hot sauce on the plate in a fancy way. I feel a bit of silly pride looking at the end result.

And then it hits me, how cool all of this is.

I'm standing in his t-shirt and nothing else, cooking for him. I feel incredibly sexy and naughty, but more than that, I feel connected. I feel like this is us and not just me. I feel like it's... Well, it hits me that this is real and not just in my head the way it's been in my head since I first saw Daniel and got a place to live.

I walk over with a huge smile on my face, a deep joy coming over me. I deliver the food. Then, I curl up beside him on the couch with my own plate and I hardly register what I'm watching.

It's so real. It just feels so damn real!

That's when the fear hits.

Is this too fast?

This can't be real.

He's just playing with me because I watch his kids and I'm young and naive. No, I mean, he doesn't have to be manipulative here. He's not necessarily toying with my emotions or anything. He just took what I offered freely, and what I offered was (I hate saying it like this but I have to face reality) young pussy with no commitment.

My smile slips away. Now I'm feeling so much more than horny and I've screwed things up.

"Hey, Sam? Samantha?"

I jump out of my own head and look to see Daniel looking at me with a tender smile. "You were pretty far away."

"I guess I'm a little tired."

He stands up and takes my plate and sets it on the coffee table. "Then, let's get you to bed."

He offers a hand and I take it. Then, he pulls me to him, kisses me softly and leads

me away.

We go to his room again, though, and we don't just go to sleep. Our lovemaking this time is slow and soft and exploratory. We take our time to discover the small things and this time, the orgasm is softer but deeper. This time, I feel something beyond the physical hunger for him.

This time my heart feels the power of being with this man.

Chapter Five

Daniel

From what I understand, most shifters have an instant transition. I don't mean physically. Every shift transitions instantly when it comes to physical. Of course, shifters are revealing themselves on an intermittent basis that we don't know about. Shifters don't know, I mean. Like Dragons. We've only known about them during my lifetime. A few years ago, antelope revealed themselves. I mean African antelopes, not the pronghorns of North America.

Anyway, most shifters evidently have an instant mental transition. For tigers, it doesn't necessarily work that way. Perhaps because we're already measured in our approach, we ease into the sensory changes. Tigers perceive the world primarily through sight, of course, and our vision is even better than the natural tigers. The naturals have excellent night vision, acute hearing, and a good sense of smell.

This allows them to navigate their environment effectively in low-light conditions. Natural tigers are great nocturnal hunters. They detect movement and can actually hunt prey through sight and sound. Often their world appears as a mix of shapes and motions instead of detailed colors. This is all due to their adapted eye structure for hunting in the dark. It has to do with their forward-facing eyes providing depth perception for precise stalking and pouncing.?

Tiger shifters make them seem blind and uncoordinated by comparison. The naturals are killing machines pretty close to unmatched in nature. Natural tigers possess a

combination of strength, stealth, speed, and predatory instincts. I think tigers are the most lethal of all apex predators. Of course, I'm biased. It's true, though. I'd venture to say that other than some groups of people on the Indian subcontinent, most human beings have no idea just how big tigers are.

In the wild, male tigers are often six hundred and fifty pounds. The largest possible lions top out at five hundred pounds. My tiger is more than fourteen hundred pounds. Nobody really knows why shifter animals are so much bigger than their natural counterparts but we are. In any case, when you shift, you have to look at the world from the perspective of an entirely different anatomy. The point of all this is that the process of transitioning from human perception to tiger perception takes some time.

I can shift and go right to killing if necessary but if I'm just going to walk around or explore, there's a slow and interesting transition process involved. I don't lose my humanity when I shift, at least not from a mental standpoint. Most shifters give up some of the intellectual clarity and become driven far more by instinct.

Wolves really let the wolf take over and it's not safe for them to live near livestock for that reason. Perfectly rational in human form, they may run by a group of sheep and be utterly unable to keep themselves from killing. Bears don't have the aggression problem but when they shift, they're always tempted to just remain a bear forever. Lions claim they have no instinct effect when they shift. That wouldn't surprise me because they're boring administrators all the time anyway. As for dragons, they think of the human as their animal form so who knows?

In my experience, I have additional sensory inputs but I still process those inputs with the same mind that processes any of my other sensory inputs. Just because I can see in the dark doesn't mean I process that sight with the mind of a cat. It's hard to be objective, though. Every shifter tends to believe himself superior to other shifter types.

It just so happens in the case of tigers that we're right.

Right now, I'm standing in the woods at the back of my property, enjoying the coolness of the evening. Oh, I'm sorry, I guess I should say that I'm standing on all fours because I've already shifted. A lot of shifters don't like to shift so close to home, but I have my boys most of the time and I don't like going too out of range.

It's fairly quiet where I live anyway. Our neighbors are few and far between out here. So, it's all good.

I circle the property. I cut a line through the brush and undergrowth. This area had a lot of appeal for me when I first saw it six years ago. It was overgrown and the seller was having trouble unloading it because of that. For most people, it isn't appealing to look at a property that would take so much work to clear and clean.

