

A Political Animal

Mikala Ash

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ISBN (10) 1-59596-453-3
ISBN (13) 978-1-59596-453-3
Formats Available:
HTML, Adobe PDF,
MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:
Changeling Press LLC
PO Box 1046
Martinsburg, WV 25402-1046
www.ChangelingPress.com

Editor: Connie Alberts
Cover Artist: Karen Fox



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Chapter 1

"Sex scandal rocks the Farmers' Party and Deputy Prime Minister Kelvin Waters resigns amid further rumors of sexual dalliances with Press Secretary Serena Plim. Insiders say --"

"Whatever the hell they want to say! I don't give a flying fuck!" Serena killed the radio with an emphatic flick of her wrist.

Sexual dalliances! It wasn't true, dammit!

She wanted to scream out loud that Kelvin was a friend and nothing more.

That wasn't strictly true, but it wasn't as bad as the blood-sucking press were making out. While she loved Kelvin, like no one she'd ever loved before, there was absolutely no sex involved. Her love was platonic.

Completely, totally, honestly platonic!

A sob slipped from her throat at the pitiful way that sounded. What the hell was wrong with her?

Was it wrong to loyally devote ten years of your life to a hunk of a man and not fuck his brains out at least once a day? Maybe not wrong, but incredibly stupid. Especially when she didn't fuck anyone else either.

But stupid was one thing she was not. She was a political and media guru, according to her supporters, though where they were now she didn't know. She'd taken Kelvin from complete anonymity to the brink of pulling off a brilliant political coup. Then Priscilla, his conniving wife, had spouted all over the press that Kelvin and Serena were -- she could hardly believe the press release -- spending all their free time together, to the "grave detriment of our marriage."

Grave detriment? What sort of phrase was that? Bloody brilliant, that's what it was. It was the line Serena had written for Kelvin's first televised campaign speech, the

speech the pundits said had gotten him elected. "My fellow Australians, the reprehensible actions of the current government pose a grave detriment to our..." Blah, blah, blah. The conniving bitch had even put it in bold, for God's sake. Bitch!

The "wronged" Mrs. Waters had played into the hands of the press, the opposition, even those conniving sods in Kelvin's own party. His political cachet had evaporated completely. He had no choice but to fall on his sword. In this age of fundamentalist politics he was a sudden and complete liability.

Poor Kelvin. Politics had become his life. This would destroy him. Her eyes stung with the tears she'd been barely holding back for the last four hours. When he'd resigned at the press conference she'd completely lost it.

Her mind had numbed, becoming a lump of stone. Had she been able to think clearly she would have rallied him to fight another day. Not let him crumble. She couldn't believe he hadn't fought back. He meekly denied an affair and resigned "for the good of the country."

His surrender had left her with nothing. She was out of a job and out of his life.

That's when she'd had a brain explosion. That was the only way she could explain what she'd done. She'd rushed to their government car and drove west from Canberra as fast as she could. She certainly couldn't face the press. How could she honestly deny the love she had for him, even if they hadn't so much as kissed?

Well, not with tongues anyway. A chaste kiss on her birthday... he always remembered her birthday.

Another sob convulsed her body.

The sudden need to sleep, to find somewhere dark and safe, became overwhelming. Serena found a motel on the outskirts of a small town and paid cash for a room. She sat in the dark for an hour, her mind completely blank. She realized she'd fallen asleep when a knock on the door woke her. It was Kelvin.

"Serena..." He took her into his arms and looked deeply into her eyes. "I've told Priscilla. It's all over."

Then he kissed her. The urgency of his kiss, the kiss she'd so longed for, took her completely by surprise. The strong bands of his arms crushed her to his chest. His lips devoured hers and they stumbled backward onto the bed.

In a frenzy, they undressed each other, showing no regard for buttons or zips until they were naked and locked in a deep embrace.

After a minute Kelvin released his grip and, with such sweet tenderness, held her face between his hands. He caressed her cheeks and then traced the backs of his fingers lightly along the sensitive flesh of her neck. With deliberate and agonizing slowness he moved his fingers down to her straining breasts. She gasped in anticipation as he circled the sensitive skin surrounding her nipples before stroking the erect nubs. A spear of electricity lanced from her breasts to her brain and to her superheated pussy.

Every place he touched burned with an intense heat she thought would engulf her in flame. She didn't care. She had him at last. He hadn't deserted her. He'd come to claim her as his own.

Serena cried out when his fingers found the moist lips of her pussy. Her body tensed, preparing itself for him. She could feel the hot shaft of his cock against her thigh.

"Fuck me now," she said.

Kelvin opened her thighs wider and slid between them. He propped himself on his elbows and held his cock poised at the entrance of her pussy. "Serena..." Her heart was racing in anticipation. "Serena," he repeated.

Behind the glint of lust and love in his eyes she fancied she saw something. A deep sadness which mirrored hers at all the time they'd wasted. He opened his mouth as if to say something more but she silenced him with a fingertip to those luscious lips.

"We've waited so long," she said. "Now is our time."

Kelvin nodded. A slight shift of his hips and his cock was pushing her pussy lips open. A wave of heat flushed through Serena's body. Her heart skipped a beat and her head swam. She pulled his head down and kissed him furiously, parting his lips with hers and thrusting her tongue deep into his mouth.

As she hoped it would, Serena's onslaught seemed to quell any hesitation in Kelvin's mind. He returned her kiss with equal energy and at the same time thrust into her with one glorious push that fed the length of his thick shaft to her hungry pussy.

Serena grunted wantonly each time he pushed into her. She shifted her hips to accommodate his vigorous fucking, wrapping her legs about his hips, pulling him into her, driving him on.

Her body was on fire. A fine sheen of sweat coated her tingling flesh as she surrendered herself to their mutual lust. The fullness in her pussy was spreading into her belly and upward to her breasts.

She gasped for breath as he drove relentlessly into her. Her mind seemed to be poised on the edge of an explosion as the energy of her pent-up lust expanded like a balloon inside her and suddenly blossomed into orgasm.

Serena cried out as her pussy clenched around the steel shaft of his cock.

Kelvin howled as he came, his body shuddering with each forceful pulse of his cock. She clung to him, holding him tightly as if trying to meld their bodies by sheer force.

He lifted his head and gazed down at her. For the first time since he'd entered politics, he looked as if he was at peace with himself. Then his serene expression disappeared, replaced by a scowl of intense concentration.

"What is it?"

Without explanation he got up and opened the door, stepping out onto the landing. Seemingly unconcerned with being naked, he sniffed the air again like he had a cold. "Damn!"

"What is it?" she repeated.

He turned back to her, his face a mask of despair. "I can't do this to you." He looked deep into her eyes. "Sleep," he commanded. Her mind clouded and she felt as if she were sinking into a bale of wool, its warm embrace comforting and safe. "I'm sorry," she thought she heard him say before the blackness overtook her.

When Serena awoke, she was alone.

For a long moment she lay quite still, trying to make sense of what had happened. It took a force of will to convince herself that she and Kelvin had actually made love. She could feel his presence inside her, so it hadn't been an illusion or a dream, though the memory certainly had a dreamlike quality.

But he'd left her. In all their time together, through all the quiet desperation of being near him but feeling so alone, she'd never felt as abandoned as she did at that moment. "You idiot," she scowled.

She wished it had been a dream and nothing else. A fantasy like she'd had so many times before. A dream was something she could easily live with, but to love her and then abandon her? How could he? Yet, it had felt so right. She shivered at the memory. "It was a dream," she said out loud, and because she'd had so many similar dreams she almost convinced herself she was right.

I have to get on. The urge to get moving was as powerful as the one yesterday which had commanded she find the motel. She showered quickly and dressed in the clothes she'd strewn on the floor. She dropped her purse and as she picked it up, she noticed something shiny on the floor beneath the bed.

It was a gold cufflink, one of Kelvin's. The dam burst as what she'd tried to suppress as a dream was made tangible. She dropped to the bed and wept. He *had* been here. He'd made love to her. He'd howled like a wild beast as he came and pumped his seed into her.

Frowning, Serena opened her purse and dropped the cufflink in. Ten minutes later she was back on the road heading west. It was a dream, she repeated to herself over and over. She could live with a dream, but not a memory of one hour of passion. That would be too cruel.

Blinking away the stinging tears, she tried to concentrate on the road as she sped along the highway amid alternating rolling pastures and thick bush land. Kelvin had started his political career in country like this. And she'd been there with him. She'd taken him from a naïve political hopeful to the second most powerful position in the country, and then to the brink of greatness.

When she'd first seen him at a town meeting he'd been a stumbling, blue-eyed cattle farmer arguing for water conservation, but she'd sensed his potential even then. Kelvin had made the sitting member stammer and he'd earned a standing ovation from the crowd. They'd been seduced by his calm melodious voice, his solid logic and his genuine sex appeal. Serena's chest tingled as it had that first moment.

I've wasted ten years of my life. The hollowness in her belly chilled with the realization that her devotion and loyalty had all been for nothing. Her love had been for nothing. Anger bubbled inside her. Kelvin's denial to the press that they'd ever had a relationship was one thing, but the idea of pernicious bitch Priscilla getting what she wanted was another.

Serena took a deep calming breath. She couldn't blame Priscilla too much. If she'd been Kelvin's wife and thought she was losing him, she'd do whatever she could to keep him. But would she destroy him in the process?

Certainly not! What sort of love was that?

Not the love Kelvin had for his bitch of a wife, that's for sure. The fact was that even though Kelvin loved Serena, he couldn't, wouldn't, leave his wife. He was loyal to the end. And he'd paid the price.

Kelvin and Serena had tortured each other with their unrequited love for ten years. Serena had understood that and had accepted it.

Now that was love.

And a lot of good it did her.

Kelvin threatened to haunt her. *I have to get over him. This is a wake up call. I'm not too old to find someone new. Maybe I should fuck the first good looking cowboy I find. Just fuck him and move on. Men are infamous for that.*

She recalled her first love. He'd stayed with her for a whole weekend. Her second boyfriend hadn't had much more loyalty or fidelity either. He dumped her after a month. Then there was the professor at college. He lasted a semester before getting a teaching position in the US and leaving her with nothing but a farewell written hastily in the fly-leaf of his latest book.

Then she'd met Kelvin.

He was such a gentleman. Maybe that was why she loved him. He'd never made a pass at her. The times they had come in close physical proximity, so close to kissing, he'd pulled back.

She respected him for that.

She choked back a laugh when she thought of the crusty old politicians and the wily journalists who'd chatted her up at the member's bar, trying to get some dirt on Kelvin. Hell! She could've fucked her way through Canberra if she'd taken them all up on it.

Men.

Only Kelvin redeemed them in her eyes. But she had to forget him once and for all. No more fantasies. Last night would be her last.

So, what to do?

"I've got three choices," she said to the road stretching out before her. "One, be celibate, but I've had enough of that. Two, become a sexual predator, which will be a lot of fun, or three, find a loyal, trustworthy man without a load of baggage." Right. Where was she going to find a nice thirty-something hunk with no baggage?

"So. Number two it is." She laughed, thinking of her favorite romance novel. "I'll be the lusty rake preying on the helpless opposite sex. I'll be the modern day female Mr. Wickham!"

What an idea. She sighed deeply. It would be easier said than done to be a twenty-first century Mae West. *I'll have to lose a bit of weight to be a femme fatale.* Serena took another long, deep breath. The headache that had been developing since Priscilla's bombshell was asserting itself once again, creating a dull, persistent thrumming inside her brain.

Serena rubbed her aching eyes. Looking back up she swerved to avoid a suicidal sheep that had jumped into her path. Adrenaline flowed hotly through her veins and she took the skidding car careering down a dusty side road. The car bounced wildly

over the dry corrugated trac, and it took all her skill to keep it under control. Her foot, however, didn't leave the accelerator and she didn't slow down one jot.

She made no attempt to stop or turn back either. It didn't matter to her where this track actually led. She needed somewhere to hide and give herself time to think.

For another twenty minutes the dry and dusty Australian bush swept past. Behind the curtain of tall eucalypt trees were vast pastures, filled with cattle, sheep and kangaroos. The heartland of the country in which she hoped to find the peace and quiet she so desperately needed.

What was that?

Something black and fast was running between the trees parallel with the road. Was it a kangaroo? No, it was definitely running. A dingo? No, it was too big and anyway, it was black -- dingoes were red, weren't they?

It was carrying something in its mouth. Was that a sheep? The sheep?

She braked. The car skidded to a stop. A cloud of dust swirled around her car. The thing rushing through the brush disappeared.

Now I'm seeing things. I'm going crazy. She lowered her head and rested her forehead on the steering wheel. *I need to find another motel, get a room and bury my head in a pillow for a week.*

A week is a long time in politics they say. Well, they were right. It felt like an eternity. The five days between Priscilla's shocking announcement and Kelvin's resignation had been the worst in her whole life. Her friends had dropped her, getting themselves interviewed on prime time, their thirty seconds of fame. "Oh, yes. Serena is always staying late at Kelvin's office..." "I never saw them, you know, kiss, but they were always standing close, whispering to each other, joking. They were just good friends. You know what I mean?"

Just good friends? Tabloid fodder if ever there was, and that meant the kiss of death in politics.

Her mobile rang. She knew it was Kelvin. Fighting the tears, she started the car but, instead of setting off again, she lowered her head to the steering wheel and listened to the phone's persistent tune.

She couldn't speak to him. She simply couldn't face him. It would be a mistake to be seen with him again. Not that it mattered now so much. But to be the cause of his political death, albeit unwittingly, was just too much to bear. Best to just slink away to lick her wounds, never to be seen again.

She raised her head from the steering wheel. The road ahead was clear, but something black scuttled through the trees to her right. She turned her head, but the shape always seemed to stay at the edge of her vision. She shivered. This place was spooky.

She resumed driving, slowly at first but as she realized the shadowy figure seemed to keep pace, she accelerated. She was driving too fast now. The spitting of gravel beneath her wheels and the thump of larger rocks on the underside of the car confirmed it.

Serena knew it was stupid to be spooked like this by a mere animal. She was in an amour-plated government car, for goodness sake! She smiled when she realized she technically no longer had permission to drive it. The car pool would want it back.

I'll return it to the first government office I come to, she promised. Though when or where that might happen, she couldn't tell.

The issue of Kelvin and her use of the car had been their first foray into the media spotlight. Serena and Kelvin had broken convention. Instead of using the usual drivers that every politician demanded as a sign of status, she had insisted she drive him everywhere. Serena had to receive anti-terrorist training to do so, but she'd impressed the Federal Police instructors with her innate ability.

Her graduation from the Federal Police Training Academy earned her a full two-page spread in a women's magazine. It raised her and Kelvin's profile a hundredfold. She was a woman in a man's world. A woman who could handle a high performance

vehicle as well as a Glock nine-mm pistol and a submachine gun was not someone to be trifled with.

Kelvin had been delighted as it allowed them to talk candidly and plan their press strategies in private. It also gave Priscilla the perfect ammunition. "Alone in the car, what did they really get up to?" one tabloid had so *innocently* and disastrously asked.

It had been foolish, Serena knew, but she loved those long drives between cities, plotting their next move, orchestrating their next media blitz. It felt so intimate, so special.

"Oops!" The road took a sudden turn. She was going way too fast, but she steered through it just as her instructors had taught her. They'd be proud of her.

"Slow down," she yelled at herself but she couldn't lift her foot off the accelerator. Trees flashed past her and still the shape in the corner of her eye kept pace.

Something dropped from the overhanging trees onto the narrow road in front of her. She braked savagely and the car went into a sideways slide before coming to a halt. She looked up expecting to see the great hulk of the beast she'd glimpsed towering over her bonnet.

But there was nothing in front of her except the swirling cloud of red and brown dust. Her heart thudding against her ribs, icy spears of fear stabbing at her gut, she straightened the car and drove on. She wanted to get back to the main road, but the deep gullies on either side of the track made it too narrow to turn around. She had to find somewhere the track widened so she could make a U-turn.

She gained pace now, glancing furtively from one side to the next to see if the shadow was following her. She was well and truly spooked. Not more than five kilometers down the road she rounded another bend.

"Oh, shit!" She braked and skidded to a halt, and once again a cloud of dust overtook her.

