

Mountaintop Mounting

—The very breath of nature seemed bent on tearing Sierra from the sheer cliff face. Clenching her teeth, she faced the frigid gust and clung steadfastly to the stone wall, even as her eyes stung and teared. Hundreds of feet above the ground, she stood only on a two-foot-wide path, carved centuries before and buffeted by the elements.

Even amid summer, small piles of snow persisted in pockets and cracks broken into the slate-grey stone. She was awestruck at the view. Clinging tightly to securing ropes, she looked out at an endless sea above, and the small world below. It gave her a sense of power, looking down at great mountains made small beneath her, great structures of stone and earth made small. Beyond lay the rolling green hills and scattered hills of her home, so distant that the roads became little lines, and men no more than slight, moving shapes.

As the winds abated slightly, she returned to her trekking. Making small steps, she crept across the perilous path, hammering a new spike into the stone to hold her safety cords. Between treacherous peaks, the fury of the elements, and the presence of strange and powerful beasts, the southern Spine Mountains were not for any human faint of heart. Survival and a keen eye could make these untamed lands profitable. She was not so foolish or brave as to think herself a master of the place, but she knew well how to withstand it.

Following faint rumors and old writings, Sierra took up a new trail. Centuries ago, in the age of legends, the long-departed dwarves created incredible works of stone, metal, and gem within their mountains. Now, their vast castles were sealed and collapsed; destruction preferable to the hands of men corrupting and pilfering their remains. Pieces of their ruins sometimes still surfaced,

cracks in the stone allowing entrance. That promise of adventure and wealth drew her to this perilous place; a storeroom recently opened by the weather, yet unspoiled by humans.

Another gust made her stumble, her heart leaping into her throat. She grabbed hold of the rocky wall and planted her feet. Suddenly, a rush and snap sounded above her. Glancing up, she jumped in surprise, seeing a dark shape creeping not high above her.

A scatter of rocks, and the padding of large paws sounded above her. At that moment, she forgot the winds and the cliff, animal panic making her jump as the large predator caught her off-guard. Falling backwards, she dodged from the watching snow leopard. However, the motion carried her further, feet slipping and stumbling on smooth stone.

Sharply choking on fear, she cut a scream short, scrabbling for any handhold as he slid from the cliff. Suddenly weightless, the earth fell away, and she dropped into the air. Yet the fall stopped just as swiftly. Her safety ropes caught her, snapping painfully around her waist, no doubt leaving bruises and burns. Even so, she hung limply, hundreds of deadly feet below her and only a rough rope keeping her alive.

Twisting and orienting herself, she turned up and grabbed hold of her rope. Nervously peering about, she searched for the winged beast that caused this. Wherever it flew to, it no longer paid her mind, and she hung alone on the cliff once again.

Panic and danger kept her from catching her breath, sweating and shaking as she dangled over death. Even so, she summoned the strength in her arms to pull herself up. She strained and gripped the rope just beneath the ledge, yanking herself inch by inch upwards. It left her arms shaking with fatigue, hands rough and burned by the cord, yet sheer stubbornness did not allow her to fall. She would survive, for it was her most practiced and valuable skill.

That struggle and fight for life would not be her last. She hooked her hands atop the ledge with a final effort, securing herself. The wounds from the slip would serve as a reminder not repeat that carelessness. With a breath, she started to pull herself up.

Before she could, a menacing growl sounded above her. Frozen and vulnerable, her eyes went wide as the beast crept nearby. The dark shape passed in the corner of her eye, though she dared not look directly at it. Perched on a higher ledge above her, it gazed down.

With a breath, she mustered the courage and turned upward. It took a deal of greater strength not flinch or release her grip, though every animal instinct within her bade she flee. Watching her like prey, a leopard crouched on its haunches, ready to pounce and slay her there. Whiter than the stone around it, its spotted pelt blended with the surroundings and gleamed in the sunlight. Its teal eyes pierced her like daggers, appraising her as though she were already its property. Fangs showed bright as it yawned, the beast larger than she had ever imagined them.

Hanging motionless, she whispered a short prayer, begging any that would listen to keep the animal from attacking. Fortunately, it made no motion to strike, wait on the edge as if weighing the option. Her fingers quivered from the strain, but she dared not rise.

Then, spurred by curiosity or hunger, the snow leopard jumped down. It landed gracefully on her walkway, tail flicking behind it as it balanced. Sierra yelped but did not let go, closing her eyes as she waited for the sharp pain of its claws or fangs tearing into her. But that did not come.