For me, it was exactly what I needed. My home and my backyard are immaculately and perfectly arranged. Immediately next to it, is wilderness. I own the wilderness part. At least, a shell corporation I own owns the wilderness part.

I hit the fence line and start heading along it clockwise. I settle into the feel of my tiger body, and slowly my senses sharpen. Tigers don't normally patrol their territory. Usually, they just head out every so often and remark it with urine or glandular secretions. I don't follow the same pattern every night that I shift, but tonight I figure it'll be good to roam a bit wider.

And no, I'm not planning on marking anything with urine.

As I pad along, my thoughts touch on Samantha. I think she's wonderful, but am I really being fair with her. Thinking of having a relationship with a single dad is a big ask, but a single tiger shifter dad? That feels like a nearly impossible task. I say task and not ask because she doesn't even know I'm a tiger.

My first wife was human, too, so I know they can adjust and be happy, but I was just a single guy then. No kids, no extra commitments. And Bridget wasn't entirely unacquainted with the world of shifters. She'd dated one briefly before meeting me. I think of Samantha. She seems so young sometimes, so naive. That may sound a little condescending, but it's how it feels sometimes.

And she's my nanny. I'm her landlord and her boss.

I hear a noise ahead about twenty yards. I stop and try to decipher it. A sliver of fear runs through me. Is there some person out here? It's a pretty isolated way out here, but it wouldn't be impossible. I sniff at the air and try to penetrate the darkness.

The sound comes again, and I relax. It's just a feral dog. It's giving me a wide berth, which is a very smart move. If it were to come at me and challenge me, I'd have no choice but to defend myself. Well, I suppose I could ignore it but ignore one and a pack arrives. Any scouting it intends here won't result in more dogs. I do hunt while in tiger form, but tonight that's not the goal.

I swing away from the direction the dog traveled and head back towards the house in a tightening arc. Everything is so alive for me right now. Tonight, the moon is almost non-existent, which is perfect for a tiger.

I wish I could share this with Samantha. I used to tell Bridget about my times as a tiger and she would listen with rapt attention like I told a great tale of adventure. We're solitary animals in nature, sure, but for shifter tigers, there's still the human side of things, and that human side needs companionship.

And love.

The thought stops me cold in my tracks.

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Chapter Six

Samantha

I have to admit I love the fact that we're sneaking around. I love it right now. The kids are asleep and it's just after eleven. I'm on my knees in the living room doing everything possible to make Daniel moan like crazy. The man has a very large penis, so when I'm sucking his cock it's not easy to get very deep. Already, though, in the last month, I've managed to accomplish a lot more depth. I mean, I'm not going to star in any deepthroat videos but I can promise you that getting even halfway down his shaft means he's deep in my throat!

I love that when I go deep right now and hold myself there, just swallowing over and over to kind of stimulate him; he can't moan like he wants to. He can't do much of anything other than to just grip the arms of his big easy chair to try to maintain his decorum. I think I love this more than anything. Of course, I also love sex with him but right now, I can let go entirely. When we're having sex, I have to worry about being silent like he does.

There is something really exciting about that, too, though. When you have to be silent, it adds a wonderful forbidden flavor to things, and that forbidden flavor does some sexy things as far as the experience goes. It just really hits me hard, you know. I'm underneath him or on top of him and afraid of getting caught. It's a really sexy kind of afraid, though.

A month.

For a month, he's not just been my landlord and my boss. He's also been my lover, and there's really something that I find almost impossible to process. I feel like I'm in love with him.

Not just screwing him.

Not just sleeping with him.

In love with him.

For one thing, it's so strange when he's gone! He does three-day runs at the firehouse and then does four-day runs. Those times when he's gone weigh so heavily on me! I mean, I worry all the time that he's going to end up dying in a fire or something and I feel so lonely when he's gone. When he comes home, if the kids aren't there, I attack him and hold him and kiss him and you know what else.

Of course, I can't always do what I'm doing right now. Sometimes, the kids are awake and there, and so I have to welcome him back chastely and quietly. This isn't something he's demanding of me, by the way. I'm the one who keeps our relationship a secret from the kids. I mean, I don't express the secrecy at all, I just fall into it.

Damn, I don't know what I'm saying. What I know though is that I want to focus on pleasure right now and not all the stuff running through my head. I slide my hands over and take hold of his wrists. Then, I pull my mouth up and say, "I want to get really deep and I want you to help me." I plunge back down and put his hands on the back of my head. He doesn't exert any pressure. I ask him again and repeat the process. After three times of him being too ginger with me, I pull back and say, "Force it!" I say it loudly, louder than I want, but I'm so turned on right now! I say more softly, "Force it in, Baby. I want it."

Then I plunge back down and rethink my decision-making process as I end up eyes

wide with his pubic hair tickling my nose.

The sensation is instantly panic-inducing. His cock completely fills my throat and I'm trying desperately to breathe through my nose, but it's buried against him as well so that isn't so easy. A second later, though, the pressure on my head releases and I slide my mouth off his shaft and gasp.

"Do it again. That was amazing!"