Standing in the middle of the road was a blond Adonis. He was naked to the waist, the dappled sunlight speckling his bronzed torso and gleaming off the broad expanse of his chest.

“Oh, my...”

Chapter 2

Serena blinked, thinking he was an illusion and expecting him to vanish. But he didn't disappear. In fact, he was walking toward her, a wry smile on his perfect lips. He stood beside her window, circling his forefinger imperiously and instructing her to open her window. She cracked it open a centimeter.

"Bit of a lead foot, aren't you?" His voice was like honey.

Serena was speechless. She simply stared at his glistening pectorals.

"You shouldn't drive so fast on roads you don't know," he continued.

"Sorry, I..." Anger welled up inside her chest. "Hey, wait a minute. You're the one standing out in the middle of the road."

He laughed. "I heard you belting along and had to stop you." He swiveled at his narrow waist and pointed behind him.

"Oh, my God." Not twenty meters down the road a huge eucalypt was lying across the road, its wide trunk a splintered mess. Had she hit that huge mass of wood at speed she would have been killed.

"Where are you going in such a hurry anyway? Was I expecting you?"

"Expecting me?"

"This is my property. The only thing at the end of this road is my house."

"I'm lost. Something was following me..."

"Something?" He looked along the road behind her, sniffing the air.

How weird. She shook her head to dispel her spooky thoughts.

His expression, instead of wry amusement, became one of concern. "Are you all right? You're as white as a sheet."

"Yes. Yes of course I'm all right."

"You said 'something'?"

"I thought I saw a dog, or wolf, or dingo. I must have imagined it."

He looked around, giving the air another sniff. "Well, there's nothing here now." He fixed her with a thoughtful gaze. "You're very shaken. My house is only a few kilometers up the track. If you'll permit me?"

She thought at first to reject his arrogant presumption, but she felt so exhausted. The adrenaline of her recent near miss and stress of the last few days had finally caught up with her. "I don't want to put you to any trouble," she said feebly.

"No trouble at all. Trust me."

Something that had long been sleeping stirred within her. His waist was at her eye level and the bulge inside his jeans was large and growing.

"Are you able to drive?" he asked.

"Of course."

He walked around the front of the car to the passenger side with the grace of a tiger and opened the door. She was surprised, unaware that she'd unlocked it. He lowered himself smoothly into the seat beside her, stretching out his long, muscular legs. He was an imposing man. It seemed he filled the entire space inside the car.

Serena could feel the heat of his body engulfing her as if an aura surrounding him had leapt out, encompassing her. His scent was intoxicating, filling her nostrils with the most sweet, invigorating aroma. A wave of lust crashed over her.

Serena steered around the fallen tree and back onto the road. She was nervous with him sitting so close to her. Her hands became sweaty and she felt her body itch with a prickly heat. Her mind filled with images of this stranger naked, hovering over her, his tongue lapping her, his fingers probing her pussy, his yellow gold eyes piercing her soul. In her mind's eye she opened her thighs wide as his tongue took her to the edge of climax and over. She squeezed her thighs together around his head as she came.

Raw sultry heat, like a fever swept through her. Her pussy ached.

The stranger's hand shot out and grasped the steering wheel, jerking it through her hands.

"What are you doing?" she asked, wrestling the wheel away from him. The car swerved and she got it back onto the road just in time, avoiding a gully by the narrowest of margins.

"Let me drive," he said softly.

"What? No!"

"Serena! You are unwell. Stop the car."

Serena obeyed without thinking. In the deep silence that settled over them, she became aware of the pounding of her heart in her chest and the blood rushing to her ears. "I don't know what's wrong," she said weakly.

"Serena?"

Finally she noticed he'd used her name. She glared at him for a moment. "You know who I am?"

"Of course. You're all over the news."

She was instantly embarrassed. Her face warmed. She took a deep breath, afraid of this giant of a man. "Get out of my car."

"Hey, I'm not the enemy. I'm helping you out."

His sincerity made her feel stupid for overreacting. "I'm sorry." Her hands were shaking, trembling, but not in fear. It was exhaustion. "I'm lost," she explained. "I avoided a sheep that walked out in front of me back on the highway and I ended up on this track."

"Maybe it was a lucky detour. I may be way out of line here, but I guess you'd appreciate somewhere to wait while the media barrage blows over."

"No. Thanks, but I'll be fine. Truly, I will."

He looked at her steadily. She felt as if he could see right inside her, that he could see her heart beating, the blood coursing through her veins. She imagined he could even see into her thoughts.

"Where can you go without the media hunting you down?"

"I don't know. But I'll find somewhere."

"Why bother looking? Fate has brought you to just such a place. I have a large house, plenty of food and it's quiet. No one knows you're here. It would be a perfect escape."

"Why would you help me like this?"

"Looked like you got a raw deal."

"I did, but that doesn't explain why you want to go out of your way to help me."

"You're the talk of the country. Everyone thinks the worst of you. I don't think you deserve that."

"You don't?"

"Then it is true you were having an affair with Waters?"

"How dare you!" The loudness of her voice startled even her.

He smiled languidly. "See? That settles it."

"I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me."

"You are overwrought. You can't do that to the next reporter who quizzes you about Kelvin. You need somewhere to relax and figure out your spin."

Serena felt so stupid. "I'm sorry. There was nothing between us," she protested meekly.

"Of course. You might have been attracted to him, who's to know? But you hadn't... been intimate with him."

"How in the hell do you know that?"

"If he'd had that pleasure, there's no way in the world he'd go back to that scrawny bitch of a wife who's just ruined his career."

"If that's a compliment, I'll take it."

"I'm not good on compliments, but the truth is something else entirely."

She considered his open expression. His eyes were dark, sad somehow, as if he'd seen terrible things, but they also had a sense of play, of vitality, deep inside. This might be the perfect chance to start her new life as a wanton. Perhaps her savior was this cowboy who could release her from her dreary, celibate past. "So, what is the truth?" she said coquettishly.

"I can't possibly say," he said. "I can only tell you what I see."

"And that is?"

"That you are a very sensuous woman."

"How can you not believe the stories?"

"I never believe the media."

"That's very wise."

He laughed. "But weren't you his press secretary? Didn't you write everything he said in the media?"

She blushed again and couldn't keep the defensiveness out of her voice. "We never lied, I'm proud to say."

"What about your so-called spin?"

"Never had to. We were straight shooters. Can't say that for the others." She noticed his cynical smile. "I admit that while we talked in positive terms, we were always truthful. We were very scrupulous in that regard."

"Your idea or his? I bet it was yours." He laughed. "Positive terms and spin. There must be a technical distinction I'm not aware of."

He was insufferable. Who the hell was he to sit in her car and... "Are you calling me a liar?"

"I don't know you well enough to call you a liar. Where I come from a man is judged by his word. All he has in the world is his honor. If he loses that, he may as well lose his life."

For the first time she noticed his accent. It was distinct, but from where she wasn't sure. Central Europe was her first guess. He tried to disguise his voice in an affected Aussie way, but it remained there beneath the surface. "That's an awfully quaint and old fashioned notion that wouldn't last five minutes back in my world."

His lips curled into a slight scowl. "You are happy with that world?"

"Does it look like it?"

"Then you are wise to leave such a dishonorable place."

"Don't get me wrong. It's not all lies. We did bring truth and honor back into government. And this is what we got for it." Serena took a deep breath, suddenly very, very tired.

"You're in no condition to drive. Change places and I'll take you to my house. Hanna will fix you a --"

"Hanna?" Unaccountably her heart sank in disappointment.

He grinned as if he'd caught her out. "My housekeeper. She'll be able to give you something for your headache."

Of course, every cultured cowboy had a housekeeper. "How did you know I had a headache?"

"Intuition."

He reached out and touched her forehead. She flinched but the warmth of his fingertips was very reassuring and she relaxed. The ache stopped immediately. She closed her eyes and leaned back into her headrest, almost nodding off. She suddenly remembered where she was and started awake. "My headache is much better now," she said.

He took away his fingers. "I'm glad."

Serena gazed sleepily at him. He really was a beautiful man. She could imagine those gorgeous lips closing on hers, his hands holding her breasts, his...

I want to make love with you he whispered inside her head. His voice was soft, sensual, hypnotic. Waves of lust pulsed through her body. She felt herself falling, sinking into a warm sea of desire. She wished Kelvin had said those words. If he had just said them once, she would have given up everything for him.

His expression changed from lust, to anger, to disappointment all in the space of a heartbeat. "You're exhausted," he said, moving a wisp of hair from her eyes. "Come to my house and Hanna will look after you."

The thought of being looked after by a kindly old housekeeper became overwhelmingly attractive. She nodded. Unclipping her seat belt, she opened her door.

The blast of hot air outside made her feel faint after the cool comfort of the car's air-conditioning. He was instantly at her side. She hadn't heard his door open at all, yet he was there, kneeling beside her, his warm naked arms about her.

She was once again so very aware of his warm skin, his musky scent. His skin wasn't as smooth as she'd thought it would be. He was covered with a light silky fur. How extraordinary. It felt so soft on her fingers that she had to look at his arm to confirm what she was feeling. But no. She was wrong. His skin was a smooth bronze, with a faint sheen of perspiration from the hot sun. That must have been what she'd felt.

She let him lead her around the car and guide her into the passenger side. He buckled her in and before she knew it the car was moving off. She closed her eyes gratefully. The wave of lust that had passed through her when he wrapped his arms about her was still palpable and had left her heart beating wildly inside her chest.

Over the last ten years, she'd only felt like this when she and Kelvin were alone in his office.

"Why do you think of him?"

Her eyes snapped open. "What?"

"It's only a few more minutes and we'll be home."

She shook her head to clear her confusion. "What?"

"My house. It's just a few minutes away."

She must have misheard him. "I'm so sorry to put you to so much trouble."

"It's no trouble, Serena. None at all."

"But I've interrupted your work."

"Nothing that won't wait."

The line of tall trees that bordered the road ended as he swept around a bend. A grand vista opened up before her. The dusty track had been supplanted by a perfect white chalk road lined by tall, manicured shrubs. Behind the trees was a colorful heart-shaped garden with ornate fountains, shooting plumes of sparkling water into the air.

Behind the garden stood a great three-story marble mansion. It reminded Serena of something straight out of a fairytale.

Beyond the house she glimpsed a wide lake, its blue waters sparkling in the bright sunshine bordered by a grove of weeping willows and beyond that, the timeless blue tinted mountains. "Oh, my," she sighed.

"I modeled it on my... a house I saw in Europe."

She noted his hesitation, but ignored it. The scene was too enchanting to spoil with questions. "It's beautiful."

The road ended in front of massive front doors which, before he had brought the car to a halt, opened, revealing a wizened old crone.

The car door opened and he reached over, unbuckling her seat belt. Serena gasped. She hadn't noticed him stopping the car or getting out.

Time seemed to jump back and forth like a tune on an old, faulty record player, breaking the smooth continuity of the music. Before she knew it they were sitting in a comfortable room looking out onto the immense garden that swept down the slope to the lake. On the water's edge were ivy clad stone rotundas, stone bench seats and a wooden dock. Waterfowl glided over the lake's picturesque surface.

They hadn't spoken since sitting down and she became intrigued by this strange man. "Who are you?"

"Jack Wolfe."

Not a good name, she thought. If he were a politician, the journalists and the cartoonists would have him dressed in sheep clothing before he'd uttered his maiden speech.

She immediately chided herself. She was not looking for a replacement for Kelvin. Though she'd miss the hurly-burly, she was done with politics forever.

"What are you thinking?"

"Sorry?"

"You went distant just then."

"Did I? I'm sorry. Well, Jack, what do you do?"

"I'm a cattleman."

What was it about cattlemen that made her heart bounce and her cheeks flush? Kelvin had been a cowboy when she'd first seen him. She imagined Jack riding across his...

"I own over a hundred thousand acres. The house and gardens take up only two hundred. There's still work to do."

Jack's voice was so soothing. He seemed to have the power to draw her away from her morbid thoughts of Kelvin. "What is that?" she asked, indicating a cleared area on a hill on the far side of the lake. Formwork indicated a large construction in the early stages of progress.

"It will be a clinic. To help people from all over the world suffering from... how should I say... exotic conditions of the blood."

"You're a benefactor as well?"

He shrugged slightly, an uneasy gesture of self-consciousness. "One should do a little to ease what suffering one can. My contribution is of small consequence." There was a strangeness in his speech. The accent certainly, but there was something other-worldly about his choice of words.

Serena didn't like the way she had so easily given in to being here. He was a stranger and she was alone. She should really go.

His gaze was steady. His formerly open and friendly expression became one of intense concentration. She yawned.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You are very tired."

"I am," she sighed.

"Let me show you to the guest room." He scooped her into his arms and carried her up the steps into a white-tiled entrance hall. She caught glimpses of chandeliers, large gilt-edged paintings, ornate side tables, and a wide staircase that swept in a great curve from the entry parlor.

Serena felt so very relaxed in his grasp. She snuggled closer to his firm chest, drawing in the heat of his body. He carried her along a long corridor, pausing at one of

the rooms. Hanna stood there, a knowing smile on her wrinkled face. She held the door open for them.

“The guest room,” Jack was saying.

She caught glimpses of the old woman moving with tremendous speed to open doors, pull back curtains and turn down the bedclothes. The old lady pushed him out of the room as soon as Jack put her down. Then she fussed about Serena, taking off her clothes and guided her to the bed.

The soft bed welcomed her and then Serena was aware of nothing more.

Chapter 3

Jack frowned at his reflection. It was, more than anything, a weary countenance. But it was still human, though now it was only a façade, a caricature hiding something from humanity's worst nightmares. It was a construction of habit.

When he slept, he took on a more primal form, a form held in every chromosome of every human being, but only released when freed by a werewolf bite. Wouldn't that be a surprise to the molecular biologists when they stumble on it as they unraveled the human genome?

He smiled wryly at the thought. Though it was not a pretty countenance, it was not, as his mother would've said, *unfortunate*. Not bad for a face that was four centuries old.

He laughed softly to himself, but it came out deep and throaty. The sound disappointed him. It was nearing that time of the month.

"What is it like to be a twenty-first century werewolf?" he asked the mirror with a mock interviewer's voice favored by irritating early morning news commentators.

"It's bloody hard, quite frankly."

People were the problem. There were far too many. They were everywhere, wandering about with their cell phones and cameras. And they had confidence, too. Not like the Europe of his time. Feeding was always an issue now. They frowned at hunting by hand and eating raw meat on the hoof, as it were. Their delicate sensibilities were disturbed. In their fear they would hunt you down and try to kill you.

People didn't like being eaten either. The few times he'd taken human flesh, a few highwaymen, and once a band of brigands, he'd found it immensely pleasurable. The memory of hot blood coursing down his throat was still fresh. Oh, those were the

days. He'd reveled in the perverse primal freedom it had given him, to rend and kill and feed.

It had also disgusted him.

But no more of that now, he was a civilized wolf.

He bred his own cattle and sheep, supplementing his diet with the feral rabbits that were a scourge to the farmer. Jack was a good cattleman too. He'd become one of the largest meat exporters in the country.

Success and notoriety created its own problems. Having to officially recreate his identity every seventy years was a chore. Once again, the necessity to find a wife of convenience was looming before him. She would give him a fictitious child to pass off to the official world as his. Eventually he'd take over the identity when the "child" reached maturity.

Hanna had obliged him twice so far, pretending to marry him, but he felt it an imposition on their friendship to ask her to do that again.

That meant he'd have to find himself a wolfen bride. He dreaded it. He craved privacy and resented the prospect of giving it up to a bride for hire. Though he eschewed company, he recognized he was lonely because of it.

"No pleasing some people," he muttered. He'd been aware of this growing dissatisfaction with his life for the last several decades. Perhaps it was time for the inevitable. He rebelled against the thought, but the growing realization was clear. The reality was he needed someone by his side, someone special.

And here she was, against all probability, asleep in the next room.

Serena. What a beautiful woman. He'd recognized her as soon as the dust had cleared. She was captivating. He'd noted her sensuality during her many television appearances over the last decade, though she'd been constrained by her public notoriety. He'd often wondered what she'd be like beneath him, her thighs open to his power, her hot juices bathing his cock.