Tentatively, she squinted and looked towards the beast. As if inspecting a toy, the leopard stood just beside her hands, nudging her fingers with its moist nose. She forgot the cliff she dangled above, the deadly fall below. Terrified of the predator above her, she clung to the stone purely on instinct. In truth, her mind was blank, preoccupied with fear as the animal sniffed at her hands.

Rather than shoving or biting her, the feline stood high. It purred contentedly, a satisfied look taking in its eyes. Before she could question its intentions, it seemed to smile, three small chirps leaving its muzzle. Suddenly, faint light shimmered around its black marks, like the wavering of light at the bottom of a lake.

Magic? Impossible, few humans possessed the talent, and most had only heard of its existence. An animal capable of wielding it, impossible. Yet, arcane energy undeniably swirled across it.

The snow leopard bent down, gently tapping its muzzle against her hand as if planting a kiss. Energy remained on her flesh like warm drops of water. Before she could question the spell, the tingling heat flowed deeper into her arm, traveling up her blood and soon filling her entirely.

Before she could comprehend or question the spell, the feline turned and padded away, vanishing behind a bend like smoke. Swift and powerful, it remained in her thoughts for a time afterwards. Though she had traveled the mountains for many years, this was her first time catching sight of one of the ghost cats. As fear faded, she could appreciate its majesty. The beasts embodied the mountains; powerful and deadly but as graceful and silent as mist over a lake.

She remained stunned for a while afterwards, eyes wide and sweat pouring from her brow as the danger suddenly struck her. A nervous laugh rose from her throat, her whole body shaking with tension and fatigue. With what could only be the last of her strength, she heaved herself up from the rope and lay down on the smooth path. Her sweat turned sharp cold against the wind, her lungs burning, her arms aflame, and her mind numb from fear and bewilderment.

For all her pondering, she could not imagine what the snow leopard had wanted with her or what the effect its spell would have. Laying there, she puzzled over the encounter.

Perhaps it was a trick of her mind; the spell nothing but sunlight reflecting off its beautiful pelt. *Beautiful? Where are my thoughts going?* Fatigue, hunger, and thirst; Sierra figured it was the sum of the three. Her hands shaking as she did, she produced a waterskin from her pack. Quenching her thirst as she watched the clouds roll by overhead. Even as she rationalized things, she could not forget the oddly-intelligent glint in its eyes.

After a time, her pulse slowed and the fear washed from her. Carefully climbing back to her feet, she was twice as mindful of the edge as before. She held tight to the rope and crept ahead, thanking whatever watchful force protected her. Even as she made progress, she found herself staring at her hands, running her thumbs over the spots where the magic had touched her. No change or effect was detectable there or within her, the magic gone for all she knew.

She tried to put the encounter from her mind. However, the striking image of the grey feline stuck in her brain like a nail. Moreover, she felt an ever-present heat simmering within her flesh. Like a fever without sickness, she blushed and felt sweat bead across her brow despite the cold. Only a few yards ahead, the narrow path reached a plateau.

In the final few steps, she almost ran to the wider ground, relieved to feel sure footing again. She tore the safety rope from her waist and surveyed the high perch. Lands stretched out far below, the snowy peaks around her glittering like diamonds. The plateau proved sizable, capable of holding house on its polished expanse. What made her truly overjoyed was where the mountain continued upwards. A steep wall climbed high above, supporting a snowy cap atop it.

More importantly, she saw the object of her search cut into the very stone of the cliff. Two doors, hewn from grey rock and decorated with faded carvings of ancient bearded kings. “Yes!” Sierra shouted, adrenalin rushing through her veins. The ruins were here, just as the rumors had

claimed. An unspoiled city, ripe for the picking. Depending on how much lay behind those doors, she might live rich for the rest of her days.

Even without touching great stone doors, she knew she could not move them with strength alone, heavy granite ten feet in length and twice as tall. Even centuries abandoned, dwarven craftsmanship held strong. A keen mind often proved better for such plunders than any inhuman might, and these doors were not her first ruins.

However, Sierra found the task of pausing and concentrating difficult. That heat still filled her, a flush suffusing every inch of flesh. It left her agitated, unable to hold still without fidgeting and distracting herself. It was like attempting to sleep with too many blankets atop her. Despite the inconvenience of the situation, she found she enjoyed the sensation. Her blood quickened, and she felt alive.