Daniel seems out of breath himself as he looks at me in wonder. He does it again, though. He does it five or six times and then it feels like a miracle because I plunge my mouth back down again. This time I relax as much as I can so I can achieve the same thing without his help. I deepthroat him without him forcing it!

I hear him groan loudly and shudder, and I feel such a ridiculous sense of pride as I get him all the way in again. I know, I know, it's a silly thing to be proud of, but it makes me so damn happy to cause such a reaction in him. I keep the deep throating up.

And now, I stay down all the way for longer periods of time.

Daniel groans again. I feel his cock swell as I slip back off. Now, I practically attack him, licking and sucking and teasing. I know he's about to explode, but I hold him off to build everything up to a fever pitch.

Finally, Daniel puts his hand on the back of my head, his fingers tangling in my hair, and I get the hint. I relax my throat and slide down, going deep just as he starts to cum. I fight to keep up, swallowing and gulping as he seems to keep going and going.

When I finally pull my mouth off, I collapse on my butt, feeling lightheaded and breathing heavily. He says in a hoarse voice, "Holy shit, Sam. So... so... so good."

I smile and get to my feet. My legs are a bit shaky. He pulls me to him. He presses me close and nuzzles my neck. "So wonderful," he murmurs.

He gets up and we get drinks before settling in front of the TV to relax a bit. This time it's a murder mystery, not some nature special. It feels so domestic, so homey. That little twinge of doubt and worry plays in my head. Am I wasting my time with a guy that will only ever see this as something fun? What is really going on between us?

Eventually, it's time to call it a night. I head for my bedroom. When the boys are at their aunt's house, I stay in Daniel's room, but I'm in mine when they're here. It's another thing that kind of sits in my head lately.

Tonight, I can't just let it sit. "Daniel, what are we?"

"What?" He looks at me with no clue as to what I'm asking.

I sigh. "Are we boyfriend and girlfriend or am I just a..." I can't think of any word other than whore so I improvise. "...available when you're horny?"

He at me and doesn't answer fast enough for me. I frown. "Daniel." I know I sound sophomoric right now, but I don't know how else to talk about it.

"Well, I know that I'd break another guy's neck for kissing you or maybe for even just smiling at you, so whatever that makes us ..."

I laugh and run to him, jumping on him and wrapping my legs around him as I kiss him. I cover him with kisses.

I only stop when I think I hear the boys stirring. I jump down and give Daniel a big grin as I walk to my room.

“Goodnight, boyfriend,” I whisper and blow him kisses like a schoolgirl.

I hear Jacob calling for me and I hurry to the kids’ room. Before I duck in, I turn and give my boyfriend one last wave.

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Chapter Seven

Daniel

“You stuck up pussycat prick!” Clyde calls from across the field. “You couldn’t score a hit if the ball was catnip.”

“You’re just jealous because you think the bat is a bone, Kibble Breath,” I reply. He’s a wolf, so of course I tease him about being a dog and he teases me about being a housecat.

Brent throws the pitch. He’s a horse shifter. He’s also probably the best firefighting technology mechanic in the world. You can think of him as an automotive engineer, a hydraulic engineer, and a structural engineer all in one. He’s also a good pitcher. I swing and miss. Garrett, my boss and a gorilla shifter calls, “Strike two!” He’s catching for both teams.

Naturally, Clyde teases some more. The others in the outfield join in but since they’re a lion and a panther, they don’t do the kitty cat stuff. I have to admit all of my focus now is on the perfect wolf-destroying insult I’ll be able to use after I get a hit. Something about a mangy cur comes to mind. Brent pitches and I swing. The contact tells me I have a homer.

And the fucking alarm rings.

I hit a homer that is going to humiliate the hell out of Clyde and put the whole cats and dogs thing to rest for a while and nobody can stick around and see it. It’s an all-

hands alarm so we all have to rush back to the firehouse.

I have my fire gear on faster than any of the other guys because home plate is closest to the house and Garret, the only one closer than me, makes sure everyone else is moving. I start the engine check while the rest get dressed.

Garrett gets details on the call and soon our engine, our truck, and our Type 5, which is designed for wilderness firefighting, are heading out. Our truck is an aerial ladder truck so we're clearly going to fight a fire at a large building that must abut grasslands or wilderness in some way. I don't know but it really doesn't matter. At this point, I'm a cog in a machine.

As we leave the firehouse, my mind flashes over to Samantha. Of course it does. I don't know what the hell I'm doing with that girl. Okay, that's a load of crap. I know exactly what I'm doing with that girl. I'm playing with fire. I don't know about the ethics of sleeping with her. I'm not some prudish guy who thinks a girl in her twenties can't make her own decisions about sexual partners but I do think I ought to at least think harder about things when I'm her landlord and her boss.

She's a brilliant girl. I think she knows what's going on in her mind, and our relationship from a work perspective is informal. We don't even have a lease or any sort of an employment contract. So, it wouldn't be accurate to suggest that we're in some sort of typical workplace setting. Also, she's the one who initiated all of the behavior I'm struggling with. I didn't seduce her. It was the other way around. Granted, her seducing me was a whole hell of a lot like candy seducing the tongue. She didn't have to work at it. Not at all.