He cursed his reflection. He was a damned fool. What was the point of lusting after a human? He had no intention of turning her. That ritual was both painful and

demanding on the body. Because the human's basic physiology went under such drastic changes, most died during the process. He remembered his own transition. He would wish that pain on no one.

She was too beautiful to hurt. Those almond shaped eyes, one dark green and the other much paler, were so mesmerizing. It wasn't just her physical beauty that attracted him. It was her strong will, her confidence, her intelligence. He'd admired her for her convictions.

And now she was in his house.

He stopped himself going too far down that track. Love was not for him. But his persistent erection reminded him he had a beautiful woman, wearing next to nothing, lying asleep only a few meters down the hall. He hadn't been this close to a desirable woman for years. Decades actually.

Jack clamped down on the path these thoughts were taking him. Could he stay in his human form once he became aroused, so aroused that he was on the brink of climaxing? What would Serena do if he transmogrified while making love to her?

She'd run screaming from his bed, that's what she'd do. No. Sex with Serena was out of the question. Jack's throbbing cock disagreed. He sensed her tossing and turning in the next room. A wave of guilt passed over him. He'd had been away from women so long he'd forgotten the effect the mental leakage of wolven lust had on humans.

Jack returned to his bedroom. His evening clothes were laid out neatly on his bed. He smiled at the thought of the night ahead.

Chapter 4

Erotic images ebbed and flowed in Serena's restless thoughts. She often found it hard to sleep. Her mind was too active. Being the Deputy Prime Minister's Press Secretary meant she always had plenty going on. Writing speeches, composing press releases and negotiating interviews to satisfy the slaving news media had filled each and every day for the last ten years. By evening, her mind would be a restless cauldron of ideas, churning one over the other. Sleep never came easy.

This past week had been the mother of all weeks. She was knackered.

She didn't have time for luxuriating in steaming hot baths, only a quick shower before falling exhausted into bed. But even then she could never sleep. She'd wrestle with the night. She wouldn't take sleeping pills. She didn't want to run the risk of being groggy the next day.

Her solution whenever sleep evaded her was to think of Kelvin. Her fantasies were so detailed. She could smell him, taste him. She'd let her fingers touch her the way she wanted him to touch her.

Sometimes, like tonight, she imagined them lying together in bed. He'd hold her from behind, his arms wrapped around her naked body, her breasts locked within his encircling arms. His body behind her, his legs entwined about hers. His breath would be hot against her neck. His cock would be all too apparent, prodding into her back.

Serena cupped her breasts and prepared to enter one of her fantasies with Kelvin. She imagined his bright blue eyes, his dark hair, firm jaw and sensuous lips. She imagined he was here in bed with her now. The heat of his body pressing against her buttocks engulfed her like a raging fire. His fingers caressed her breasts while his tongue played at her ear lobes. She arched her back against him as his breath sent shivers of lust through her body.

She was breathing heavily now as his imagined hands caressed her breasts, gently tracing the coral halos of her nipples. Her pussy became wet with liquid heat and her pussy lips pulsed. She could sense her clit aching in expectation of his touch.

Kelvin's hands explored beneath her breasts and traced her belly down to the moist juncture of her thighs. He'd find her pussy naked, shaven and smooth. His fingers would slide over the warm, pulsating smoothness. Then he'd delve into the heat between her thighs, gently teasing her pussy lips apart and, collecting the wetness within, he'd smear her juices over her clit. His imaginary fingers would slide onto that nub of ecstasy, sending shivering bands of electricity cascading throughout her body.

Serena would open her eyes just before she peaked to look into Kelvin's face. She did now, but it was Jack who appeared in her fantasy now, his eyes whirlpools of deep ebony. She barely had time to register the switch before her orgasm took over. The pressure of Jack's fingers increased and the rubbing motion more determined as the ecstasy built into a crescendo of sensation, overwhelming her senses, exploding into a paroxysm of pure joy.

She was left panting, her breath catching in short sharp gasps. Instead of being satiated and ready for sleep, she was wide awake and, wantonly, ready for more. She threw herself across the bed and thought once more of Jack and searched for that elusive release.

Her eyes snapped open. She was not alone. There, standing in the half shadow by the window, was a man. The silvery moonlight caressed the masculine form and she gasped in fear before the shape resolved itself into Kelvin.

He was naked.

"Oh, my God."

Kelvin was holding out his arms to her, beckoning for her to join him at the window. Without hesitation, she climbed out of bed and stepped toward him.

"Serena," he whispered in a voice soft as moonlight.

"How did you find me?"

"We belong together, my love. I'll find you always."

"Why did you abandon me?" She searched his eyes for a sign, some irrefutable signal of his love.

"I'm sorry. Truly I am."

She stepped into his encircling arms. Her whole body ached with longing. She feared she might burst. "I'm so alone," she whispered into his naked chest.

"You're never alone. I'm with you. My thoughts are always with you."

"I want more than your thoughts," she cried into his chest. "I want you. I've always wanted you."

"And I you."

"Do you mean it?"

"I've always loved you Serena. We'll be together soon."

"When?"

"Soon."

Serena looked up at the soft lines of his face in the moonlight and slowly, as she watched, his features changed, and for a moment, in the silvery glow, he resembled some sort of beast. Serena stepped back in surprise and alarm. She blinked and shook her head. She was standing alone, naked, in a strange room.

Serena hurried back to bed. She crawled under the covers, wondering where she was. It all came flooding back to her like a blacksmith's hammer on an anvil; Kelvin's press conference, his resignation and cruel but honest denial of any relationship, the mad drive into the strange country and the strange beast of her imagination pursuing her.

She was in the house of a stranger. Jack Wolfe. She was overwrought, she decided. The disastrous week had weakened her, making her prey to strange dreams. Jack had entered her fantasies and his name, Wolfe, had entered her last dream, transforming Kelvin into a wolf.

Serena laughed out loud. "Idiot."

She became aware of music coming through the half open window.

As if she were still in her dream, she went to the window. The full moon cast deep shadows from the sheltering trees across manicured lawns. She rubbed her eyes in disbelief. It was like something out of an old fashioned movie.

Down in the garden, set between two expansive Moreton Bay fig trees, was a table covered in a white frilly cloth. Candles, set in elaborate candelabra fluttered gently in a slight breeze. A bottle of champagne sat in an ice bucket and two glasses, half filled, sat next to it. On the ground beside the table an old fashioned phonograph with a ridiculous trumpet speaker was playing a waltz -- "The Blue Danube."

Gliding between the table and the trees out into the clearing two people were dancing a waltz. They were very graceful, in tune with each other's movement. They were holding each other ever so tightly as if they didn't want to let go, gazing deeply into each other's eyes.

Serena could tell they were deeply in love.

She opened the window all the way so she could lean out and get a better look as the couple swirled below her in graceful unison. It was a magical sight. Like it came out of a story book or a beautiful dream.

The chilly air brushing her face told her she wasn't dreaming.

She sighed wistfully. The couple dancing below her were so obviously in love it hurt. Serena winced at the jab of jealousy. If only she could have even an iota of what they were expressing in that slow, sensuous waltz she would be the happiest woman alive.

The man was disturbingly familiar. Tall, masculine, dressed in a formal coat like something out of London society of the 1800s, he moved with a confident grace that was more animal than human. The dark-haired woman wore a beautiful silk ball gown which showed off her wasp thin waist and voluptuous décolletage. She was stunning.

Holding her by the waist, the man swung her around as if she were made of air. Their eyes locked in mutual embrace. She gazed up at him with unmistakable rapture.

Unaccountably, a pang of disappointment and jealousy washed over Serena. "Jack," she whispered to the night air.

She cursed herself for being so stupid to think a hunk like him wouldn't have a beautiful woman in love with him. Hell! She was surprised he didn't have a harem waiting on him hand and foot.

To think she'd even fantasized about him making love to her. Furious that he hadn't told her about the other woman in the house, Serena slammed the window shut and stomped back to bed, crawling under the covers and burying her face in the pillow.

She felt like an intruder in this strange place. She was supposed to be taking control of her life, not getting her heart broken all over again. She was to be the *femme fatale*, not a victim.

A victim no more, she told herself, and tried to sleep, accompanied by the haunting melody of "The Blue Danube."

Chapter 5

Jack watched Grigor and Hanna dance as they had in the 1920s when he'd first met them. Tonight was their one hundred and twentieth wedding anniversary. He remembered with fondness how they'd befriended him. They'd been married for fifty years when Jack had first knocked on the door of the house on the outskirts of Berlin. He was a stranger from the Balkans, yet they took him under their wing and rented him a small room from which he studied philosophy.

Nourished by Hanna's excellent cooking and entertained by Grigor's sharp sense of humor, they watched the gathering totalitarian storm. It was one of Grigor's acerbic jokes that brought the unwanted attention of the Nazi brown shirts who'd savagely attacked him and Hanna on their doorstep. Jack had made short work of the attackers but Hanna and Grigor were wounded. They were dying.

He'd been touched by the humanity of them both. So he did the only thing he could. He gave them life. They'd both survived the transformation and together they weathered the war. The three of them created havoc with the Nazi war effort by discreet acts of sabotage against the pack of werewolves who had sided with the Third Reich.

He sipped his wine and smiled as he watched them swing each other in glorious abandon. They were in love as much today as they'd been when they first met.

Jack envied them.

Such enduring love was uncommon. He'd expected them to part after a century together. Shape-shifter relationships were typically fluid. Eternity, after all, was a long time. But Hanna and Grigor were, it seemed, content with each other. They had been long before he turned them. They were soul mates.

And Grigor had certainly lucked out when he found Hanna. She was a real beauty.

They were wearing replicas of the clothes they wore in 1886 when they first met. Grigor assured him he actually had the athletic figure he was wearing for display tonight. Hanna nodded sweetly as she usually did when Grigor was exaggerating.

To honor the occasion, Jack was waiting on them and was also suitably attired. He wore a long morning coat with top hat, silk cravat and white gloves. He liked wearing the old styles, knowing they took him back to a time of elegance and simple pleasures.

He wished he had a partner so he too could waltz the night away. Jack looked up between the overhanging branches of the Moreton Bay at the window to Serena's room.

Jack sensed her standing there watching him. He flinched at her jealous fury.

Frowning, he tried to guess what would bring on such intense emotion. Jack refused the temptation to explore her mind as he had earlier in the day. Serena deserved her privacy. She'd been angry, bitter and confused, and no wonder at the way that stupid son of a bitch Waters had treated her. Not to mention the media feeding frenzy that wanted to sink its insatiable jaws into her.

He winced at the analogy.

For a moment, he considered inviting her to the celebration but she'd already returned to her bed and, he sensed, was crying herself to sleep.

Perhaps, like him, she was jealous of the love Grigor and Hanna had for each other. It was something they both lacked in their lives, someone to love.

Poor Serena and Jack, he mused. He wished her to sleep before turning his eyes back to the dancing couple, seeking refuge in the warm blanket of their love.

* * *

Early next morning, at what passed as the local train station, Jack watched Hanna transform herself into a perfect replica of Serena. Last night, after they celebrated their anniversary, both Hanna and Grigor enthusiastically agreed to help him solve a couple of Serena's problems, namely the government car and her fear of the media finding her.

He watched “Serena” make a reservation at a Perth hotel, using Serena’s credit card number. Then she bought a ticket to Perth from the ticket machine at the station. The station was far too small to warrant a station master and had one of those modern excuses for customer service, a vending machine.

Hanna winked when she said goodbye and handed the credit card to him. She walked back to the commonwealth car, got in, and drove out of the car park. Jack followed her to the police station. Hanna went inside to hand over the keys and report to Sergeant Bluey McKenzie. She would tell him she was heading off to the Excelsior Hotel in Perth and would ask him to call the Fleet Manager at Parliament House to send someone to pick up the car.

Jack could imagine the effusive Bluey getting all flustered at the very thought that the famous woman was actually in his station. He’d want to ring Parliament House right now, but Hanna would tell him that the train was arriving shortly and ask if he could possibly give her a lift back to the station.

Hanna appeared with the portly cop, who, clearly besotted by this important political personality, ushered her to his car.

Bluey drove Hanna back to the station and waited with her and Grigor, who had shifted into the form of a Swedish backpacker. Grigor would ask for directions to Adelaide and engage both Bluey and “Serena” in a long convoluted conversation that was badly in need of an interpreter.

Finally the train arrived and as it left the platform, Bluey gave the pair a friendly wave.

Jack smiled. Once the train was safely in motion the Swedish backpacker would shift into one of Grigor’s many guises and “Serena” would, of course, shift into one of Hanna’s other stunning personas.

Any waiting police or media in Perth would be disappointed when Serena failed to appear. They’d interview Bluey, of course, and be left mystified by his witnessing her getting on the train. She’d become a mystery for a day or two until the media found something else to occupy their gossipy natures.

The longer he could keep the hounds at bay the better. He wanted Serena to take as long as she needed to recuperate at his house. He hoped she'd appreciate the deception, even if she would never know how he had actually carried it out.

Grigor and Hanna would depart Perth for their anniversary holiday back to the home country and then some skiing in the Swiss Alps, while he had Serena all to himself.

Chapter 6

Serena had awakened hours before at the sound of car engines in the distance, but a lethargy had come over her and she had fallen back into a drowsy sleep populated by pleasant dreams of Jack. Despite her irrational anger at him last night, he stubbornly refused to get out of her fantasy.

She decided to go with it and brought herself to another orgasm. Her aching pussy and tingling clit had demanded it.

She'd imagined Jack taking her roughly from behind, doggy style, thrusting madly into her. Imaginary Jack had fucked her as if he were possessed. He grunted like an animal and howled when he came, pumping hot seed inside her. The thought of his semen flooding her pussy brought her own climax and she clenched her thighs around her hand.

She was lying in the wonderful lassitude that following a powerful orgasm when the gentle rap at the door snapped her back into the here and now. Jack pushed the door open a little and poked his head in. "You decent?"

"Of course," she said.

Dressed immaculately in tan slacks and a blue shirt, he was carrying a breakfast tray. The warm smell of bacon, eggs and toast filled her senses. In addition to the food and two glasses of orange juice, the tray held a crystal vase and a single red rose.

Serena's stomach rumbled. She wriggled up to sit against the headboard, pulling the covers up around her waist. Beneath it, she was aware that her nightdress was still bunched up around her waist.

With one hand, Jack pushed another pillow behind her back and set the tray onto her legs.

Serena watched him closely as he fussed about her and drew up a chair beside the bed.

"May I join you?" he asked.

"Of course."

His smile seemed uncertain when he noticed her eyes were on him instead of the food. "It will get cold," he said.

The delightful smell filled her nostrils and Serena lowered her eyes to the food.

How could he be so attentive to her this morning when last night he'd been in the arms of a beautiful woman? A woman he clearly loved.

What sort of two-timing sod was this?

She carefully spread some scrambled eggs onto the toast as she processed this notion.

"Are you going to watch me eat or are you going to join me?"

He smiled as he spooned some egg onto a piece of toast. "Sleep well?"

She nodded, her mouth too full to speak.

"So, what are you going to do?" he asked munching on the toast.

She shrugged. "Find a little town on the coast somewhere and write advertising copy."

"A waste, surely?"

"I don't think the world would be any poorer by my absence."

"Don't bet on it. Surely you've seen that Jimmy Stewart movie."

She shook her head wistfully. "I'm not going to kill myself," she snapped irritably.

"Well, that's a relief."

She looked away and munched on her toast as she thought about his words, aware that his gaze was still on her. "It's not been a very wonderful life," she murmured.

He smiled, eager to cheer her up. "You always brightened up my world."

"I did?" she asked doubtfully. "How?"

"Every time you were on TV. There you were, in the corner of the shot, at the edge of the stage, directing people here and there."

She knew she'd been caught on film many times despite her attempts to avoid it. Kelvin used to gleefully point her out as they watched the news, saying that she was much prettier and smarter than he was, and that she should be Deputy PM instead of him. She hadn't realized the general public would've noticed her. She said as much.

"Well, I'm sure every red-blooded male in the country noticed and lusted after you."