The warmth seemed to fill her in certain areas, face hot and red, but the sensation most pronounced in her privates. Shaking her head, she attempted to suppress the origin-less sensitivity. Though she could shift her concentration, ignoring the feeling was impossible.

Impatiently jumping to a solution, she produced a powder horn from her pack. Using a sticky, clear gum, she packed the crack between the doors with a heavy line of black powder. Stepping away, she connected a twisted length of twine. Pulse racing, she lit the strand and watched. The trick worked to open metal safes or doors, but she figured it could apply here too.

The powder ignited and blasted between the doors with a flash and bang. Hoping the lock was broken, she shoved against it with her shoulder. The stone neither moved nor creaked, unaffected by her strength and tools. The blast left nothing but a charred mark along the crack.

Sierra considered her options, a dwarven lock too strong to be broken by a small explosive. Instead, she examined the door, noting its every crack and hinge. A space lay beneath the doors, but the inside remained too dark to see into. Her focus instead turned to the lock, gold and bronze still untarnished and built into the designs of elaborate shields. Picking an ancient lock in the shape of a cross was not a trial she was excited to undertake, but she could not see any other entrance.

If she knew the challenge ahead, she would have brought a locksmith she knew with her. Ryvers was a worldly man, having seen battle and stranger lands as a mercenary. Given an hour, he could find a solution.

Sierra considered returning to town, asking Ryvers to craft a tool or join her search. That was no more than an excuse, and she knew it. *No, a piece of metal will not trounce me*, she chuckled to herself. Though ornate and sturdy, the lock was not particularly complex. Its unique shape would prove difficult, but nothing she could not conquer. Measuring its internal mechanisms, she pressed her ear against the metal and tapped it. Though men could not yet replicate these dwarven mechanisms, they had pried many from the ruins and sold them to wealthy men. As they spread, thieves like her learned to open them in turn.

She smiled with recognition for the challenge, pressed close to the door. Her breath filled her chest warmly, her skin sensitive to every touch of the breeze. Chest touching the stone, she found her very clothes setting her skin ablaze. At the moment, she forgot the door, forgot the mountain cold, and forgot to question the sudden fire that possessed her.

Almost unconsciously, she reached up and made tentative contact with her left breast. It sent a shiver through her, ice and electricity through her blood and skin, making her shiver. Face red and her entire body burning, she felt her loins flush and moisten but not dampen the fire within.

Cupping her hand, she massaged her breast tenderly; nipple toughened in her palm. Her other hand wandered lower, wasting no time in stoking her fire. She ran her middle and ring finger against her womanhood through her dampened pants. Her breath caught sharply in her throat, a jolt of pleasure springing up her spine, followed by waves of resonant pleasure.

She sighed contentedly, brain awash with pleasure as her hips rocked unconsciously. Her fingers pushed deeper and held her open, her pelvis aching to be filled. Occupying her other hand, she reached under her shirt and undergarments, wrapping around the underside of her breast. While kneading the soft flesh, she made tender circles with her thumb. Her nipple pointed and sent a current of bliss through her body.

It made her every cell feel alight and alive, her other hand climbing to toy at her other breast. Legs weak, she quivered as ripples spread from her chest and to her core. It made her body liquid, and she sank low, subtle moans joining the breeze. Nearing climax from her breasts alone, she reveled in the state.

However, a sound interrupted her. A sharp yowl echoed around the cliffs, one she recognized. A leopard's hunting call caused her every prey instinct to recoil. Self-preservation proved more powerful and arousal, and she jumped to her feet.

The door, carved into the stone, offered a frame to hide beneath, of which she took full advantage. Concealed under the archway, she waited for tense and silent minutes until she was sure the predator was neither near nor seeking her.

With a relieved sigh, she collected her thoughts. Though a wanting lust still smoldered within her, a dose of fear had returned her enough wit to suppress it. *This is not a place to lose myself*, Sierra thought, promising herself an enjoyable night once she returned home. The embers

of that passion remained inside, but the physical effects were now misplaced and uncomfortable. More so, she felt unsatisfied and disappointed but unwilling to resolve the matter.

For the life of her, she could not figure what caused such a maddening want to come over her. It was almost like heat, without reason or relent. As she examined her hands, she recalled something possibly responsible. Perhaps the magic the snow leopard used affected her so— though odd, it was the only event she could imagine to create such an effect.