The real problem with this situation is that the morality isn't absolutely clear. If I end things because I think it's unfair to her, am I treating her like a child? Can I even trust my thoughts on this? Giving her up will really suck, so am I going to convince myself I'm not being an asshole so I can keep her without any worries.

“Fuck this shit!” I say that almost as a shout. A few of the guys look my way.

Curtis, a lion, says, “Someone must be getting laid.” It’s a cliché, we shifters getting screwed up over romance.

“Always more than you, Garfield.” The guys all chuckle and then, we’re swinging around a corner and coming into view of the fire.

It’s a big one and it’s moving fast. The building is an abandoned office complex that is surrounded by overgrowth. If any squatters are there, it’ll be a real problem. As it is now, it’s a horrible scenario. Then, we get Garrett on the radio and it becomes even worse. “Guys, we’re getting reports that there are individuals trapped in the main building.”

“Shit.” Curtis shakes his head.

We all jump out and get ready to fight a fire that looks to be well on its way to devouring a significant piece of acreage. Now, we have to think about looking for any survivors. It always complicates things because now, we have to rearrange priorities and can’t take things down without clearing them first.

A bunch of us hit the hoses and get them going. A few of us gear up to go in where there are most likely people trapped inside. I go over to Garrett. “That building is about to go down. There can’t possibly be anyone still alive in there.”

“Well, a groundskeeper told the dispatcher that he hasn’t seen his employee and is thinking that he went in to use the restroom.”

“That’s a lot of doubt for us to be running in there and risking more lives.”

Garrett nods. “I know, but we can’t ignore it, you know that. I need you and Curtis

and Vittorio to head in there and clear it.”

I stare at the fire engulfing the building. “Where the hell are we going in with that?”

“Do your job, Daniel.”

Of course, I will do my job. I’m a little shocked at myself for being so hesitant. Is it because my head was filled with thoughts of Samantha on the way over here? Is being with her making me more cautious about taking risks on the job?

I deal with it, naturally, by snapping at him. “Of course I’m going to do my damned job, Garrett, and your job is to have the damned information that keeps the people in Company 417 safe so why don’t you spare me the fucking bullshit.” I walk away before he says anything. I have to. I’m utterly wrong here. I sure as hell don’t want to have to hear him say it.

I frown and then, I don’t bother to wait for everyone to be ready. I just march over and circle the building until I see one corner that seems fire free. The only entrance is a window. I run over and take my axe in hand. It’s just as I get to the window that Curtis comes up with an extinguisher ready and aimed. “Tell me you weren’t going to go in there and introduce more oxygen to this party.”

“Just fucking get ready.” I knock the window out easily and there’s a whine as air rushes in and the fire tries to jump to a new target. Curtis gets it controlled, and we both climb in.

The smoke is pretty thick. I yell, “Fire department! Hello?” There’s no response. Damn it all, we have to go inside. We move quickly and clear the bottom floor. The fire is rerouting rapidly even as my buddies work on it. New pockets are bursting to life. I hit the stairs and start running. I don’t communicate with Curtis. I just go.

I find the guy in the stairwell near the third-floor exit. He's passed out and I check for vitals. They're thready but there. I hike him up over my shoulder and start heading back down. And that's when the fire makes a jump through a window on the landing below us. I'm cut off.

Normally stairwells in buildings are meant to be protected from fire. They'll be the last areas to succumb. The doors are usually firesafe and there are no windows. This place doesn't seem commercial after all. Maybe it was designed to be some guy's elaborate mansion or some private retreat. It doesn't matter now. What matters is that I'm now trapped and need to find another way out.

And I need to find it now because the smoke is getting thicker and the heat is becoming very evident. The fire is moving into the remaining pockets. The building is going to go down. I run back up and through a door into the building. I see a long hallway. There are flames licking along one side and the ceiling. If I could, I'd shift and get us both out of there, but my tiger form would be too big inside where I'm currently trapped.

I'm sweating profusely in my gear and the guy is getting damn heavy. I have my oxygen mask but I switched it to the victim. I take it back briefly, breathe, and return it. My spare doesn't kick in when I put it on. It'll definitely be something for the next equipment check.

I get to the stairwell at the other end and barrel through the door. The flames have beat me to it, but I just can't take the time to look for any other way through. I drop the victim briefly, pull an emergency blanket from my pack, cover him and hike him back onto my shoulder. I enter the stairwell and start running.

I don't know how it goes after the second floor. I seem to be moving, but everything feels surreal. The guy weighs nothing now because I'm completely unaware of my body in time and space. I just go down and down. I walk through flames with my

blanket-covered bundle and then, I'm outside and my radio is squawking.

I register nothing, though, except the last image of Samantha in my mind. She's laughing and I feel my breath hitching in my throat.

And then, everything is quiet.