"Stop it," she pleaded, thinking her barely contained laughter would erupt and make her spray egg all over the beautiful bedspread.

"It's true," he said.

She blushed. "Well, it's all over now."

"I don't think so," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"You'll probably write a book about it."

"There's not going to be any book."

"But it's expected. Just think of the publishers that will be clamoring at your door. You'll be able to name your price."

The laughter died in her chest. "I won't do anything to hurt Kelvin."

"You still care about him then."

"Of course."

"Even though by denying you he left you swinging in the wind."

The desire to defend Kelvin was strong. "He did what he had to do. He did the honorable thing."

"A politician to the end."

The bitterness in his voice surprised her. After all, she should be the one bitter and swearing revenge on the man who had done nothing to protect her. She should hate the man who'd denied his feelings for her. The man who went back to the wife he didn't love.

She shook her head. "It would only be a betrayal if we had an affair. We didn't. He had nothing to protect me from. He denied the affair. He told the truth."

"Then it's a misunderstanding?"

"Yes. Absolutely. A misunderstanding."

"Then why did you run away?"

"Because..."

"You love him, don't you?"

She couldn't speak. Who was this guy to question her like this? They were strangers, for God's sake. He was talking to her like he was her older brother, reprimanding her for dating an unsuitable boy.

He pressed on. "Why did he resign if it was only a misunderstanding?"

"His position was untenable. The PM saw a chance to draw away Kelvin's support. They cut and run, and he had no backers left."

Jack shook his head. "By resigning it makes you look like the guilty party. It seems like you were the one in control of the relationship. He'll go back to his wife with his tail between his legs like a repentant sinner and leave you looking like the floozy that almost destroyed his marriage. He didn't do the honorable thing at all."

"If you're so smart, what would you have done?"

"Toughed it out. Lived to fight another day and get the bastards next time. He gave up too easily. He made you the patsy in the eyes of the world because he couldn't stand the heat." He took a mouthful of toast and crunched it loudly.

Toughed it out indeed! How like a man. He didn't know what politics was like. It was a brutal, savage place... though she knew some of what he said made sense.

Kelvin hadn't fought very hard to stay. She'd been too embarrassed and distressed to notice it at the time. A normal political crisis she could've dealt with like she had in the past, but this time she was the focus of the media attention.

She realized she hadn't coped at all well. She'd stumbled and let Kelvin be influenced by the numbers the head counters were giving him when she should have been in charge and told him to tough it out, just like Jack had said. "I let him down."

"No you didn't. I saw it live on TV. He cut and ran."

A tear trickled down her cheek.

"I'm sorry," Jack said, reaching out and brushing it away. "I shouldn't have said any of that."

"Why did you?"

"I hate seeing innocent people mistreated."

She managed a smile. "Thank you for believing in me."

"It's easy. You're telling the truth."

"How do you know I'm telling the truth?"

He shrugged. "It's a knack I have."

A moment later she became aware that he was frowning at her. "Now where have you gone?"

"Sorry. I was thinking I should write that book."

"I was joking," he chided.

"But don't you see? I can write the truth because it can't hurt Kelvin. Only vindicate him."

Jack rolled his eyes. "You don't have to save him, Serena. He's safe, home with his wife now. A book from you might seem to be a case of Lady Macbeth. 'Methinks the lady doth protest too much'."

"You'd make a good adviser."

"If there's a vacancy, I'd like to apply."

She shot him a glance. He was serious. "Won't your friend object?"

"My friend?"

"Your dance partner."

"My... ah," he laughed. "That was Grigor and Hanna. My retainers."

"Your retainers..." She was relieved and embarrassed at the same time.

"They make a marvelous couple, don't they? It was their anniversary yesterday. They celebrated with a champagne dinner and a dance. I did the cooking."

"You did?"

"Oh, yes. I'm quite accomplished in the kitchen."

I bet you are. "I'll have to wish them all the best."

"They are on their second honeymoon, a world trip," he said and then added casually, "They left this morning."

Fear stabbed at her stomach. "Then we're..." She let her voice trail off, not wishing to state the disturbing truth.

He smiled. "Alone? Yes, we are."

"I remember an older lady last night."

His face fixed. It was a slight change but she noticed it nonetheless. "There is the cook," he said hastily. "Mrs.... er... Cook."

"Mrs. Cook." She pursed her lips. *Sure there is.* "I'll be leaving as soon as I get dressed," she announced.

His jaw dropped. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I am," she said curtly.

He lowered his eyes and cleared his throat. "You'll have a bit of difficulty with that," he said hesitantly.

She looked at him, waiting for an explanation.

"You don't have a car."

"What do you mean? Where's my car?"

"I took the liberty of dropping it off at the police station. I explained you'd caught a train to Perth."

She was furious. "You did what?"

"I thought you'd need some time to yourself."

She couldn't believe it. He'd actually gone and taken her car.

"The news bulletin last night said the Federal Police were searching for your car."

She nodded slowly. "It belongs to the commonwealth car fleet," she explained hesitantly, still not believing what he'd done. It was sheer arrogance to take matters into his own hands without even consulting her. It was outrageous!

It was as if he was reading her mind. "I'm sorry for being presumptuous, but the news worried me. Grigor and Hanna were leaving this morning, and you were sound asleep so I couldn't ask permission. I thought the last thing you needed was the Federal Police on your back. I figured it best to get the car handed in. I had all your belongings put in the wardrobe for you."

"Let me get this straight. You took my car?"

"For your own good," he explained.

"Just who the hell do you think you are?"

"I did it for your own good," he repeated, his face hardening.

"I can make my own decisions, if you don't mind! I've never seen anything so patronizing and condescending. *For my own good?* This is the twenty-first century, for God's sake. Men don't do things like this."

She pushed the tray toward him and he grabbed it to stop the tumblers of orange juice from toppling over.

She flung the coverlet from her and swung her naked legs over the side of the bed. Serena realized immediately her nightgown was still bunched about her waist, exposing her thighs. She didn't care. She just wanted to get dressed and get out of here.

Her feet touched the soft carpet beside her bed and when she put her weight on them, her legs trembled. Her head swam and she collapsed back onto the bed.

Instantly Jack was at her side, holding her firmly around the shoulders and pushing her gently back into the warmth of the bed when she tried to rise again. She sank back into the bed's soft embrace and weakly accepted his ministrations as he pulled her nightgown down her legs, and then lifted the coverlet up around her shoulders.

"I don't feel so well," she whispered. "What have you given me?"

He laughed. "You think I've drugged you? Don't be silly. You're suffering from exhaustion. The last week has obviously been hell for you. You need to relax. You're safe here. Trust me."

"You're a stranger. How can I trust you?"

"You have nothing to fear, Serena. Believe me. In time you'll understand that."

In time? How much time did he mean? This guy was clearly a weirdo. She tried to think of the movie where the mad guy kidnapped women and kept them locked up in his basement while he showered gifts on them. What was that called? The Collector? Maybe he was like that, collecting women for his own warped amusement.

"I'm not some sort of whacko," he said softly, resuming his seat and replacing the tray on her lap.

She shot him a glance. It was as if he was in her mind reading her very thoughts.

"Calm down and have some orange juice."

"I don't want any."

"It will do you good."

"Don't be so bloody patronizing."

He took a deep breath. Though his face was impassive she sensed he was controlling his exasperation with her. Digging into his pocket he produced a key ring. He slipped off a key and placed it on the breakfast tray. "I apologize for upsetting you. I have a second car you may borrow when you wish to leave. It's a red sports car. Red ones go faster, I'm told. I know you can handle a high performance vehicle, but I would like it back unmarked."

She couldn't help but laugh. "I promise not to scratch it."

"So, now that you have your escape car organized, will you have some orange juice?"

"How do I know it's not drugged?"

He rolled his eyes. "Suit yourself, don't have the orange juice," he said, picking up the tumbler and draining it. He replaced the empty glass and reached for the other one but she beat him to it. She was dying of thirst and she really didn't think he was drugging her. He was much too charming for that. He'd never have to resort to something like that to get a woman into his bed.

She swallowed a big mouthful of juice and licked her lips. It felt invigorating.

"Sweet, is it not? I grow my own oranges," he said proudly.

She agreed the juice was delicious. "And the eggs?"

"Free range."

"The toast?"

"Store bought, but I operated the toaster myself."

She laughed. "So everyone thinks I've traveled to Perth?"

"I thought the other side of the country was a good place to send the news hounds. They can chase their tails until you're ready to reenter the world."

"That would be never."

The more she thought about it, the better she felt about him disposing of the car. The Federal Police would've searched for it. She didn't want to be found just yet. But she was still angry that he'd done it without even consulting her. "But they'll soon figure out I didn't get off at Perth."

He shrugged. "They'll backtrack, stopping at every train stop until they get to the local police station, and the reliable Sergeant McKenzie will attest he helped you onto the train himself."

"How did you manage that?"

"Hanna is a beautiful woman. She looks a lot like you."

She felt her face flush at the compliment.

"Bluey, Sergeant McKenzie, that is, won't know the difference. We also used your credit card to book a room at the Excelsior Hotel in Perth." He led up her hand to forestall her complaint. "I will reimburse any funds the transaction costs you. I've returned your card to your purse," he said and motioned to the bedside table.

She reached over, grabbed the bag and checked her purse. The card was in place, as was the sixty-five dollars in cash.

"All there?" he asked sardonically.

She gave him a sour look and put her bag beside her on the bed.

He stood up abruptly. "I have some arrangements to make."

"Arrangements?"

"What shall I tell Cook to prepare for lunch?"

"I may not stay for lunch."

"You're still tired. Of course you'll stay for lunch. What would you like?"

She pursed her lips at his arrogance and shrugged petulantly. "Whatever."

He smiled cheekily. "I'll tell Cook. I'm sure she knows what that means." Jack paused at the door and looked over his shoulder at her. "Would you like your laptop set up in the library or do you prefer to keep it up here?"

"Why would I want my laptop?"

"To start your book. The insider's story on the tangled political machinations of the government."

"I thought you said you were joking?"

"I was, at first, but I figure you'll need a place to work, a secluded place where you can concentrate and be assured of privacy."

His playful expression was too self-assured to ignore. "I could go to my sister's."

He screwed up his face and shook his head. "Like all older sisters, she'd eat up all your time giving you advice. You'd hate it."

He'd picked Jessica's personality to the proverbial "T", but she didn't want to give him the satisfaction of knowing that. "My sister is too sensible for that," she said.

"No, she's not," he said casually and shut the door.

She stared at the door for a full minute wondering how the hell he knew Jessica was the eldest.

Chapter 7

Jack cursed himself for a fool as he bounded down the staircase. He'd been too smart by half. The idea was not to let on he could read her mind. But he couldn't resist the temptation. She brought out a playfulness in him that had been dormant for years -- decades -- a century.

She was smart too. He liked that.

She'd caught him out in a lie. She didn't believe he had a cook. He had to prove to her that she wasn't alone, that she was safe and sound. He had to produce a cook. An old crone like the one Hanna had portrayed last night.

Where the hell was he going to dig up an old lady? He took a deep breath. He hated pretending to be a woman. The last time was in 1944 when he'd dressed up as an aged peasant to smuggle bombs on board a Nazi supply train.

He tried to conjure up the idea of a peasant woman. He felt his body start to change and, satisfied he remembered enough of the physiognomy of an old crone, he stopped the shift. Not yet. He had a few other things to arrange first.

Uneasy after a restless night in which sleep would not come, he'd sensed something as he'd driven home from the train station, especially when he'd stopped to open a gate. As soon as he breathed the fresh air into his nostrils, the musky trace set off alarm bells. It was a scent that was faintly familiar, but like a distant memory it was difficult to place. And that worried him.

He had to check it out but didn't want to leave Serena to her own devices. She might get it into her head that she could leave. Especially now that he'd given her the keys to a car. He stretched out his thoughts to her. She was lying quietly, listening to the sounds of the house, the light breeze stirring the trees. Her mind was in turmoil. She

couldn't decide if she believed him or not, if he was harmless or a serial killer, plotting her death.

Part of her was attracted to him, and his libido responded to that. But another part of her was very wary of him.

Jack stretched out his will, and he sensed her relax and then her eyes closed. He rationalized his use of his psychic powers by telling himself that Serena needed the rest. If she hadn't been so tired, he couldn't have influenced her so easily. The limits of his power were that he could only influence impulses that already existed in the mind of the recipient.

He hurried down the stairs and out the back door to the garage, past the red sports car he'd promised Serena, and climbed onto the dirt bike he used to round up stock.

He roared down a track through a stand of eucalypts and to the back paddocks where they kept one of their herds of cattle. There he found Bill Jones, his head stockman who lived in the town.

They passed the time of day and a few stray comments about the approaching storm front that threatened from the southwest. Bill was worried about the calves and suggested taking the herd into a sheltered area on the leeward side of a ridge. Jack concurred and suggested he hire some lads from the village to help him as he was tied up.

"I found a dead 'un by the creek," Bill reported.

"Shooters?"

The past few years they'd had problems with so-called hunters from the city. They'd descend on properties all across the state during long weekends. The weekend warriors were after kangaroos but their indiscriminate shooting left any creature unfortunate enough to be in range at risk. Jack had run off a group of roo-shooters last year. He smiled inwardly at the panic the drunkards had shown when he'd made his bestial appearance.

Bill shook his head. "Not likely this time. It's the damndest thing. Guttled and drained of blood it was."

A chill shot down Jack's spine. "I'll check it and get Bluey to have a word with any newcomers to town. Get some help to move the cattle."

He knew the spot Bill described and went off to inspect the dead calf. Its throat had been torn and its belly sliced open, but there was not a drop of blood on the ground or on its lifeless hide.

It had been killed for one purpose only. Its blood.

It was as he'd feared. A feral wolfen was about. The calf was redolent in its scent, the smell of a male werewolf, a very powerful male. The scent was different to the one he had sensed before. This was a disturbing realization. There were several wolfen about.

But who would trespass on Jack's property? He was known in the wolfen community to be a welcoming host. A local werewolf would not have been so rude as to feed alfresco without permission.

He looked around for telltale signs. Paw prints, large ones, scuffed the dirt around the corpse.

Thunder exploded on the horizon. Jack hoped Bill had contacted his regular crew of lads from the village in time to help him get the herd to safety. At any other time, he and Bill would've done the job themselves, but this development was too urgent to leave unattended.

He widened his search for clues. He followed the paw prints to the creek where they disappeared into the shallow water. The wolfen had deliberately gone to the water to disguise its passage and to wash.

Who could it be? The wolfen population in Australia was relatively small, certainly not as big as the US, Europe or Asia, but it was a well disciplined pack. The constant danger of exposure kept everyone watchful and careful. The turning of humans into werewolves was discouraged, simply because it wasn't sensible. The Wolfen Council was the supreme bureaucracy involved in granting permission to turn a

human into a werewolf. They rarely permitted it nowadays and so numbers were kept at a manageable rate. The reason was simple. Too many shape shifters risked detection and if history was any indication detection meant death.

Recently turned wolfens sometimes went through a feral stage. While they grew accustomed to their new skin, they were unpredictable. He remembered his own turning. But the times were different. Back then the whole world was wild and behavior such as his was easily hidden.

The Hunters, the enforcement arm of the Wolfen Council, were licensed to kill and were a thoroughly dislikeable bunch. When the worldwide council was inaugurated fifty years ago Jack had washed his hands of it. It had the potential to turn into something like the totalitarian Nazis who he'd fought so hard against.

But they had kept conflict between wolfen and humans at a minimum and persecution had dropped to an almost imperceptible rate.

The condition of the calf carcass, however, suggested it had been killed by an experienced wolfen. Not that calves were hard to hypnotize, but a newly turned wolfen lacked skill and was more likely to panic its prey.

This slaughter was done by an old, experienced wolfen. But it was well known that Jack gave traveling shape-shifters permission to hunt and feed on his property for free. So this individual didn't want to be identified. Jack hadn't heard of any recent problems in wolfen society that would cause a wolfen to become an outcast.

Though he had occasional disagreements with his shape-shifting brethren, Jack was not hated by anyone, at least to his knowledge. It was probable then that the perpetrator was passing through, unlikely to make Jack the focus of his visit.