Ignore it. Magic isn't something I want to play with. Attempting to focus, she opened her bag and returned to the door. Even after centuries, human techniques could not match a simple dwarven contraption. But if finesse would fail, brute force never hurt. Never hurt her, at least.

Scouring through her bag, she produced a tar-like oil and a horn of black powder. Mixing the two created a dark, doughy substance, but foul-smelling and far more dangerous. She rolled it between her hands into thin strands, pressing the mixture into the crack between the doors. She took several safe steps away and produced a clasp of iron and a spark-stone.

With a few clicks, Sierra cast off a shower of sparks, igniting the wick. The flame traveled quickly, and she averted her eyes, knowing well what was to come. A blast like thunder shook the space, echoing through the mountains around them. She smirked and looked up, but her giddiness turned to bile in an instant.

The blast did no more than scorch the stone, the door still too sturdy to budge. Today, she would reach no further into the ruins, but its treasures would remain. Explosives and picks might not see her through, but that was not the limit to her bag of tricks. Letting in a trusted few might make the process easier; though she could not pick the lock, it could be possible for one more specialized in the craft.

Ryvers could be trusted, and he certainly possessed skills beyond hers. He would need convincing, not much of a risk-taker, but that was a skill she possessed. She could invite him to the tavern as though she had already returned with a treasure. A few drinks would make it easier to manipulate him, but too many might let him know he was being used. Talk of discovery and history would not convince him, but every child knew the phrase ‘rich as a dwarf’.

After enticing him with promises, she could bring him somewhere private, somewhere to discuss specifics. Alone, she could tell him of the door and the secrets beyond. But the words would fall on deaf ears, for all that would matter was the shrinking space between them. Barely palpable warmth in the air between them, the realization that they wanted no longer to just drink as friends. She had felt his gaze upon her many times before, sometimes even returning it.

Though diminished, her magically-induced lust had not disappeared. So present now, she could feel the arcane sparks sending her into an animalistic heat. Try as she might to focus on the journey ahead, she could only focus on dreams of a night. Sierra’s skin prickled as she pictured Ryvers beside her. Lither than he was strong, the man had sharp, handsome features and a charm betraying him as more than a common builder.

Perhaps tonight could be the last we drank as friends, Sierra thought, a coy smile in the corner of her mouth. Many times before, she had felt his gaze upon her; it would take little to turn eyes to hands. Little convincing to guide him to her bed. Once there, he could take the lead, pulling off her clothes and linking his lips to hers. Heat flooded through her as she felt something hard and hot pressing slowly into her.

With a gasp, a shock of pleasure shot up her spine. Back against the wall, she stood with a wide stance, two fingers buried in her nethers. Her clothes were damp and her fingers soaked,

shivering with need. Caressing herself, she forgot place and time. It felt good but woefully unsatisfactory. She needed someone else, anyone else, in whatever manner they chose.

Returning home fled her mind, as she felt if she did not douse the fire, it would take shape and burn her to nothing. The fantasy took hold, and she lay down onto the stone floor, almost able to feel his weight atop her. Slipping her trousers off, she cupped her hand slowly, a tickle and pleasant warmth flooding her as she rolled her hips.

Pleasing herself in a place like this was stupid, but she no longer cared. Let the heat run its course; satisfy it. If she did, her mind might return. That excuse convinced her for a moment. Soon, however, the drive needed no reason, simply stronger than any rationality that might obstruct it.

A painful emptiness took root as she spread herself with her hand, one swiftly filled as she plunged in two fingers. She bit her lip, back jolting to an arch as her digits rubbed against her inner walls. She closed her eyes and imagined Ryvers atop her, gently parting her legs. Heart racing, she could feel the tickle of soft kisses against her neck, followed by the rush of a sudden thrust. The images took life in her mind, hips rolling as she pumped her fingers feverishly.

Slight squelches emerged amongst the wind, sounding with little moans with each thrust. Curling her fingers, Sierra stroked her inner walls deeper, sending twinges deeper with each twitch.

Her pulse raced, and she lay awash with pleasure. Yet, it all seemed just short of what she needed. Quickening her pace, she thrust her hand with less care, straining her thumb away to brush her clit. Sudden and rapturous sensations overtook her, and she moaned loudly with abandon. If heat did not drive her mad, the relief from it seemed poised to do so. Writhing with bliss, she felt the orgasm of her life set her every cell ablaze. All the world could have heard her scream, sweating and dripping onto the floor as sensations plateaued.