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Chapter Eight

Samantha

Jeremy is excited because he's going to do show and tell for the first time today. He's going to show off a real firefighter badge and some firefighter toys he got for his fifth birthday party a few weeks ago. Jacob is fun to watch. He's definitely enjoying the role of an older brother. Every now and then, he sends me a knowing look, feeling especially important and significant to be able to think of himself as one of the adults in this little way.

Jeremy's friend Toby is at the bus stop, and he hurries to stand next to him and show him the show and tell items. Lisa, Toby's mom, gives me a tired smile. She's eight months pregnant. Hopefully, it won't be long before she takes me up on my offer to drop by her house in the morning to walk Toby to the bus stop with Jeremy and Jacob.

Renee, whose daughter Annie is the oldest child at this stop, fourth grade, rushes over to tell us all about a recipe for ginger molasses cookies. She just rattles off the ingredients and then the instructions. I realize with a bit of surprise that I actually commit the recipe to memory just like that. In fact, I committed the last recipe, a meatloaf, to memory as well. I feel like I'm kind of behaving like a wife, and I can admit that I like that.

It's a strange thing to admit for me. I never really saw myself as the marrying type. Well, okay, that's a bit of a lie, but what I mean is that I always saw marriage as a down-the-line kind of thing. I thought the career would come first, and then, maybe

the man. Kids? Well, that was way, way, way down the line.

But now I'm standing here with these moms at the school bus stop and sharing recipes and tips and I feel happy. Content, even. It's kind of scary, actually.

The bus shows up and we wave to the kiddos as they pile on, chattering with excitement about the day, and I'm talking about the moms here. Just kidding. Well, kind of. We are talking a lot, about dinner and snack breaks and what works when a kid gets an earache or won't do homework or how to get grass stains out of pants.

We also talk about relationships. That is, they talk and I listen because I'm not about to suggest that anything is going on between my employer and me. But I hear them chatter about their husbands and sharing chores and leaving dirty clothes on the floor and laughing about all of it and some part of me feels a bit jealous.

And I realize I need to get moving.

I say goodbye and hop in my car and head for the grocery store first. Yep. I'm that domesticated now. I have a grocery list for a planned dinner. Like I said, scary.

I'm going to be trying a new recipe, something from my Brazilian roots, which are pretty far away, granted, but are still something I want to be in touch with. I'm going to try my great grandma's recipe for feijoada, which is a recipe I had to drag out of my mother with the promise that I would come visit soon. Soon is absolutely relative, though, of course.

I get back home and get the groceries put away and start preparing dinner. It's a dish that does better when it gets time to sit and simmer so I want to get it going as soon as possible. I kind of laugh to think that I have this side of my family and I also have a Germanic side. Both sides together really spell disaster for the intestinal tract.

I'm bopping along quite nicely when the doorbell rings. I practically scream.

"Who the fuck can that be?"

I try to pull myself together and go to answer the door.

It may seem strange that a knock on the door could make me jumpy, but this house is fairly secluded. It sits on a big tract of woodsy land, back from a lot of the other houses in the neighborhood. So, visitors are scarce.

I swing the door open and see Tina standing there. "Oh, um, were you getting the boys today? It's a school day and Daniel didn't say anything about it."

She shakes her head and then, reaches out and takes my hand. "Oh honey, I need you to come with me."

"Why? What's happening? I've got dinner going and ..."

"It's Daniel."

And just like that, every nightmare I've ever had since getting involved with a firefighter comes true in that one statement. A million scenarios fill my mind. "Is he okay?"

"Just get your dinner put away and we need to go."

"Where?"

"He's in the hospital, Sam. I need to get back to him, but I knew you'd want to know."

She looks distracted, like she hasn't slept at all, and so I can't really yell at her for being so vague, but I really do want to shake her. If you're going to randomly show up with bad news, then you'd better be coherent. I set all that aside, though, and try to hold onto my own sanity and overwhelming fear. "Uh, okay, let me do that and get my things. I'll go back with you."

I know better than to pepper her with questions on the drive over. My heart is racing and I try to tell myself that it's all going to be a huge misunderstanding and that she just came to get me because he was there with a bug bite and forgot his wallet with his insurance card.

I know better. I know that he was fighting a pretty big fire last he messaged. He said they were on their way to some abandoned property and that they were always huge messes and how he wished people weren't such idiots.

Fucking idiots!

We get to the hospital and Tina takes me right to his room. I wonder briefly how long it's been since he was brought here and how long she's been with him before deciding I should be made aware.

But all thoughts, angry, nervous, sad, uncertain, just go out the window when I see him in that bed.

Daniel is a big man, but in that hospital bed with all that stuff attached to him, he looks smaller. I get to his side and see that he's unconscious. I take his right hand in both my own and try to will all my strength into him.

He doesn't look good.

"What happened?" I whisper it, probably I'm asking Daniel, but Tina answers.

“He played the hero, like always. Honestly, it wouldn’t be that bad but, they’re keeping him here and, well, he can’t get better here.”

“The doctors don’t think he’ll get better?” I try to keep the hysteria out of my voice but it’s impossible.

“They’re doing their best, but he has better medicine available to him. His body knows how to take care of this.”