If that was the case, there was nothing to worry about. Unless, that is, he was searching for something, or someone. The only person he could be searching for would be Serena. Why she would be of interest to a wolfen Jack had no idea.

With increasing anxiety, he climbed onto his bike. He needed to be close to her.

Chapter 8

Serena dozed fitfully. Strange dreams wafted in and out of her consciousness. Dreams of Kelvin. He was looking for her, searching everywhere, their joint office in Canberra, his electoral office, her parents and sister's homes. He was searching along roads and creeks. He was close to panicking because he couldn't find her.

She stirred. A motorcycle roared up to the house, its staccato pulsing, shattering the heavy silence. Yawning, she went to the window and pulled aside the delicate lace curtains in time to see Jack climb off the bike.

Serena admired his athletic form, the way he glided up the path to the front steps. Jack's determined stride had a sort of animal simplicity to it. She hadn't been aware of it when she was in the room with him, but from a distance he seemed at one with the world around him.

He paused at the first step and looked up to her window. A wave of desire flooded her belly. She drew back behind the curtain but had the distinct feeling he had seen her and that he was smiling. With equal certainty she knew he would come up to see her.

She ran back to bed and climbed beneath the covers, patting down the coverlet so it molded her body.

She waited.

And waited.

Her eyes grew heavy. The surreal dreams of Kelvin searching for her returned. Only this time Kelvin found her... in the arms of Jack.

She started awake at the sound of a knock on the bedroom door and her heart jumped inside her chest. "Come in."

The door swung open to reveal an old gray-haired woman dressed in a shapeless, flowered smock. She must have been ninety years of age, her withered brown skin drawn taut over the bones of her face so that she resembled a mummified cadaver.

But as she watched, the wizened features softened. Her first impression must have been a trick of the light. The old woman shuffled into the room carrying a tray on which an ornate silver teapot steamed beside a delicate teacup.

"Master bid me ask you what you would like to eat." The voice was old and brittle, with a definite European accent. It was a voice of ages.

Serena considered her with a gentle smile. Master indeed. She knew exactly who this old woman was.

* * *

Serena had been watching him from the window. He sensed her scrutiny as soon as he climbed off the bike. Even through the lace curtains he could make out her face. She was so breathtakingly beautiful. The base drum of his heart set up a staccato rhythm and his stomach felt hollow.

He wondered if she knew the effect she had on men. His cock strained in his pants. The strength of his desire surprised him. She was quite a catch, but who was he kidding? It was she who had captivated him.

"What am I playing at?" he asked himself as he strode up the stairs and opened the front door.

There was no way he could get involved with this woman. *Sure*, he told himself, *get to know her, enjoy her company, soak in her beauty, but do not surrender yourself to her.*

But why not?

Why not enjoy her for an eternity? Oh, what pleasure they could have. The pleasure they could exact from the world. They could have such a life together.

His cock was still tenting his trousers. He hadn't been this aroused for decades... longer. He found the sensation... uncomfortable.

What to do about it?

Agitated beyond all reason, he stormed into the library and flung himself into a leather armchair only to immediately stand and pace before the fireplace. Flinging himself back into the chair, he swore that he would not go upstairs to her.

She was waiting for him, he knew. He could sense her anticipation.

He stood up, paced again, and then came to a decision.

He'd make her a cup of tea.

It was the only thing he could think of to put her at ease. Serena still didn't trust him. Why should she? It was only that she was stressed and tired that she had been so easy to manipulate. Why else would she put up with his strange behavior?

He bounded up the stairs and into Hanna's walk-in wardrobe where he found the "cook" outfit she'd worn when they'd had human guests. Then he gathered some ribbon and undergarments.

He went to his room and stripped off in front of the mirror. His cock was rampant, throbbing with his heartbeat.

This is ridiculous. He needed something to squash these lusty thoughts and adopt a convincing disguise.

What did an old cook look like?

He conjured up an image of his paternal grandmother when he'd last seen her, feeding the chickens outside their ramshackle hut. He took a deep breath and started to shift.

First his body shrank, he became squat, bent over, his skin darkened and withered before his eyes which in turn became yellow and dim. His jaw diminished and his teeth yellowed. His hair lengthened and grayed so that it hung over his furrowed brow like thin wire.

What was below the waist he left alone, hoping he would be able to control the erection which still tented his boxers.

Satisfied with his change, he pulled on the formless blue flowered smock, and tied up his hair with a piece of red ribbon.

The main difficulty in shifting was maintaining the body shape. His “natural” wolfen form he could keep without conscious thought. But other shapes took significant concentration to maintain.

He needed a few minutes to adapt to his new shape.

Walking, or rather shuffling, was a difficult task. He wanted to stride along, but the new skeleton he’d made for himself just didn’t want to extend itself that far. He was still as powerful as always, but the shape just didn’t accommodate the raw power of a wolfen.

In the kitchen he got used to handling objects and balancing them on the tray. He had to be convincing and he practiced picking up the tray and putting it down to pour in the tea into the little cup with out spilling too much.

A little clumsiness, he reasoned, Serena would put down to old age.

Satisfied with his skills, he put the steaming pot on the tray with the little cup and saucer, the sugar bowl, milk jug and spoon and with measured steps, carried them up the grand staircase to her room.

He knocked softly. “Come in,” she called and he detected the uncertainty in her voice. He stepped into the room.

She looked at him oddly, her eyes taking in his whole body, focusing on his face. He sensed her surprise as his gaunt appearance and felt she was more menaced than put at ease with his cadaverous façade. He willed his face to fill out and soften a little and was glad she put it down to a trick of the light. As he approached the bed, he noticed she was gazing at his hands which he hoped were withered enough to resemble a ninety-year-old woman. He worried that maybe he’d overdone the liver spots.

“Master bade me ask you what you would like to eat,” he said in a voice that surprised him. He sounded just like his paternal grandmother.

Jack avoided her eyes, but saw the smile flash across her face and his heart jumped. She was beautiful, sitting up in bed, dressed in a white nightgown. She looked almost virginal.

His cock stirred and he feared his whole disguise would collapse.

"I know who you are."

He froze. "You do?"

"You're Jack's grandmother. Aren't you?"

He was too stunned to reply.

"It's the accent," she explained. "You and Jack sound alike. And there's a family resemblance."

He poured the tea.

"So how long have you been in this country?"

"Many years."

"Did you come with Jack or later?"

"Later."

"How old was he when he came over?"

What a question. He was several centuries old when he first came to Australia. "He was a babe," he said.

He held up the milk jug and Serena nodded. "Two sugars, thanks."

He completed making the tea and held out the cup and saucer to her. His hands were trembling. A good effect, he hoped, but it wasn't acting. He was having trouble maintaining his disguise. "What would you like to eat?"

She took a sip of tea. "Mmmm. That's wonderful. What sort of tea is that?"

"It's from the old country," Jack said, having no idea what blend of tea it was.

"And where is the old country?"

"It doesn't exist now. It is long gone."

An awkward silence filled the room. Confusion swamped his thoughts. He didn't want to be beguiled into a conversation he couldn't sustain. She hadn't yet said what she wanted for lunch and he wavered, uncertainty eating at his stomach.

"Tell me about him."

He opened his ninety-year-old mouth, but nothing came out so he stood there, silently. "The kitchen," he muttered. "I must..."

"Don't go," she pleaded. "Sit down and talk awhile."

"I..."

"Please. I've been so alone for so long. I haven't been able to talk to a normal person in years. Please."

Without answering he sat on the chair at her bedside.

"Was he a naughty boy?"

"A naughty boy?" he repeated, his mind swirling in greater confusion.

"What's the naughtiest thing he ever did?"

A memory, hidden by the blanket of time, awoke from its slumber and stretched its arms into his consciousness. A story his grandmother had delighted in telling every time they had company.

It was a moment before he realized she was studying his face intently, waiting patiently for him to respond. "He hid our dinner in a bucket and put it down the well."

Serena's puzzled expression made him laugh, and the cackling sound so reminded him of his grandmother that he felt tears welling up in his eyes.

"His favorite chicken," he explained as if he were talking about a strange gangly little boy he knew instead of himself. "His brother told him we were eating it that night."

Serena put her hand to her mouth. "So he hid it?"

Jack nodded. He hadn't thought about little Grete for centuries. He'd raised the bird from the egg, fed it, petted it, protected it from his evil brother and even slept with it. Tears streamed down his cheek.

"That wasn't naughty," Serena said with laughter in her voice. "It was lovely."

Jack simply nodded, not wishing to complete the story. She didn't understand that that winter the bandits had raided the village and slaughtered the men, his father included. By hiding Grete, a small naïve attempt at mercy, he'd threatened his family's very survival.

A wistful expression crossed Serena's face. "He is a handsome man," she said.

Jack's heart thudded in his chest.

"I bet he's broken a lot of hearts."

Jack didn't trust himself to respond. His eyes fell to the swell of her breasts and his groin ached. He looked away hurriedly.

"Has he been married?"

Jack nodded, not liking where this was heading. He started to rise, to get out before he betrayed himself, before his lust broke free.

"I'm sorry. I didn't introduce myself. I'm Serena." She held out her hand

Jack reached out and touched her fingers. Though brief the touch was electric. He released her and started to turn.

"Please stay. You didn't tell me your name."

"Olga."

"Please stay, Olga. I'd like to talk. I appreciate Jack's help, but I don't want to intrude on his social life. If he has friends... girlfriends... I don't want to upset things."

"No. No girlfriends."

"He's not... he does like girls doesn't he?"

Jack couldn't help but smile. "Yes, yes he does!"

"Well, that's a relief."

"Is it?"

"Yes. It would be such a waste for us girls if he didn't." Her laugh was hesitant.

"I suppose you know who I am. Jack told you?"

Jack nodded, still avoiding her eyes. "You've had troubles."

"In buckets. I don't know what to do."

"The vultures will hunt you down if you leave."

"I'm sorry?"

"The newspapers. The rabid dogs will not leave you alone. Never."

Serena sighed deeply, her breasts swelling as she did. The coverlet dropped away and he could see the curve of those magnificent feminine orbs. He groaned.

"Are you all right?" Serena had leant forward, reaching out to him, pushing away the coverlet completely exposing her golden legs as she knelt on the top of the bed.

His lust threatened to explode. He clamped down on his burgeoning desire. "Yes. Yes I am."

She rested her arm on his, softly caressing his wrinkled skin. "I guess you're right. Well, I know you are right, about the media, that is. I know these media people very well. You're spot on. They're like rabid dogs." She laughed. "Once they get hold of me, they won't let go. And there's nowhere to hide."

"You can stay here."

"No. That wouldn't be right. I couldn't intrude."

"It is nothing," Jack said, putting that persuasive lilt in his voice that his grandmother would use to cajole and force submission in her children. "Jack wants you to stay." He worried he'd said it too eagerly, but she only blushed.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. He likes you."

"Why would he be interested in me? I'm not beautiful... like... Hanna. I've got at least fifteen kilos on her."

Jack stared aghast. "No, no," he said, shaking his aged head. "Serena, don't you understand? The body is nothing."

She snapped him a sudden glance. "What do you mean the body is nothing?"

Jack reached out and clasped her hand in his. Her warmth energized his wolfen self and he struggled for control. "It is a mere shell, a husk. Like clothes you put on and take off, nothing more."

"I like to think that. Thank you."

Jack's lust threatened to overtake him. His cock stirred as if begging for release. "Tell me what you want to eat and I will make it for you."

Serena clasped her arms about her naked legs, giving him a flash of pink panties. "I need to stretch my legs. I'll come down to the kitchen and help."

"No!" Serena jumped at his abrupt answer. "I'm sorry. Jack wants you to rest."

"I'm rested enough. Shame on him for making you do all the work."

He didn't know how to deter her without spoiling the trust he'd built.

She put her arms about his shoulders. "Please?"

Her nearness almost sent him over the edge. Her intoxicating scent and the warmth of her body overwhelmed him. With her hot breath on his cheek, he nearly lost control and revealed himself. He wanted to take her in his arms and show her she was the most desirable woman in the world.

Serena kissed his cheek then bounded out of bed and rushed to the wardrobe. She rummaged through the clothes Jack and Hanna had hung up when she first arrived. She held some of the dresses in front of her to look in the mirror and asked his opinion but elected, she said because she didn't feel like dressing up too much, for a gray track suit.

Without a trace of shyness, she pulled her nightgown over her head, revealing her golden flesh.

Jack sat there open mouthed admiring the suppleness of her body, her large, ripe breasts tipped with coral-hued nipples, her shapely thighs and the hairless juncture of her legs.

She pulled the track suit pants over her legs, putting her arms into the sleeves of the top, and slipping it over her head.

His mouth had dried completely. He tried to swallow but couldn't. Instead he choked. Serena came over to him. She put her arm around him. Her breasts, now safely covered, pressed against the naked flesh of his forearm. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," he said eventually, his voice weak from concentration. His hold over his human form was weakening. His lusty cock tented his boxers and he fought to control it, to think of something else. Like baseball!

Serena's heavenly aura surrounded him. He breathed in her essence and it filled him completely, the warm tendrils caressing every fiber of his being. His head swam and he feared he would lose control. He could feel her warmth through the material of Hanna's dress. Her breast rested on his arm and he fought the urge to take it in his palm, lower his head and lick that coral nipple.

"Are you sure you're okay?"

He coughed again and, with an exhausting effort of will, defeated his erection. "It's all right, Miss."

"Serena, please. Now, let's go and fix lunch."

She released him and he thanked the gods. He couldn't hold out much longer. His libido, suppressed for so long, was battering his psyche. She straightened the top and played with her hair in front of the mirror as she waited for him to shuffle awkwardly to the door.

"You don't look well," she said when they finally reached the kitchen. "Why don't you sit down and I'll make lunch?"

"No, Miss..."

"I don't feel like anything special. What is Jack having?"

"He hasn't said."

"What do you normally make him?"

Jack desperately tried to think what Hanna usually made him and Grigor for lunch. "Sandwiches."

"Why don't I make him a sandwich? Does he like tomatoes?"

"Yes."

"Bananas?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll make him my most favorite sandwich of all time."

"He'll like that."

"Then you sit there and I'll make you one too."

Jack watched her in amused silence as she prepared the sandwiches, chatting away about her childhood in Queensland. Suddenly she stopped. "Has Jack ever been married?"

He hesitated. He'd thought he'd escaped that question in the bedroom. But evidently she was insistent on knowing. He decided honesty was best. It would be one less lie he'd have to maintain. "Yes, Miss."

Serena's expression clouded for a moment. "He's not now?"

"No. She died, many years ago."

The cloud deepened. "That's very sad. He loved her deeply?"

"As deep as the oceans," he said softly.

Serena reached out a comforting hand and laid it on his withered bones. Her sadness was genuine. "How did she die?"

He responded before he could stop himself. The bitterness in his voice was tangible. "Bastard hunters."

Serena started at the sharpness in her voice. "An accident? How tragic. I'm so sorry. Did you know her?"

He barely resisted the temptation to shout it was no accident, but an act of vicious, heartless cruelty. "She was the most beautiful, the most graceful woman in the world."

"He must have been devastated," she sighed.

He couldn't answer. His exhaustion at maintaining this stupid façade was almost overwhelming.

"I bet there's been a lot of women since, wanting to take his mind off her loss." He saw her blush at the question. "I'm sorry. That was a stupid thing to say."

He held up his withered hand. "No. No, there hasn't. He's not like that."

"Loyal, I like that in a man."

His heart jumped at the idea that she could respect him. "And do you have a man, Miss?"

"Oh, yes. Haven't you seen the news? He's a loyal man too. I've loved him for ten years, worked so closely with him that it hurt. But he was married and he never broke his marriage vows."

"That's unusual," Jack murmured, not believing a word of it. "This man, he knew you loved him?"

"Oh, yes. We even talked about it once. He said he loved me too, but he also loved his wife and wouldn't do anything to hurt her."

"And he kept you with him, even knowing you were suffering?"

"It was my choice," Serena said defensively. "He needed me to manage his career."

"He seems a very cruel man." Jack imagined the ego of the man, stroked every day by this beautiful, intelligent women who he'd kept at arm's length so he could bathe in her adoration. What a bastard.