All but melting into herself, she lay on the ground, panting and relishing the departure of her climax. She smiled as pleasant warmth left her flushed, her thoughts finally showing through her lusty haze. The need remained, but now satisfied enough for her to suppress.

Her hand moved unconsciously to her stomach. The curious tingling of the spell remained within her, now more like a lingering electrical charge than an empty heat. It felt like sparks dancing along her hand. A few remained from the previous session, like a warm pool.

As the sensations faded, Sierra wished she could reach out and grab hold of them. Even if only for a second, she just wanted to enjoy them a little longer. Once gone, she was disappointed that she now lay there alone. It felt good, but she wanted more, something not here.

In searching for that missing piece, her mind cleared. Given a brief reprieve from her carnal instincts, she turned her attention back to the great door. *That's why I did that... right?* She thought, having 'satisfied' herself. Walking back up to the door, she rubbed her hands together in thought, finally coming up with something.

She pushed a lump of soft wax into the keyhole, removing it when she felt sufficient resistance. Extracted, it bore internal notches and grooves matching its mechanisms.

Smiling at the simplicity of it, she took several picks and needles. One after another, depressed the tumblers. However, after a final click, the lock made no sign of opening. *Constant pressure*, she realized, the moment of inspiration almost making her forget the ache. Again, she put the pins in-place, this time affixing them with wax.

Once finished, several needles protruded from the lock like spines. Eyes narrowed with focus, she inserted a metal bar, pressing and twisting. *Fuck!* She hissed, the mechanism clicking,

before snapping back into place and knocking loose the many pins. Was she not capable of opening one old door? Was she that hopeless in her craft?

Catastrophizing, Sierra hardly noticed as her efforts were rewarded. With a low groan, the door creaked open an inch. A puff of dry, ancient air escaped the ruin. Daylight could not enter the forgotten place, the tunnel too deep for the sun's rays to reach more than a few feet. Though the contents of her victory remained shrouded, she celebrated nonetheless.

An unsealed dwarven citadel full of tomes and treasure; a find to mark history. More gold and knowledge than she could earn in a lifetime, and all the glory belonging to her. So many of her dreams had come true so quickly that she could hardly process it. She would have to return to properly study and loot, but she could not take another step. Living penniless with only ambition to drive her, she was unprepared for actual achievement. Just what was she supposed to do now? What was she supposed to feel?

Slight winds seemed to dance across the ground, dust drifting in little clouds. Not propelled by any actual breeze, she recognized it as magic at work. Before she could react, the wind picked up, a hurricane-force without a second to gather. It ripped her off her feet and threw her away from the door. She grunted in pain and surprise, skipping across the ground like a stone.

The world spun as she came to a stop, too surprised and bewildered to make sense of things. When she looked up, she was met by sapphire eyes and storm-grey fur. The snow leopard stood above her, a cocky expression on his feline face. More than just an animal, the guardian of this place revealed himself, seemingly mocking her for thinking it would be so easy.

Seeing its powerful frame, its sharp fangs, she knew she ought to be afraid. Instead, she was impressed. Having never seen a being of such a powerful being, she felt like she was in the

presence of living history. Fighting would do no good. She was no match for a beast with such magical strength. However, the animal showed no signs of hostility, only sniffing at her.

The leopard huffed as it sniffed her. She remained still; the predator inspiring a twinge of fear. Carefully placing her hands on the ground, she prepared to jump to her feet. Though impressed by the creature, she knew better than to leave herself at the mercy of a bound guardian. Once its attention was turned away, she would flee to return later.

For now, she just had to flee; but... but she did not yet want to leave. Like a scholar, she could observe the beast's behavior. Study and learn from him... those were nice terms with which to think of her admiring. If honest with herself, she would admit that she just wanted to look at the animal more; its pelt, strength, eyes, they all had a wild beauty. He was like the mountains surrounding them, untamed, awe-inspiring, deadly, and amazing for it all.

He playfully nudged her forehead with his nose. Initially warm and moist, the touch shocked her like a jolt of static electricity. Similar to the magic it used on her ascent, she was struck by a sudden feeling of connection. Unable to communicate with human words, a direct link was made. As she tried to make sense of the strange presence now occupying her mind, the beast stepped back and sat, his tail curled around his paws. He simply watched for her response.