I whirl around. “Tina, what are you talking about?”

She pauses and seems to read something in my face that I’m not meaning to advertise. “Sam, he’ll be okay, I will promise you that. If I have to drag his big ass out of that bed and shake the health right back into him then that’s what I’ll do.”

I’m confused by everything she’s saying, except for her promise to make sure she’ll watch over him. “I have to be home for the boys.” I turn back to look at Daniel, to plead with him. “It’s my job.”

I’m fighting back tears now, and I feel like an idiot. How did I let myself get so close?

“I’ll be right here with him, Honey, I promise, and I will call you if anything at all changes. You can take my car back to get the boys when you’re ready.”

I just nod. I can’t talk.

“I know you want to stay, but you’ll be stronger for the boys, and I think I can fill the doctors in a bit better on Daniel’s medical history.”

I just shrug and shake my head. I try to focus on the feeling of encouragement in her

words because I'm not understanding any of them.

“He can get better? Right? He'll be better? I can't leave him like this. I can't leave him if I don't know if he'll get better. I know I have a duty to the boys but, Tina, I can't ...”

Tina hugs me until my words are just tears. “Sam, you just get the boys and I'll make a damn miracle happen.”

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Chapter Nine

Daniel

I wake up in agony. Pain that feels unreal spears my body everywhere. I gasp and open my eyes.

And I close them again.

“Danny?”

I blink and slowly adjust to the lighting of my hospital room. I see my sister Tina standing over me. “Danny!”

I can only moan for water. She pours a drink. Then, she tells me I’ve been out for four days and the doctors have been worried. “You’re pretty bad, Danny.”

I nod gingerly. “I feel it. I need to shift.”

She understands, of course, that shifting will allow me to heal in a way that modern medicine can’t help. “That’s why I’ve been waiting here. Let’s get you out of here while the getting’s good. They just checked in on you. We should be able to sneak out.”

To say that the trip down to her car is excruciating is to minimize the absolute searing nerve-blasting agony I experience. I have no room for any thought other than putting one foot in front of the other. I lean on Tina heavily.

Admittedly, during this initial time, I don't have many thoughts about the boys or Samantha. I focus only on the next breath and the next. We get to Tina's car and she bundles me in. I pass out again.

She gently jogs me awake. The car is stopped. I see the fear in her face. Will I even be able to shift? Am I just too weak at this point?

I stumble out and she finally steps back to let me go ahead and shift. This is the first time ever I feel pain in the transition. My body seems to rip apart and shatter.

But then it's fine.

I'm in my tiger form and the world is fine again. I shift back to human form and say, "I'm starving. Can we get some food."

"Hang on," she says. Shifters don't perceive nakedness like humans. In fact, most shifters don't bother with clothes unless they have to. We're hard wired not to even pay attention to it. This is why what Tina does next isn't strange to me. She walks up and looks all over me. She stares at me with a great deal of intensity and then finally says, "I brought food for you but you need to shift back."

She goes to the trunk and I walk back there and shift. She opens an ice chest and there are a great many cuts of beef. She tosses me steaks, roasts, shoulders, and briskets. I gorge on them and finally feel full. I switch back to human and say, "Thanks. That hit the spot."

"Bro, you have got to stop this hero shit. I can't afford to keep buying you sides of beef." That's not true. We're very wealthy. All tigers are. It's part of what makes us what we are.

"Tina, thanks. Why the hell didn't they just take me to the woods or something?"

“Is your boss a guy named Barrett?”

“You mean Garrett?”

“Primate of some sort?”

“Gorilla.”

“Yeah, that’s him. He told me you ended up, somehow, in an ambulance run by humans.”

I laugh. Then, it occurs to me that I’ve just walked out of the hospital with no notice.

“Damn, I better call the hospital.”

“Well, no shit Sherlock.”

It’ll suck to try and explain my decision to leave hospital care, but I know I can’t avoid it. There’ll be hell to pay if they file a missing person’s report. Tina gestures a duffel bag next to the cooler. Inside are my clothes and my phone. My wallet is there, too. Basically, all of my personal effects from the hospital along with new clothes. I was so out of it, I don’t remember her taking them from me. “I’ll call on the way,” I say, “but get me home.”

It’s time to head home and talk to the woman I love.

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Chapter Ten

Samantha

I can't believe Daniel is here, standing in front of me, looking almost normal. I don't know what to think or what to say. I just stand here like a dope, blocking his entrance into his own home.??

"Hello, Samantha."?

I stare past him and see Tina smiling. "Well, I'll let you two have your alone time. I've got the boys until tomorrow soooo..." she softly punches Daniel's arm, "you'll have plenty of time to talk."?

I nod and try not to burst into tears like I've been doing on and off for the past day and a half. "Thank you, Tina," Daniel says.?

"Hey, they're my nephews. I love having those meatballs around." She walks past me and I just stare in wonder as she gathers the boys. They get a very quick hug session with their dad and then, Tina walks them out to her car. I watch in shock and then look at the man who's decidedly NOT on death's door.?

Now, it's just me and Daniel.?