"I thought so sometimes. But he often said I'd have a better life away from him. Do you think it silly," she said softly, "to keep yourself for a dream?"

"Sometimes, if it is not returned."

She nodded. "I think had I not known he loved me, that he was completely not interested in me, that I would've gone. But I could see he did. His every word, his every movement told me we were soul mates. I know I was a fool. It could never be. I should have ended it and found someone else."

"You will find happiness."

She shook her head. "But you only get one soul mate."

He wanted to shout out that was poppycock! If only she knew how many years he'd wasted on that silly notion. "Perhaps," he said at last, "there is more than one soul mate for each of us. I think you'll find someone worthy."

"Did you, Olga?"

"Yes," he said immediately, surprised at her perceptiveness. "I am very tired now. I must go."

"I've made sandwiches for Jack. Where is he?"

"He'll be in the library," he said.

Serena put her arms on Jack's shoulders. "Thank you for listening. I haven't told anyone those things before. You know, I find you very easy to talk to."

"They say I am a good listener."

She kissed him on the cheek. He raised his frail arms and hugged her but with the strength of a man in love.

He recoiled, releasing her immediately. He couldn't do this to her. He couldn't fall in love with her. He couldn't make her fall in love with him. It would be just too unfair to make her love him and then disappoint her as he knew he would.

He had to get out.

Chapter 9

Serena took a surprised breath as she watched Jack's grandmother leave the kitchen. She was incredibly strong for her age. Despite her pleading tiredness, Serena sensed that the old woman was as strong as an ox. Her shoulders still felt the strength of her embrace.

An impressive old lady indeed and the family resemblance was very strong.

Even the way she moved, gracefully and smoothly, she could have sworn it was Jack walking away from her.

Serena giggled at the story she'd told about Jack hiding the chicken. It occurred to her that Jack couldn't be his real name. She spoke of a European upbringing she was sure. She'd have to ask him.

Serena was pleased that he wasn't the typical macho, arrogant male and the fact that he had a tragic past made him infinitely more interesting.

That it was so tragic she regretted. To lose the love of your life would have been devastating, and that he had grieved and stayed loyal to her memory was special. He was one of a kind.

As she made another banana and tomato sandwich, sprinkling brown sugar over the banana, she wondered if she had actually found someone who could help her get over Kelvin. She wondered if the old woman was right. Perhaps there was more than one soul mate for everyone. One just had to find them.

She smiled inwardly at the wickedness of the thought. Here was her chance to become that modern day femme fatale she'd imagined being yesterday.

She stopped herself. Was it only yesterday?

She was amazed at the distance she'd come in only one day. Yesterday she'd been devastated that she and Kelvin were over completely. Now, she was seriously thinking about using Jack in a ruthless cathartic way. She paused at that idea.

No, she felt something more romantic in her interest in Jack. She had a strong desire to get to know him, work out what made him tick. See if there could be something more with him than just a one-night stand.

He was certainly intelligent, articulate, handsome, athletic and moral. She paused at that last one. Since meeting his grandmother she felt much better about him. Though, she knew, even Hitler had a nice little old grandmother somewhere who probably loved him.

She had to speak with Jack more to determine if he was genuine. Serena put the butter and leftover fruit back into the fridge, and carried the plate of sandwiches and two glasses of orange juice out of the kitchen in search of the library.

She only got lost once, going into a sun room instead, but she found Jack pacing by the window. His long legs strode gracefully, one hand punching the other as if he was debating some point with himself. She wouldn't have been surprised to hear him muttering to himself but he was silent. His brow furrowed in deep concentration.

She put the tray onto an ornate table and considered leaving right then and there. He didn't look pleased to see her. In fact, he looked absolutely hostile.

"Is there something wrong?"

His face softened. "No. Nothing is wrong."

"Your grandmother has gone for a lay down. She was feeling tired. So I've made you some sandwiches."

"Oh," he said. "Thanks."

Serena watched him fidget like a little boy in front of the headmaster. Finally he said, "I better go see how she is."

He hurried from the room, leaving her alone in the spacious library.

How peculiar, she thought and picked up one of the sandwiches and took a bite. She loved banana on anything, especially tomato, and she hadn't indulged herself in years. She closed her eyes in absolute bliss.

Despite the hurly-burly of the last week she felt strangely relaxed. The incredibly heavy burden of political sacrifice had been lifted and she felt indescribably light. Free of the multitude of actual and potential problems that had plagued her every waking moment and intruded even into sleep. She felt beside herself with an amazing sense of... she struggled to put it into words.

It was as if she could float, even fly.

Perhaps now, she mused, she could actually get in touch with herself again. That may explain the extreme sexual arousal she was feeling. Her nipples ached inside the track suit and her pussy was wet and tingling. She hadn't felt like this since the last time Kelvin and she had been on a flight to Europe and fallen asleep midway over the Mediterranean. Their heads had fallen against each other and when she'd awakened, her face was only centimeters from his. She had brushed her lips against his and his eyes sprang open. He didn't draw away. She liked to think they would have kissed but for the approaching flight attendant.

She sighed. She'd been living on memories like that for far too long. She had to stop dwelling on the past.

She walked slowly around the library, chewing on the sandwich. The shelves held hundreds of history books. Jack was, evidently, very studious. She liked that. He was certainly no ordinary cattleman.

She pulled down a volume on the French Revolution, her favorite period in history, and opened it at random. It was a chapter dealing with Robespierre. Written in the margin in an angry hand were the words, "No! No! No!"

She began to read the paragraph that had elicited such emotion when a sound startled her. It was the library door closing. Jack was standing there, staring at her.

"How is your grandmother?"

He stood very still staring at her, his nose flaring as if he was sniffing the air.

Then, with a dozen long strides he glided toward her, his face serious. He stopped only centimeters from her, his face bending down to meet hers.

She looked up into his dark, sad eyes, her heart thudding in her chest.

"I can't do this any more," he said finally. "I want you."

"Oh," she managed to mumble and closed the book, all thoughts of Robespierre instantly gone.

"I've tried to deny my attraction to you because you are going through a lot and I didn't want to take advantage of you."

She struggled for something to say. "Thank you for your..." she began, but too late for he'd swept her up into his arms and kissed her, causing the words to die in her throat.

His lips were like fire brands. The pressure was intense and she was vaguely aware that he'd actually lifted her off her feet, his strong arms grasping her shoulders firmly but carefully. His lustful lips pried her mouth open and she let in his insistent tongue.

He overwhelmed her. The heat of his body, his hot, sweet breath on her cheek, sent pulses of lust cascading through her body. The blood rushed in her ears and her heart thudded impatiently in her chest.

She wanted him so desperately.

Her tongue wrestled with his. She found the buttons of his shirt, ripping them open so she could run her hands across his broad, firm chest.

Without breaking the contact of her lips he carried her to his desk. He gently lowered her onto it and, releasing her lips, he scooped up the hem of her track suit top and lifted it over her head.

Ever shy of her body, Serena covered her breasts instinctively. He stepped back and gently grasped her wrists. Fixing his eyes on hers, he opened her arms.

She felt so exposed. Her face flushed under his rapturous gaze and she turned her head away.

"The body is nothing," he said, kissing her.

Though her embarrassed mind was awash with lust and desire she thought it odd that Jack was the third person to say that to her. *The body is nothing*. The statement rang through her mind.

Kelvin had said the same to her one night. They'd been celebrating in private with a champagne or three after a particularly stunning election win when the subject of love entered the conversation. A school friend of hers had been married the same day and had taken time from her wedding celebration to text a message of congratulations. *So, Serena, when are you getting hitched?*

It had been too much. She thought herself so ugly that no one would love her. Kelvin had consoled her with that same statement. "The body is nothing. It's what lives inside us that animates us. The creature inside sees the beauty of a clear, blue sky, the fragile petals of a flower, considers the immensity of the universe. The body simply houses the intellect, carries it about. It is no more important than a carriage, a car or the clothes you wear."

Different examples but the message was the same. Was she such a fool to think that her weight was an issue? Here two beautiful hunks thought she was desirable. How could that be?

"You have bewitched me," he said. "From the moment I first saw you I haven't been able to think straight."

"Me either," she mumbled.

"Make love with me," he said gently.

"Are you usually so formal?" she asked coyly.

"It has been some time," he said. "Customs change."

"Customs?"

Jack silenced her with a kiss and it all became a blur. His gentle hands roamed over her body, caressing her neck, her shoulders, the sensitive skin at the throat. His searching fingers found her breasts, encircling the nipples and tracing her rib cage.

She shivered in absolute pleasure.

Hesitantly she touched him. His bronzed skin was soft yet firm. The muscles beneath the flesh were so hard and warm. Her fingers tingled in excitement as she traced those muscles around his chest. Cheekily, she touched his nipples, the firm buds encircled by thin, blond hair hardened just as hers had when he'd kissed them.

She traced her fingers down his firm chest to his belt. Her fingers worked without conscious control as she undid the buckle and pulled down the zipper. She had to force his trousers down over the bulge of his cock. She hooked her fingers inside the waistband of his boxers and with a simple motion, pulled them down. His cock sprang forward.

He was so big. His cock pulsed palpably with the beat of his heart. She opened her legs and hooked her ankles behind his ass and drew him in.

The head of his cock pressed against her pussy lips. The touch was pure electricity, taking her breath away. He stood motionless between her legs. His mouth clamped over hers. His strong arms closed around her, holding her tight.

The anticipation was unbearable. She moaned into his mouth.

The sheer animal lust that had been building for a decade battered at the door of her self-control. Self-control? What control could she muster when she was in his arms, feeling his flesh, tasting him, smelling his desire?

She urged him closer with her ankles.

She broke the kiss and, looking into his eyes, hoping to see her desire mirrored in his. His eyes were ablaze with an inner light, a touch of yellow-gold, beckoning her. She was being drawn into a swirling maelstrom of lust.

He returned his burning lips to hers, just a grazing touch. "I want you," he whispered. His hot breath set her alight.

"I'm yours."

"And I am yours."

He clamped his mouth forcefully to hers. She raised her face that bare millimeter and he lowered his so that they crashed together in a rush as if they'd been running toward each other for an eternity.

Jack's pulsing cock head parted her slick pussy lips. Its width slipped in without hesitation. Serena gasped as his thick shaft filled and stretched her flesh.

A moan escaped from deep inside her thrumming chest as she accommodated his engorged length. Heat spread deep inside her, awakening a lust she'd never known before.

Jack buried himself to the hilt and then held himself perfectly still. After a moment he moved his cock slowly back and forth, sending wave after wave of pleasure through her pussy. Then, after only a minute, he began to withdraw. As the head of his cock threatened to leave her, he thrust the full length back to the hilt.

Serena grunted in turn, shuddering at the sudden impact. Her head swam in delirious pleasure with the heat of his increasing lust. He began moving inside her, slow gentle movements at first, as if he was luxuriating in each millimeter of pleasure, and then quickening. She felt as if she'd burst as his powerful thrusts increased.

They were in perfect rhythm. Her ankles clamped around his slim waist, urging him to drive deeper, then releasing him so he could withdraw for the next onslaught.

Every time he filled her, stretching her pussy around him, her tingling clit shot shafts of pure, unadulterated pleasure into her brain. Pleasure pulsed from her pussy and radiated throughout her body.

Tears of joy trickled down her cheeks.

He slowed his onslaught and his thrusts became gentler. She luxuriated in each luscious millimeter of his length. Then he accelerated his thrusts and, in a moment of clarity, she wondered if he was controlling himself, delaying his orgasm, waiting for her to climax first.

She opened her eyes. The concentration on his face was manifest. He seemed so focused on her pleasure.

Her head swam as the weight of her pleasure built inexorably against the walls of a dam she'd built around herself. Then, like a supernova, her universe exploded in orgasm and the dam finally burst.

Chapter 10

Only when her shudders had subsided and self-awareness returned did Serena open her eyes. Jack was gazing at her. She gave him a gentle smile and he continued to thrust.

Serena moaned as the pressure of her pleasure built again and the already weak walls of that dam burst a second time. He waited until she'd climaxed a third time before he let himself go.

She felt his hot seed flood into her, filling her, setting off a string of little orgasms that overlapped so she couldn't tell how many explosions rocked her quivering body.

He was holding her tightly as his body shuddered. She held him close, wanting to meld herself into his body so that he would never leave her.

"I'll never leave you," he whispered and raised his face.

She wondered at the sadness in his voice. She reached up and caressed his cheek, feeling the perspiration. She brought her fingers to her lips and together they kissed the wetness.

"I'm sorry," he said.

She was disappointed. Why did he have to speak at all?

This, she knew, with certainty, was the beginning of the end. So much for being the femme fatale. Here she was the victim all over again. "Don't," she managed to say.

"You deserve better than this."

Here it comes. *It's me, not you. I'm not good enough for you. I can't make you happy. I have too much baggage for you to deal with. I'll only cause you pain.* She'd heard it all before.

She sighed. The gold flame in his eyes had died.

Serena released him, unclasping her ankles. She placed her palms on his chest, slick with sweat, and pushed him away.

He started at her abruptness.

"I wish I could have waited," he said.

"Oh?"

"To take you on a desk like this. It is uncivilized."

"What did you have in mind?"

"A bed of silk covered in rose petals with silken curtains draping..."

She cut him off with an uncertain giggle. How had he known her favorite masturbating fantasy? "Sometimes I think you're inside my head."

"I want to learn everything there is about you. I want to give you everything you could ever want. I want to love you till..."

Confusion. "Love?"

"I know I've ruined it. It's only been a day, yet I knew as soon as I saw you that you were my heart's desire. I'd been longing for you for so long I'd forgotten what it was to love. I should've waited and wooed you in the proper way, let you fall in love with me, but I couldn't wait and I've ruined my chance. I've made what should have been glorious into something tawdry."

"Wait," she said, bringing her fingertips to his lips to silence him. "You think this was tawdry?"

His golden face blanched.

"Of course not, I..."

"Then I don't understand."

He stepped away. "I'm sorry. There are things about me you do not know, things you will not accept. I must go."

With an abrupt movement, he stepped back, pulled up his trousers and strode from the room.

Serena stared uncomprehending at the door as it closed emphatically behind him.

* * *

What had happened had been so inexplicable that Serena couldn't think straight. She had to get out of the house. She found herself wandering through the grove of weeping willows down by the lake.

Jack's words played through her mind as if they were on an endless loop. What had he meant? Did he love her or not?

She stopped and leaned against one of the willows, staring sightlessly at the smooth water. He'd said he loved her. That was what counted. But to call the most glorious experience of her life tawdry? What had he meant?

What could be going through his mind, she couldn't guess.

She didn't know how long she'd been aware of the sound of scrunching leaves before she reacted but when she turned to see what was making the noise. She expected Jack to be there. She wondered how he'd explain himself.

However, it wasn't Jack. There was something running toward her through the trees. A shadow.

It wasn't an animal. Not really. It seemed to start out as a four-legged shadow and with every glimpse became more like a man in some sort of strange transformation. Now, as it paused by a tree it was unmistakably a man.

A naked man.

Kelvin!

She stepped toward him. "Kelvin?"

"Serena."

It was Kelvin! She couldn't believe it. Gone was the powerful politician she had known and loved for a decade. But without the superficial trappings of power he was even more impressive. There was always something majestic about him, something magnificent. She'd always thought that power came from position, from education, from action. But here he was standing before her simply as a man. He was magnificent.

"Kelvin, what are you doing here? Why are you naked?"

"It's hard to explain."

"Is this another dream? I've had a lot of strange dreams in this place."

"I need some clothes," he said simply.

She dropped her eyes from his determined face to the broad expanse of his chest, to his washboard stomach and below. His semi-erect manhood hung heavy between his legs. She swallowed. "Where are your clothes? Did you leave them in your car?"

"I didn't bring my car."

"What do you mean? How did you get here? We're a hundred kilometers from anywhere."

"It's a long story."

"And you need clothes?"

"If that's possible."

She studied his body, not sure that she wanted him to cover up. For ten years she'd imagined what he would look like nude and now here he was in all his impressive nakedness. He was a thing of beauty, more amazing than any marble David.

"I'll try. But I don't understand. What are you doing here? How did you find me?"