Not about to miss the opportunity, Sierra jumped to her feet and faced the leopard, backing away slowly to avoid provoking it. Yet as she met its gaze, that spark of connection seemed to intensify. Like a tickle in her mind, thoughts, emotions, and memories were made known to her. At first, she could have confused them for her own; but their source was soon clear.

Centuries guarding an empty mountain had become truly lonesome. When she reached the door, the snow leopard allowed her presence, wanting the entertainment and not expecting success.

When she did, he considered killing her like he had many other interlopers. But she impressed him, and something else held him back.

Her ingenuity, courage, and beauty gave him pause. After all those years, he had found someone that struck him with just a glance. Drawn to her, he wanted for a human, something new that confused him. However, it made him realize how lonesome he had been, how much he did not want to return to that life. Maybe, she would not have to leave. He could not let her proceed into the citadel, but he did not want her to go. Sierra understood the choice she was given, stay with the snow leopard, or leave and never return.

Enticing. The prospect of a life with such a majestic creature. Living above it all would be wonderful, the mountains her domain, looking down upon the village of her home... her home...

No. No matter how much she wanted to escape. That place was still her home; she could not leave behind her friends and everything she had built. She would return home, just after a few more seconds to appreciate the beautiful creature. His sapphire eyes had a hypnotic quality in which she could lose herself. And as they shared memories, they understood one another in ways neither had ever trusted another mortal enough for.

Unbeknownst to both, his entrance into Sierra's mind did more than share information. The snow leopard gave her the choice, but wanted her to stay, wanted her. Those intentions reached deep into her mind, his greater presence scattering her mind. Her eyes locked hypnotically on his. She tried to walk away, to consider leaving. However, in a trance-like state, she could not put thoughts together. All she knew for sure was that she wanted to keep staring.

Losing herself in his eyes, in the sheen on his pelt, her old life faded and dulled. She could not think of what she clung to so desperately. A life of adventure was what she always craved, and

that was offered to her now. She did not want to go back now. Returning to her life and as though nothing had happened. Not when she was only now alive.

Sierra looked stoically to the guardian; her decision clear. She approached and lowered herself, accepting a life with him in the mountains. The snow leopard walked up, standing slightly taller. Mind awash with magic and hypnotized, she could only smile as his presence dominated her thoughts. He rubbed his cheek against hers, marking her with a comforting gesture.

Though their minds were connected, they did not stand on equal grounds. The guardian's will was dominant and consuming, pushing her mind down and shaping it to his wants. If it was intentional or subconscious, she did not care. Warmth and attention filled her, she wished to be his and make him happy, overjoyed to be wanted and cared about.

Sierra embraced the guardian, and it gave her a warm lick. She nuzzled her forehead against his, learning what her new life entailed. As his partner, the mountain range would be her domain. She saw its den, her home, a peaceful cave adorned with comforts from the citadel. The guardian could protect and provide for her. It would be primitive, though she would never be alone or unloved. She smiled because of it, not missing her old self and frustrations.

He would do this for her, and she was grateful. Returning the touch, she wished she could show her appreciation. Though they could share emotion and mind in an intimate and newfound way, a physical distance still remained between them. This embrace was as close as they could naturally be. Any contact would please her, but she wished to please him as well.

The guardian smiled at the intention but chuffed in reaffirmation. After all that time, he wanted companionship of any sort. Though a more intimate touch was not something he was against, giving up one's humanity was not a choice that could be undone.

She chuckled. After the heat his spell put her through, he was strangely accepting of a chaste relationship. However, that was not something she was sure she could stand. Besides, he was too handsome a creature to live with that loneliness.

If Sierra was to abandon her human life, it made sense that her human form would follow. But giving up herself would not be easy, and the prospect frightened her. Her will shook, knowing that this would be her ultimate sacrifice. How much of herself would even remain afterwards? She looked down at her hands with a worried breath, so familiar and fading. As she glanced up, she met his sapphire gaze again, a trance dulling her mind once more.

Breathing deeply, she made her choice; this is what she would do for him. Clenching her jaw, she nodded in agreement. She would take a form better suited to him.

The guardian purred, the vibrations reverberating through her. Bones buzzing, she fell and held herself up with a hand. The changes were already beginning, starting with her skin. He smiled as he saw the transformation begin, picturing a new and perfect form for his mate.