And I can't believe how good he looks. "How?"?

He smiles. "Tina told me that she promised you a miracle."?

I laugh so I don't cry. "Yeah, she did."?

"Well, I'm not completely a hundred percent. You need to finish that miracle."?

I roll my eyes and step aside for him to come into the house. "Come on, let's just get you some dinner and ..."?

He grabs my hand and stays still. "Sam, please."?

I look at him. "What?"?and then I break down. Dinner? Really? What am I trying to do, make things somehow normal? Make it seem like I didn't almost lose him? "How?" I sob. "You were dying! How are you..."

"Come with me."?

I have no idea what this man is talking about, but I know now that I can't deny him anything because...

Because I love him. Completely. Seeing him in that hospital bed, it was the worst moment of my life. "Okay, lead on, my fearless leader," I sniffle out the words. I feel pretty foolish. I'm aware this all seems so silly and romantic but trust me, there is nothing romantic about the thought that you are going to forever lose the one person in your life that makes you feel whole.

There's nothing remotely meet-cute about walking into a hospital room and understanding that you love this person so much that you don't think you can go on without them.?That's particularly horrible when you're certain the person is about to die.

And knowing you'd have to keep going no matter what because you love his kids like they're your own and you couldn't leave them.?

My eyes flash up to Daniel's face and suddenly, I know. I understand.?

All his heartache and fear and loneliness. Everything he had to endure when Bridget died.?

"Daniel."?

He just tugs me to him and kisses me. "Come on, my little zookeeper. I've got something to show you."?

I cling to him, marveling at how healthy he looks when it was just a day ago that he seemed so, well, not healthy. We walk around to the back and across to the edge of the yard where the trees begin to thicken.??

And then the man begins to undress.?

"Daniel, what the hell are you thinking?"??

"I still have some healing to do, and this is how I do it. I've been wanting to show you, I just wasn't sure when would be right."?

"Daniel, as happy as I am to see you alive and, well, naked, maybe now is not the time for..."?

He just steps to me, kisses me, steps back and then, he's gone.?

The air seems to undulate like it does with heat waves coming off asphalt on hot days and then, I stumble back so fast I almost fall flat on my ass. The only thing that saves me is when I reach out and manage to grab onto a tree behind me.??

"Holy fuck. What? Oh my... I..."?

There is a tiger standing where Daniel was standing. I'm confused and, well, terrified. The thing is huge. It's bigger than any tiger I ever saw in the exhibit at the zoo. I've never heard of any tiger being this large. It must be twice the size of the biggest tiger we had, and Maksim was one of the largest Siberian tigers in the world.?

"What the fuck is this? Am I having some kind of bad trip? Is this a dream?" I start to shake so hard I have to hold the tree with both hands.?

The tiger doesn't move. It just lays down and sets its massive head on the ground in front of me.??

And I start to remember.?

Shifters.?

They're a thing. Right. They were announced and they were stories I heard about as a kid, but we all knew it was a joke. "It's a joke."?The tiger just huffs slowly and blinks.?No joke.? "No," I protest. "It's all a hoax. They're not real." The tiger doesn't respond.

I walk up to the tiger with my hand outstretched like some stupid Disney heroine, but this is no Disney movie. I touch the large face and again, the tiger just blinks and then ...

The tiger isn't there and my hand is resting on Daniel's cheek.

I wish I could explain exactly how it looks when he shifts, but it's like there's just a haze. It makes you want to rub your eyes, like they're watering or something, and then, the tiger is just gone and the man is there.

Daniel draws me to him and holds me close. He kisses me softly and I feel all my

anger and fear and worry melt away as I feel his body next to mine. I finally pull back to see that he's whole. Complete. "You're okay."

He nods. "Shifting heals us. From human to animal heals us dramatically. From animal to human, it heals us a little. The fire was so big and things were so confusing that I ended up in an ambulance so I couldn't shift. That was why Tina was so desperate to get me out of the hospital's care. I needed to shift so I could heal."

I run my hands over his body and marvel at how perfect he looks. Not long ago, I saw him unconscious in a hospital bed with all kinds of beeping machines around him. Now, he's here and okay.

And then I realize.

"Uh, Daniel, you're naked."

He grins. "Yeah. You'll remember that I undressed. I can't shift when dressed. Well, I could, but it would destroy the clothes."

I return his smile and then I step back and very casually, start removing my clothing.

His eyes go wide and I laugh. "You almost look like a wolf from those cartoons."

"Hey now, no insults. I'm nothing like those dumb dogs."

I shake my head. "Of course, there are wolf shifters."

I pull my panties down and he pulls me close again. "And bears, and lions, and horses ..."

"Oh my," I whisper as his lips press against mine.

“And dragons.”

I push away. “What the hell? Dragons?!”

He laughs and grabs me to him again. Nibbling my ear, he mumbles, “But they don’t eat hobbits.”

We kiss and our hands roam over each other. I feel a need to touch him everywhere, searching for any missed injury or sign that he’s still hurt. I do feel a new scar or two, but eventually he takes my hands in his own and then, he just grabs me and lifts me up into his arms.