"I had to find you."

What the hell was going on? For ten years he'd kept her at arm's length and now, after all that had happened, he simply turned up. "Now you have. And you're naked. I find this very surreal."

"I had to..."

"To what? Say you're sorry after leaving me to fend for myself?"

"Serena, that's not true. When the press conference finished I went to find you, but you'd already gone. It was hours before I found out you'd taken a car."

"I felt deserted."

"I'm sorry for that. Truly I am. I've beaten myself up about it ever since. I was a fool."

"How did you find me?"

"A mutual friend in the Federal Police told me your car had been dropped in at a local police station and that you'd caught the train. I was waiting for you in Perth. But when I realized you didn't get off the train..."

"So you came here? Why here?"

"Discreet inquiries. I'll explain later. Are you safe?"

"Yes. Jack has been looking after me."

"I bet he has."

She detected the bitter jealousy in his voice. She wasn't sure how she felt about that. "What do you mean? Do you know Jack?"

He sniffed her. He actually sniffed her. His face distorted into a scowl. "Never mind Jack now," he said curtly. "There's something I have to say to you."

He motioned to one of the stone seats. She sat next to him, unable to get over the weirdness of sitting with a naked man, a man she loved yet had never seen naked before. She couldn't take her eyes off his cock. It was thick and heavy, and even in its flaccid state it was impressively long. She wanted to reach out and touch it, bring it to life as she'd done with Jack.

"Firstly, I love you, Serena."

That brought her back to reality, if that was the right word for all this. "But you denied me."

He grasped her hand. "I said I loved my wife. I said that we'd never been unfaithful. I told only the truth. I didn't deny my feelings for you."

That was true, but it didn't make her feel any better. "But you left me for Priscilla after she'd destroyed your career. You still went back to her even after what she did. You left me hanging out here for people to say whatever they wanted to about me."

He nodded. "I know. I should have included you in the denial. I treated you shabbily. There is no excuse for what I did. If I had the time again I'd do everything differently. Believe me."

"The press conference, you mean?"

"No, everything. I would've left Priscilla as soon as I realized I loved you. To hell with politics, the farm, the hell with the lot of it. I despair the time I wasted being near you and not taking you in my arms and kissing every inch of your luscious body."

She blushed and her whole body warmed at the thought. He placed his other hand on hers, gripping her tightly. "Can you forgive me?"

"But you went back to Priscilla."

"I had to. I had to tell her that it was over between her and me."

"And is it?"

He nodded. "I was a fool. I always thought she loved me. Even though I'd fallen in love with you, I didn't want to hurt her. I thought her fragile and leaving would destroy her. But she didn't really love me at all. She just wanted to own me. She felt threatened by our relationship. Her imagination conjured up an affair to prove she owned me and, more important for her, that you didn't. She had to destroy what we'd built together. She had to destroy me. Of course, now that I'm disgraced I'm worthless to her."

"But do you love her?"

"No. I haven't for a long time. Since I realized I loved you. But I was trapped."

"When did you know you loved me?"

"Do you remember when we were in Paris?"

She did, and it had been sheer torture. "I remember. Priscilla had the bedroom and we were alone in the office suite. I made a clumsy pass and you carried on talking about the trade negotiations."

"I wanted you so badly then," he said. "But I couldn't. I pretended I hadn't noticed. But I had and the more I thought about having you, the more I fell in love with you."

"But you gave no sign."

"I was a fool!"

His eyes pleaded for forgiveness and she felt herself leaning toward him, wanting to feel his lip on hers, his arms wrapped tightly around her. She was so aware

of his nearness, the heat emanating from his body, the sound of his breathing. She wanted to fall into his arms, but she drew back.

The hurt that crossed his face was tangible.

This was so unfair. If he had told her these things three days ago, she would've gladly flung herself into his embrace and together the two of them would have faced the future, sailing off into the sunset together.

This was what she had wanted for all these years. Each day she'd dream he would leave Priscilla and come to her. Each day turned out the same. The endless yearning, the wanting that hurt so bad she'd end up crying.

And now there was Jack.

She needed to get away from both of them. She really needed time to think.

"We should get you some clothes."

"I love you, Serena. I never want to be parted from you again."

"So much has happened."

"What's happened? What's he done to you?" He gave three short, sharp sniffs as if he was smelling her.

"What do you mean?"

"What has Jack done?"

"Nothing. He's just been very kind."

"I bet. He hasn't touched you?"

A cold shiver swept through her body. The arrogance of these men was intolerable! "And what if he has? You say you love me, and I certainly have loved you for over a decade, but that doesn't mean you own me!"

"Of course not," he said. "Because I love you, I want to protect you."

"That's rich, considering what's happened."

"I..." he started but didn't finish. His eyes bored into her.

He was angry, but he had no right. "How do you know Jack?" she asked.

"From a long time ago."

They were both cattlemen. It would be no surprise if they did know each other. "Well, I'm sure the two of you will have a good time catching up."

"I'd rather we didn't do that."

She studied him closely. It wasn't like Kelvin to be afraid of anyone, and she certainly didn't detect fear now. He was angry and concerned, but not afraid. It seemed he was avoiding something more serious than a fight with Jack.

"Well, you can't skulk around here. You need to come up to the house. I'll talk to Jack and get you some clothes."

"I saw some on the clothes line."

"They've been out all night. They'll be damp."

"The laundry then. There must be some dry clothes in the laundry."

"Why don't you want to speak to Jack?"

He opened his mouth to speak. "It's important he doesn't know I'm here. I don't trust him. Surely you've noticed something strange about him?"

Well, yes, she had. But that had all been resolved. He'd fallen in love, well, in lust at least. That explained him getting rid of his staff and her car. But there was something in Kelvin's eyes. He knew something about Jack that worried him.

"What do you suspect?"

"I can't say. But I want to get you away from here."

Anger swept across her face. She stood up abruptly. "What is it with you men? You are both positively medieval! I can look after myself, thank you very much." Serena turned and headed off toward the house. "Stay here. I'll bring back some clothes," she said. "If I remember, that is."

"There's something else I have to tell you," he said, his voice hardly audible.

"What is it?"

And that's when the nightmare began.

"I have to show you what I really am. There's no easy way to do this. I should have told you at the very beginning. But I'm sure you'll understand why I couldn't. Not when you know the real situation. Serena. I'm a shape-shifter."

"A what?"

"Don't be scared by what you'll see. I'm still the Kelvin Waters who loves you. I'm just more than what you thought."

"Kelvin. Stop being so..."

Her words died on her lips. She tried to account for what she was seeing but couldn't find the words.

He just *changed*.

The gorgeous hunk she called Kelvin Waters became, in a matter of frozen moments, a beast with yellow eyes, long white teeth and silky fur.

And then he was back again.

"Serena?"

She tried to speak, to say something, anything. But nothing came out.

"I'm so sorry, Serena. Believe me. But I couldn't tell you before this. There was a lot at stake. I'm not the only one interested in my politics."

His words meant nothing to her. She was going mad.

"Serena, I am a werewolf. I am immortal. I want you to join me and be as I am."

"What?"

"Join me. Marry me. Be my wife."

The image of him as a beast burned in her mind's eye. He'd reached out to her, his hand touching her shoulder. She flinched.

"Serena!"

Jack's voice snapped her out of her daze. She turned to look but not before seeing the snarl of rage cross Kelvin's face.

"You!" Jack yelled. "I thought I smelled your stench yesterday. Leave her. You're not good enough for her!"

Kelvin's hand dropped from her shoulder. In an instant he had reverted to the beast. Serena flung herself away from him and scrambled toward Jack's voice.

To her horror Jack was no longer there. In his place, standing within a heap of ripped and discarded clothes, was a beast.

With a murderous snarl it leapt to meet Kelvin who was running full pelt toward him.

Serena screamed.

The beasts paused in mid-run, stopped and eyed each other suspiciously before turning their feral eyes to her.

“Stop it!” she yelled.

The beasts cast each other rancorous glares. A moment stretched into an eternity as they sized each other up. Serena sensed their muscles tensing, preparing to attack. She couldn’t let that happen.

She summoned up whatever strength she still possessed. “Stop it. I can’t deal with this. Turn back so I can talk to you and sort this out.”

They growled at each other but made no move to obey.

“Now!” she commanded.

The looks they both shot her would have been funny had she not been so terrified. They both wore those sheepish expressions dogs have when their master chastises them.

“That’s better,” she managed to say before it all fell apart.

She wasn’t sure which one made the false move, but in the blink of a terrified eye, they were at each other’s throats.

Serena couldn’t bear it any longer. She ran.

Chapter 11

Serena ran until the sound of their fight had faded into silence. She didn't care where she ran she just had to put distance between her and the nightmare her life had become.

Kelvin was a werewolf.

Jack was a werewolf.

If that wasn't enough of a mind-numbing shock, the fact that she loved Kelvin and had made love to Jack overrode the terror she knew she should be feeling.

Serena stopped dead. *Oh, my God! I've made love to a werewolf!*

Oh, my God.

The thought hammered at her brain.

There was stirring in the bushes behind her. They'd tracked her down. She fled into the scrub. Serena had no plan except getting away from them. Maybe she could talk to them if they were men, but not as animals.

The flat, manicured grounds surrounding the house had given way to a scrubby slope which now had become a steep hill. She was struggling to keep up the pace she had set herself but she was determined to go somewhere quiet.

In the distance, lightning flashed and a moment later, rolling peals of thunder reverberated off the surrounding hills. This was just great. She was going to get drenched.

She ran between the spindly eucalypts and short spiky shrubs until the ground suddenly gave out.

She skidded to a halt and stood for a moment, mesmerized, on the edge of an abyss, a hundred meter drop to jagged rocks below. She turned to retrace her steps.

"Kelvin? Jack?"

The beast that barred her path growled. Its fur, she realized, with fear stabbing at her chest, was darker than either Jack's or Kelvin's. Then she noticed that around its shoulder was a leather harness. It was a gun holster.

"Who are you?"

The beast transformed into a naked man. A singularly ugly naked man. He gave an open mouthed smile, revealing jagged broken teeth. He took a purposeful step toward her, drawing the pistol from its holster with practiced ease.

Serna took an involuntary step backward that took her to the very edge.

"Who are you?" she repeated.

"A hunter," he said, his lips pulled back away from those yellow canines. "I'm hunting you."

"Hunting me?"

"Have been for a couple of days."

"Why?"

"You know he is a wolfen."

"Kelvin?"

"He shouldn't have told you."

"So what if I know?"

"You cannot live."

"Because I know? Trust me, I won't tell. No one would believe me."

He eyed the empty space behind her and reached out as if to push her over the abyss.

She screamed and batted away his outstretched hand.

The bush around her erupted in angry growls. She looked over the hunter's shoulder to see Jack and Kelvin, in beast form, crouching in preparation to attack.

The hunter grabbed her by the shoulder and, pulling her onto his naked chest, he put the pistol's barrel to her temple.

Jack and Kelvin separated to surround him.

"I suppose that has silver bullets too?" she asked the hunter.

"Yes, it does," he replied without any emotion at all.

She thanked Hollywood for getting something right, and hoped that piece of intelligence helped Jack and Kelvin decide not to do anything stupid. Her mind was racing and yet a strange calmness settled over her. Resignation perhaps, because, no matter what she did, what else could go wrong?

"I'm sure we can settle this without violence," she said, surprised how strong her voice sounded despite her stomach that seemed to have twisted into a tight painful knot.

No one spoke. Jack and Kelvin were emitting low menacing growls. The hunter tightened his grip on her shoulder.

"Now, boys," she said. "You're only making him nervous. Why don't we all become human and talk this through?"

Without looking at each other they both transformed into human form. Standing like that, she marveled at what wonderful physical specimens they were.

"My orders are to kill the human," the hunter said.

"I won't permit that," Jack said.

"We won't permit that," Kelvin corrected him.

In a flash of brilliance Serena had the solution. "This guy is worried I'll spill the beans about you being a werewolf," she said quickly. "Why don't you make me a werewolf? That way you won't have to kill me and we can all live happily ever after."

The hunter laughed. "It is not permitted to make new wolfen."

"There'll be a vacancy after we kill you," Jack said ominously.

"My mission is to kill the human."

"There's no need," Kelvin said. "She has agreed to keep our secret and we'll apply to turn her as we normally would when a vacancy occurs."

"The Council has decided. I have my orders."

"If you harm her, we will destroy you," Jack said.

"You'll try."

"We are pack leaders," Kelvin said. "You will obey us."

"I obey only the Council. They are my pack."

Serena was losing patience with this macho crap. They seemed to have forgotten her presence completely. They were concentrating on posturing with slow, purposeful movements, baring their human canines and growling. It was all silly and pointless.

And it would get her killed.

The hunter had to know his only chance for survival in the short term would be to keep her alive. His threat to kill her while the boys were near was an empty one.

But eventually, the boys would attack. His only solution, given that releasing her was not an option, would be to halve the threat. Kill one of the boys first, and then kill the other one. He had the gun with the silver bullets. The only thing that held him back, she decided, was that he had no orders to kill anyone else but her. As soon as he worked his way out of that procedural conflict, they'd all die because he held all the aces.

His big ace was her, and it was only a matter of time until the hunter would shoot one and then take his chances with the other. Serena couldn't bear the thought of losing either Jack or Kelvin.

It was simple. If she died, the boys would be safe.

She had to do something. If she could distract him for just a moment to wrestle free. She recalled her martial arts instructor's words. "Keep it simple," was his mantra.

Once the decision was made, she hesitated no longer. She jabbed the hunter in the ribs, wincing as her elbow jarred against his rock-hard rib cage. He doubled up, just enough for her to twist in his arms and slip out. With a growl, he grabbed for her.

She paused on the edge for just a moment. "You don't have to kill them!" she cried. With a despairing look at Jack and Kelvin who, both oblivious to the hunter, had lunged toward her, she took a single, fateful step.

A brush of finger tips, an anguished cry and then only the wind.

* * *

Tears streamed down Jack's face as he cradled Serena's broken body. "She is dying," he said.

"This cannot stand!" Kelvin cried. "Dying naturally is one thing. But we caused this! I love her! I've loved her for ten years. I'll not lose her now! We must turn her."

"I love her too, though for only a day, but she has made me whole again. She should not die prematurely."

"She should not die at all."

The despair of centuries rushed into Jack's mind. "You love her so much you'd condemn her to an eternity of horror, disappointment and despair? That is what immortality really is."

Kelvin snarled. "Rubbish. Do you love her so much that you'd deny her an eternity to enjoy life?" Kelvin jabbed his finger in Jack's chest. "You ran here to hide from the world. That's how much you enjoy your precious gift!"

Jack snarled, but he knew Kelvin was right. Perhaps with Serena at his side he could return to life. "The Council won't like it," he said sarcastically.

"To hell with the Council."

"On that, at least, we agree."

Kelvin's eyes met his over Serena's twisted body. Kelvin nodded to him and shifted into his wolfen form. Jack did the same.

"Forgive me, Serena," Jack whispered as he lowered his jaws to her neck.

Chapter 12

Serena's head felt like it had been split like a melon. Her whole body ached. She thought for a moment she'd been hit by a truck. The last thing she remembered clearly was running and almost falling over a cliff.

She blinked her eyes and her vision cleared. Jack and Kelvin were sitting on either side of the bed.

"You're back!" A broad smile rippled across Jack's face.

"I think so. What happened?"

"You fell."

"A long, long way," Kelvin added.

She knew from their expressions that she more than just fell. She knew why her body felt odd. "I died, didn't I?"

"Almost. But we..."

"I feel a little strange."

"Serena, there's something we have to tell you."

But she already knew. "You turned me into a werewolf, didn't you?"

They nodded, uncertainty etched on both their handsome faces.

She pretended to be angry but couldn't keep the scowl going. They relaxed visibly and in unison punched her softly on the shoulder. They growled at each other when they realized they'd both shown her affection in the very same way.

"I know you'd never turn me without proper cause."

"We weren't supposed to turn you," Jack said.

"You did what you had to," she said, kissing the back of his hand.

"It was touch and go," Kelvin said. "Not everyone survives the turning. But you were so far gone we had to try. It wasn't fair that you die because of what I did."