Keeping up a brave face, Sierra tried to endure the changes. However, the rush of discomfort made her flinch, like sand crawling beneath her skin. Discoloring, dark blotches emerged across her, everything itching as fur began to poke through. The pelt came in swift and thick, grey and marked with black spots, her underside shiny and white. Overwhelmed by the sudden change, she felt a flash of heat rush through her. She removed her clothes, her downy under-pelt warding off the cold. Covering it was shiny fur, soft and drawing her admiration.

Whiskers prodded from her snout, like pins and needles and tickling in the wind. Stretching out an arm, she smiled at the beautiful fur, the patterns like that of her love. The changes pushed deeper inwards into the deeper layers of skin. Her nose wrinkled and thickened for a snout. Along

her hands, it softened and tightened, centering around her nails to hide her future claws. The churning sensations clustered on her palms and soles, the flesh darkening and thickening like callouses. As the feeling gathered, she watched little ovals become rough and leathery. Sensation dulled in the spots as her paw pads took shape. The tough beans felt nice as she closed her hands, her feet already better suited for the rocky ground.

All at once, her muscles spasmed and were overcome with weakness. She collapsed to the ground, struggling to hold her head up with her elbows. A twinge of fear reached her core, body out of her control. Was this a mistake? Reassuring her, the guardian padded up and rubbed his cheek against hers. It did help, and she held his paw, his presence a bulwark against the unknown.

Body swiftly toning, she felt her muscles tighten and grow. Her body became strong, and she stood again, weakness suddenly replaced with power. Especially around her jaws and haunches, she gained animal strength. Tongue lengthening, her mouth filled, and her body followed. Gathering muscles did not fit in her still-humanoid shape, prepared for a later self.

The changes suddenly warmed and tickled. Sierra's changing shape was never something she expected to find arousing, but it hit a sweet note within her. Her breasts shrunk and pulled into her chest. Before she could lament the loss of her assets, her nipples tingled and hardened. The sensation only strengthened, fuzzy and tickling as they moved. Like cells, they divided and moved, her underside softening as four sets of teats covered her torso.

Already slick, her privates clenched and shifted. Her breath grew hot as it felt like her walls were taking an invisible object. She shook her haunches as the pleasure coursed through her, parts pulling up for a quadrupedal position. Beside her, the guardian chuffed and smiled, her scent filling the air as he changed her. He sensed them puffing out and warming, made by and for him.

The true leopard rubbed against her, almost warning that what would come next would be most unpleasant. He would be there through it, making sure that it would not hurt. Loud clicks and snaps foretold the transformation reaching her bones. Her limbs bent and twisted, fingers retracting into her wrists. Before she could appreciate them, popping in her spine doubled her over. Her hips and shoulders pushed her limbs apart, not yet quadrupedal, but no longer bipedal. Moving awkwardly, every step felt like bending a joint too far.

Not that she could concentrate on movement, lengthening sensations dragging at her front and back. As if pulled apart at both ends, she fell to her stomach. Spine and jaws cracked and protruded, both sides of her stretching out. A tail grew out behind her, muzzle reshaping her face. Her teeth fell free, pushed out by a mouthful of new fangs. She clicked her jaws and looked back, the bushy appendage wagging as fur grew over it.

Rising back to her feet, new claws gripped and scraped the stone. Finally, her body began to match that of a snow leopard, skull grinding into a feline shape. She buried her face in her paws, head pulsing with a painless migraine. That occupying her, she could only think of her transformation. Legs and shoulders pulled into an animal's, ribs stretching into a barrel shape.

As sensations ceased, she rose again into her new stance. She hardly noticed the last of her changes; eyes changing color and ears taking triangular points. She purred with unfamiliar lips as she took her first steps. Completed, she flexed her claws and felt graceful and strong.

That's just the beginning, she almost sensed the guardian saying. Her blue eyes focused on far details, ears picking up subtle whistles in the wind. More powerful were the smells. As she inhaled, the scent of stone, snow, her old humanity, all reached her. Better than they, a thick musk met her sensitive nostrils. Her mate, his mark already on her; alluring and powerful.

He smiled and rubbed his side against hers. Admiring his work. To most, she looked like any other snow leopard. However, given the chance to shape his mate, he had taken several liberties. Her feminine features were slightly exaggerated, tail extra bushy, pelt shiny and softer than usual. The slight abnormalities did not bother her, only more beautiful for them.