He settles me onto him and we move together. He holds me without effort as I roll my hips and urge him deeper. I kiss him harder as I get closer. I don’t care that some nosy neighbor could be out peeking over the fence. I don’t care about anything except the feeling of his body and mine.

His fingers dig into my ass as he tries to hold me steady. I bury my face in the nape of his neck and breathe him in, trying to hold every sensory detail of this moment forever.

My orgasm claws to the surface, and I arch backward. Just as it crashes over me, I feel him shudder. I feel my body flood with warmth and I hug him close. “I love you.”

He wraps his arms around me even more tightly. “I love you, too, my little zookeeper.”

I laugh and then, I kiss this incredible man once more.

“And you’re never scaring me like that again.”

“I’ll do my best.”

I slip to my feet, but I refuse to let him go. “Promise me.”

“What?”

“Promise me no more heroics.”

He strokes fingers through my hair. “I promise I will do my absolute best to not play the hero. Unless it’s for you.”

I smile. “I just want to hold you here.”

“Okay.”

And we stand there, naked together. Happy together.

I never plan to let go.

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Three Years Later

We move almost frenetically. We always do on Saturday mornings. As I move above him, I hold tightly to his shoulders and roll my hips in something anyone watching would likely call desperation or... Maybe they would think I was frantic. Who knows. All I know is that for some reason, we always end up making love on Saturday mornings when he's home and not at the firehouse. We always do, and it's always like some sort of a race to get to the finish line as quickly as possible.

Well, I mean, of course it is.

Jacob and Jeremy could wake up at any moment and interrupt us.

And the twins would force us to stop. We can tell the older kids to play quietly until we come out of the room. Try telling that to one-year old tiger cubs.

Okay, well, they haven't shifted yet but they're shifters. It's always a fifty-fifty chance when a shifter is with a pure human. Well, all four of our kids are shifters.

"Daniel!" I cry as my orgasm hits. Then, of course, I turn bright red with embarrassment as I imagine the boys telling their teacher or their Aunt Tina all about how I always scream his name in the morning.

Of course, it's hard to stay embarrassed. It's hard to feel anything other than happiness, actually. I have my incredible husband and four beautiful kids. I have everything I can imagine wanting, and everything is a pretty damned wonderful thing to have when it comes right down to it.

Did you enjoy reading Deadly Tiger's Single Dad Crush ? I hope so. I really enjoy writing about the Company 417 firemen shifters. You already know that if you've read any of the other books I've written. I'm definitely a shifter-loving girl. I don't just have book boyfriends. I have a menagerie full of them! Bears, wolves, lions, tigers, and those giant majestic dragons!

I loved writing about Daniel, and I hope you found him as sexy as I did. I think any girl can go for a sexy fireman, of course. When you're also looking at a tiger shifter, you've got even more reasons to love him, right?

Naturally, I fell in love with Daniel while I wrote the book. That isn't going to surprise any of you out there who've read my other Company 417 books. At the end of all of them, I whine and moan about how much I love the men I wrote. Well, maybe I fall in love with every sexy shifter leading man I write. I can't help myself! I always imagine I'm the lucky girl involved, and I did it this time, too, even though I'm not as young as Samantha and I've never been a nanny.

Samantha got herself a sexy man, an incredible firefighter, and a strong and powerful shifter. She got the real deal, I think! I have a feeling that she's going to spend the rest of her life head over heels in love with Daniel. I get the feeling she's going to learn a whole lot more about tigers, too. What do you think?

Do you love these two together like I do? What do you like about the characters?

Let's face it. When it comes to shifters, I'm a hopeless romantic!

Anyway, I really hope you enjoyed reading about Samantha and her tiger shifter lover. These two have a really tender and sexy life together ahead of them, don't they?

If you enjoyed this story, then I think you'll love the next tale of paranormal romance in the Company 417 Fireman Shifters series.

Katrina Viceroy is just trying to live her best life. She's succeeding, too. She graduated top of her class and has a dream job at one of the best architectural firms in the country. She inherited a lovely home from a distant relative, and it's the perfect chance to use her education to really create something special.

The view is really nice, too.

The view of her neighbor, a very attractive firefighter. Isaac may be, in fact, the most attractive man on Earth! As she works on the renovations and settles into her new post-college life, she spends plenty of time imagining the possibilities with him.

One thing she never expects, though, is that he'd show up on her doorstep one night and beg her to be his fiancé! His parents have arrived from overseas, and they've brought a woman they want him to marry. He wants to close that door right away. It seems like a crazy thing to do but it's hard to resist this sexy man so she agrees.

What she doesn't know is that Isaac isn't just a sexy fireman, and his parents don't just want their son married. He's a panther shifter, and he's the crown prince. The longer he waits to get married, the riskier things get for his family's control of the royal house. She's in for a lot more drama than a fake engagement; that's for sure!

Find out all about it in *Deadly Panther's Fake Fiancé*, the next exciting tale in the sexy, steamy age gap shifter firefighter romance series *Company 417 Fireman Shifters* !