"What was going on? I remember you two fighting over me."

"You don't remember the hunter?"

She searched her memory and slowly the whole ordeal flashed through her mind including her final, fateful decision to save them. "I remember," she said, shivering.

"Kelvin's friends in the wolfen Council sent him to kill you."

She shuddered. "Why exactly did the Council want me killed?"

Jack shrugged. "Don't ask me. I stay out of politics."

"Immortality is an exclusive club, my love. We don't admit just anyone." Kelvin kissed her fingertips.

"What our politician friend is trying to say is that there is safety in anonymity. The more of us there are, the greater chance of discovery. With discovery there is a risk of annihilation. The Council guards our security."

"There's one thing I don't understand," Serena said. "Running for politics would surely increase your chance of discovery."

Kelvin nodded. "It's a risk. But being immortal, we wolfen and other shape-shifters have more of an interest in the future than short-lived humans. You threaten yourselves with destruction by war, pollution and economic chaos."

"I'm no longer human," she corrected him.

"My apologies." He chuckled. "See how quickly your attitude changes?"

"I have a long way to go yet."

"Human politics are for the short term. Our goal is to infiltrate human political systems so that long term strategies can be implemented. We have a long term plan to solve the world's problems. We can do it. But we need more wolfen politicians. Already, a tenth of the senior politicians in the world are shape-shifters."

"I've suspected that," she said and laughed. "But for different reasons. I guess exposure right now wouldn't help your plans, would it?"

"Absolutely not."

"But you saved me anyway."

"It wasn't right that you die because of us," Kelvin repeated.

"But you put yourselves at risk."

"I love you. What else could I do? I had to explain to you why I gave up my career with hardly a whimper."

"It was so out of character. I knew how much you loved it. I thought you really, really did love your wife."

"The reason I gave up without a fight was because they had threatened you. We were both now a risk to the Council, but they were afraid you might tell the media about me."

"They threatened me then?"

Kelvin nodded and gripped her hand. "I couldn't risk them hurting you. I told them you didn't know that I was a wolfen, but they refused to believe me."

"How could they believe you with all that publicity about our supposed love affair? The media ran wild with that story."

"So, I had to end it all. The easiest way was to resign. They're angry with me for setting back their plans a few years, but I couldn't continue. I left the press conference to talk them out of it, but the hunter had already been unleashed. I couldn't convince them to recall him."

Serena gripped his hand. "Thank you, my darling, for trying."

"I went straight to Priscilla and told her it was over between us. Then I looked for you."

"Did you find me?"

"At the motel."

So, it had not been a fantasy at all. "But why did you leave?"

"I sensed the hunter. I didn't want him anywhere near you. I knew he'd follow me to get to you. So I led him on a merry chase. But he realised what I was doing, and I had to look for you all over again."

One thing bothered her. "The Council, does it still want me dead?"

Kelvin took a deep relaxed breath. "Now that you're one of us, the death sentence has been removed. I confirmed that after we got you back home and sent the hunter packing."

"Well," she said. "That's one thing."

"What's the other?" Kelvin asked.

Uncertainty crossed her face.

"What are you thinking?" Jack asked.

She screwed up her face. "I'm a werewolf, aren't I?"

"Yes indeed."

"Do I have to eat live animals and raw meat now?"

Kelvin laughed. "In our ten years together, did you ever see me devour any live animals?"

"So you're a vegetarian werewolf?"

"Don't be silly. You always joked about me eating rare steak when we went to restaurants."

"I know, but do I have to eat it as well? I like my fruit and vegetables."

Kelvin kissed the back of her hand. "Once a month, under the influence of the moon, you will get the urge to chase something, but you'll soon get out of it. Seriously. Experiment. You may find you don't crave blood or raw meat much at all."

She gazed at him. Thoughts of eating anything but him were of little interest. After all these years, she finally had what she wanted. Kelvin was hers at last.

Jack stood up. She quickly looked to him, frowning at his dejected expression. "Stop, don't go." She reached out and grasped his hand, knowing the source of his anguish. "This is a real dilemma. I'm so happy. But what do I do? On one hand, I have the man I've loved deeply for ten years and who gave up his career to save me. And here, I have the man I fell in love with and who, in my darkest hour, showed me that I am a sensual creature worthy of love."

The two hunks glared at each other. They were joined by their mutual love for her, but they distrusted each other intensely. She guessed werewolves had a pecking order and they were vying for ascendancy.

"We don't share."

"You can't make me choose between you."

Jack shrugged helplessly. She glanced to Kelvin. His face was implacable. Werewolves, like everyone it seemed, were victims of their own nature.

She had one ace to play. "I willingly chose death so you both could live," she said. "I think that gives me some leadership rights here."

Jack and Kelvin glanced warily at each other.

She smiled at both of them. "I did that out of love. That same love will not force me to choose between the two of you. So..."

"So?" Kelvin said.

"You both have eternity to learn."

"Learn what?" Jack asked, though she was sure he knew what she was demanding.

"To share."

Kelvin laughed. "You're the one that should have been the politician, not I."

Serena grasped both their hands. "I may just do that. Now for my sake, shake hands."

And they did, reluctantly.

Serena had noticed one thing about her new physical state. Lying in this warm bed her body felt almost the same as her old one. Almost, but not quite. She was sure she would notice dramatic differences soon enough, but at this moment she just felt... horny.

Kelvin's gentle caress of her cheek, Jack's stroking of her forearm and their overwhelming presence was incredibly arousing. She could feel the heat radiating from their bodies, smell their maleness. Sense their love.

But there was something else stirring deep inside her. A powerful desire was building. An electrical tingling centered in the pit of her stomach was raising the sensitivity of her flesh. Her clit was erect and Serena could feel the sultry heat generating in her pussy.

She licked her dry lips. "Guys," she said, her voice peculiarly husky and thick. "To, um, celebrate your new bond of friendship. I need you to do me a favor."

"Anything, my love," Kelvin said.

"You name it, sweetheart," Jack added.

"Make love to me."

They both tensed and she noticed their eyes flick upward in an unspoken challenge. Their jaws tightened and flexed, their eyes glowed with nascent malevolence. They had a lot to learn.

"Guys. Please. For me?"

The incipient violence faded from their eyes.

"You're still too weak," Kelvin said.

"There is time enough, Serena," Jack cautioned. "An eternity, in fact."

"I want, I need you both. Now."

Jack looked to Kelvin. "There are less vigorous ways of making love," he said.

She saw a flash of understanding in Kelvin's face and a slight nod. "Just... don't touch me."

"Believe me. That will never happen."

In concert, the two men lifted the covers off her body, revealing her nakedness. Kelvin gently kissed her, his lips warm and soft. Serena closed her eyes. His tongue teased her, stroking her lips from the center to the sensitive corners. She opened her mouth and he claimed her.

Jack grazed her stomach with butterfly kisses and slowly, inexorably worked his way downward. His firm hands parted her willing legs. He kissed and licked her quivering flesh, caressing her inner thighs with his fingers, moving closer and closer to her pussy.

Kelvin left her mouth. His lips brushed her cheek. She gasped and arched her back as he moved to her neck, nuzzling her skin, kissing and licking her flesh. His hands cupped her breasts, his fingers softly circling her straining nipples.

Serena quivered with pleasure as Jack's tongue stroked the delicate flesh beside her pussy lips. She raised her pelvis, wanting him to find her clit. He teased her, licking either side of her nub, taking the flesh of her pussy into his mouth, pulling gently on her lips. Her clit ached for a touch.

Kelvin drew her nipple into his mouth. He flicked it with his tongue, causing electrical sparks to ignite her chest. She gasped and held his head tightly to her breast.

Serena's hips were rotating with excruciating pleasure. Jack's tongue was circling her clit now, spiraling inward as she spiraled upward. She was climbing a tower of absolute pleasure. Her body was aflame and inside her chest her heart pounded ferociously as if a beast was chained within, demanding release.

And then Jack touched her. His lips closed on her swollen clit, sucking it into his hot, wet mouth. His tongue pressed hard against her, launching her from that tower of pleasure.

Serena cried out, an ululation of joy, releasing the voice of the beast within.

She lay gasping in Kelvin's arms with Jack resting his head on her thigh. While she struggled to regain her breath, Serena reflected on her feelings. She had expected the words absolute joy to leap from her thoughts to describe her glorious state of mind, but instead all she felt was the insistent itch of horniness, a prickly heat originating from her pussy that was radiating powerfully through her body in slowly, pulsating waves of desire.

She licked her lips which had become very, very dry. She'd never felt so horny before in her life. An image of being fucked by Kelvin and Jack *at the same time* flashed through her thoughts. The sheer wantonness of the thought scared her beyond words but any reticence was quickly dissolved in the flood of desire that washed through her.

"I want you inside me," Serena gasped before she could stop the words. "Both of you."

"In time," Kelvin said, sitting up so that he kneeled before her head.

"There is no hurry," Jack said from between her thighs.

"Yes, there is," Serena said lasciviously. "I want you both now."

She saw the quick look that Jack shot at Kelvin and wondered what volumes of discourse existed in a wolfen glance.

"I can sense you're strong," Kelvin said at last. "Stronger than most after their turning."

"I know I can take you both," she said confidently, though she didn't know why she would be so sure.

"Have you had two men at once?" Jack asked, raising himself onto his knees.

"Of course not," Serena said. "But I'm suddenly..." She was at a loss to put into words the strength of the desire she felt right at that moment. That she'd had a wonderful orgasm not a minute ago and now wanted more, much more. She wanted, *no needed*, to feel their hardness within her. "I just want you."

"It's not uncommon," Kelvin said cautiously, "for the libido to be heightened at the turning."

"It's more than heightened," Serena gasped. "It's sky-high! Now fuck me. Both of you."

Impulsively she reached across and unbuckled Kelvin's belt, unzipped his fly and reached inside. His cock didn't display the same degree of concern he'd expressed only moments before. It was a solid shaft of steel, its beautiful arrow head standing ready and waiting. She licked her lips hungrily.

Serena reached behind his buttocks and drew him toward her. His cock was huge and she wondered if she would be able to get her mouth around it.

She hesitated for a moment with Kelvin's cock grazing her lips. She glanced down to see Jack kneeling between her legs watching her. "What are you waiting for?" she asked coquettishly, her eyes locked on the enormous bulge inside his jeans.

"Are you sure you're ready?" he asked.

She nodded enthusiastically and Kelvin's cock bounced on her chin.

Jack quickly stripped off his clothes. Serena heart skipped another beat and she smiled in appreciation. His impressive cock was standing ramrod straight, projecting from his flat muscular stomach like a spear. He positioned himself between her thighs, his cock throbbing as it neared the moist entrance to her pussy.

Serena watched him edge closer and gasped as he probed her pussy lips, still slick with her juices and his saliva. She gasped and took the bulging head of Kelvin's cock into her mouth, letting it sit on the flat of her tongue as her lips closed around the velvety shaft.

She grunted in wanton satisfaction as Jack slid the length of his shaft inside her. He was gentle, sliding his cock slowly into her, pausing, letting her pussy accommodate his girth before slowly withdrawing.

Serena almost passed out with the electric shivers his cock was sending through her. Jack must have been satisfied with her ability to take him because he quickened his movements inside her, sliding in and pulling out with ever increasing energy until her body was rocked by his vigorous fucking.

As Jack fucked her, she took Kelvin deep into her mouth, letting his cock stretch her lips and fill her mouth. A few moments later Kelvin began fucking her mouth, gently moving his shaft between her lips. He wasn't going deep enough for Serena and she started rocking her head back and forth, taking him deep into her throat.

Serena glanced up to see Kelvin raise his eyes to the ceiling. He was concentrating, she guessed, on keeping himself in human form. Somehow she knew that just below her new skin lurked the body of a beast. She knew that she could keep it there, below the surface, by concentrating on the sensations her human flesh was experiencing.

A shiver of wonder swept through her. What was *her* animal form? One day she'd let herself go. Then she'd see, but not now, not this minute, not while she was being fucked by the two most beautiful men in the universe.

"I'm going to come soon," Kelvin said urgently.

"Not yet!" Serena said. "Inside me... with Jack."

Serena felt his body tense. "Quickly, I want both of you inside me."

"Serena..."

"Please."

She watched impatiently as the two men organized themselves. Jack lay on the bed beside her and without hesitation pulled her onto him. She quickly lowered herself onto his cock, luxuriating in the sensations as his cock filled her once again. She bent over him, lifting her ass high into the air, offering herself to Kelvin.

Jack pulled her head down and kissed her while he kept up a piston like rhythm with his cock. Jack's vigorous fucking overwhelmed her senses and she was hardly aware of Kelvin positioning himself behind her.

She felt his fingers, though, as he gently rubbed around her asshole with his finger tips. She shivered in delight at the forbidden sensations as he massaged her ass with his saliva-coated fingers. He adjusted his position again, moving closer, his thighs pushing her thighs further apart. His fingers were splayed across her buttocks, separating them to give his cock head access to her asshole.

She gasped as the head of Kelvin's cock nudged her ass. He probed gently with his cock, his thumbs spreading her asshole so that she felt wide open to him.

"Oh, yes," she groaned into Jack's mouth.

"Serena, my love," Kelvin whispered as he slid the full length of his shaft into her.

Serena cried out, a moment's pain replaced by the most dizzying pleasure she'd ever felt. She sighed as Kelvin slid even more deeply into her. He bent over her, wrapping his arms tightly around her. His hot breath on her neck sent electric shivers through her body that clamored for attention from the sheer pleasure of his cock sliding into her ass.

Serena surrendered herself to these glorious new sensations. She'd never imagined that sex could be so good. The two cock's moving relentlessly inside her were sending her to a completely new plane of awareness.

Kelvin and Jack were moving their cocks in perfect synchrony inside her and the joint action sent jolts of electricity directly into her nervous system. Just when she thought it couldn't get any better, something magical happened. Her body suddenly tensed with a jolt as the energy of her lust built inexorably inside her like an expanding balloon.

Her first orgasm came suddenly. It exploded from a place deep inside her belly. This was the first orgasm of her new wolfen state and she wasn't prepared for the awesome force of the explosion within her.

Serena's body became a burning flame that originated deep within her belly and like a supernova, once ignited it could not be stilled. It seemed she could see the flames behind her eyelids flaring brightly. It was a fire that fed on itself, the heat exploding through her feeble flesh and consuming her as it grew on its own energy.

It took her breath away.

The inferno had not even begun to subside when, with her lovers' relentless cocks fucking her, the flame in her belly pulsed and expanded, releasing the flame which swept through her again and again.

She cried out but the sound she heard in her ears was not her own. It was a beastly ululation that resonated in her brain.

She fell onto Jack's body aware that his grip on her had become stronger. Beneath her his body was as tense as a coiled spring. Suddenly the movement of his cock stopped deep inside her and he howled into her neck.

Above her, Kelvin also ceased his fucking. His cock was buried deep inside her, and he too began an animalistic howl that echoed through the bedroom. Both cocks were pulsing inside her, releasing their seed. That thought alone took her over the edge again and she bayed in absolute pleasure.

An eternity later Kelvin threw himself onto the bed beside her. With her chest heaving painfully, Serena rolled off Jack's chest and lay between her two lovers.

Satiated and languorous, Serena drew them both to her and held them close. She'd been denied love for so long. Now she had an eternity of pleasure stretching out

before her. She was embarking on a great voyage of sensuality, and she could wish for no better guides than these two gorgeous men.

Mikala Ash

Mikala Ash wakes up every morning to the sound of the crashing surf and has her first coffee of the day on her verandah overlooking the wide Pacific Ocean. It's a double-edged blessing, she says:

I have to drag myself away to do anything at all -- like work. I'm a Management Consultant and I don't think Ricky (my beautiful Border Collie) fully understands the economic necessity of me working to keep him in the lifestyle he's become accustomed to (typical male). He just wants me to run with him along the beach all day chasing those pesky sea gulls. He's good company though and, if there are shape-shifters in the world, I think I'd like him to be one -- loyal, trustworthy, obedient and protective. A voracious reader, I've been writing in one form or another since I was little. I'm so lucky that I've found a way of sharing my passion for spicy romance and the more fantastical realms that hover just beyond our grasp.