Testing her new shape, the guardian leapt to a higher rock, glancing back to bade she follow. Happy to find her ability, she crouched low and jumped. Instinct guided her steps as if this body was more natural than her old. Haunch muscles flexing, she sailed through the air, landing beside him. Her paws gripped the rocks as she gracefully jumped about the mountain. She fit the form perfectly, at home as an animal and in her mountains.

The guardian nodded, proud to see her adapting so well. Even in the shape he designed, she was still impressive herself. Alive, her heart pounded as she danced over the high cliffs. She loved her new form, enjoying every moment and movement within it. Making it all better was following her mate, his powerful haunches and glistening pelt attractive as they pulled her along.

Follow me, he bade, wishing to show her their home. However, she wanted to thank him, show him firsthand how much she enjoyed being a snow leopard. Pushing herself, she hurried and jumped in front of him. He skidded to a stop, surprised by her sudden bravery.

Purring, she rubbed her cheek against his, his soft fur a caress against her sensitive skin. Walking forward, she felt his heartbeat as hers quickened, her tail lightly brushing his nose teasingly. The scent of her heat reached him, making him shuffle nervously. Though he expected this eventually, centuries alone left him faltering at such a beautiful cat presenting herself.

She noticed something as well, his body reacting involuntarily to her advances. The thick smell reached her as his member poked from its sheath. Greeting the part, she leaned down and

licked the red rod, making him shiver with pleasure. A wave of pheromones and smells hit her, the musky cloud gathering in her brain. Though she approached confidently, his dominating presence awakened every submissive instinct within her.

Like a puppet on strings, her body crouched low. Sierra shivered happily, pulse racing with excitement as her sex quivered. She was his, and offered her everything to him. Master, mate, owner? Whatever he was, she wanted him, hoped to please him and make him as happy as she.

Chest touching the ground, she raised her haunches high and her tail higher. She presented herself and gazed back in invitation. He needed no more signs, a low purr leaving him as he buried his nose in her nethers. Shivering with anticipation, she rocked her hips alluringly. As he licked her sex, the rush of pleasure made her quiver and yowl.

Their wishes coming to fruition, he stepped up and mounted her, shaking with excitement. She bowed under his weight, overjoyed to feel him so close. His legs locked around her hips, heat radiating through her as he positioned.

No amount of anticipation or fantasizing prepared her for his actual entrance. His hips rocked as he prodded. She jumped as his hot tip entered; new parts explored and sensitive. Puffy animal lips gripped the filling member better than her old equipment.

Small thorns extended from him, scratching her inner walls as he pulled in and out. It hurt slightly, but his every other touch was a comfort. Thrusts finding a rhythm, she lost herself in the pleasure, each scrape sending a wave through her. Getting used to his feline member, she grew to enjoy it even more, closing her eyes in bliss. Unaware, her breath caught as he bit the back of her neck. The sharp jolt of pain was quickly subsumed by excitement as he held and shoved her down. It made her glow, awash with pleasure, and proud to be so good that he was losing himself.

That joint bliss spurred him on, his thrusts stronger and deeper. Sierra yowled, pleasure reaching deeper as he held her in place. Shuddering, she reveled as his chew toy, utterly owned by him as they mated. Sex dripping, she pushed against him as sparks of pleasure approached a peak. Her breath raced like a gathering storm, and she surrendered to her base desires.

Giving in was the trigger pulled. The storm reached its height and struck like a thunderbolt. Her entire body quivered and tensed at her climax, pleasure driving aside her mind and will. She basked in the heat, her inner walls clenching and tugging at his member. The new motion compressed his spines expertly. He shook with their first mating, no longer able to resist. His jaw tightened, and he thrust fully, hissing at his intense orgasm.

Sierra purred, wonderful heat, satisfaction, and fulling taking as she felt him finish. He twitched and sprayed her innermost depths, the batter pooling like a well of life.

The guardian remained within her for a while afterwards, both nuzzling one another as they enjoyed the residual bliss. She felt both safety and excitement, love as her mate purred atop her. Far better than human experience, she already imagined their next session. *Gods, he was good.*

He licked her in appreciation, and she smiled happily. She was his and would continue to please him. Though, the satisfaction in her core suggested another gift. They had not yet considered kits, but she could feel his potent seed already taking hold. Pride filled her, already wanting the weight of a litter and milk, wanting cubs as strong as their father.

But that was to come later. For now, they would go to his cave and overlook the great mountains. Sierra and the guardian pictured a romantic evening together. Perhaps another session.