



Fawn
Lowery

Molly's
Surrender

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Molly's Surrender

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Chapter One

The tarmac was hot underfoot as Molly Clark set out toward the twin engine Cessna waiting at the end of the runway. According to the grizzled old man at the front desk of Hampton Charter, the pilot was already on board. There was a company dispute brewing at a major corporation in Colorado Springs and she planned to scoop her fellow reporters by beating them all to the story.

Molly saw the door of the plane was open and the short stretch of steps was down, awaiting her boarding. She hoped the pilot had everything ready for take off so she could just flop down onto her seat and relax for the length of the flight. Not that she actually believed that she'd relax—she hated flying with a passion, especially in a small plane. She just kept telling herself it was a short hop over the mountains to Colorado Springs, then another short hop back to Durango—no reason to panic.

She grasped the metal handrail and stepped into the plane, blinking her eyes against the sharp contrast from bright sunlight to dim interior. Her briefcase slammed against one seat while her right knee

collided with another before she was able to adjust her eyesight. Finally able to see, she looked round at two rows of tan leather seats, six all total, and the back of the pilot. A most appealing head of jet-black hair topped off a large span of impressive male shoulders. Was that a baseball cap he wore? Weren't pilots usually garbed in a uniform of some sort?

Pushing her musings aside, Molly stowed her briefcase in a small upper compartment while the man on board came to fold up the steps and secure the door. With a quick glance in his direction, Molly made it her business to get herself in order for the flight. There was an odd feeling that traveled along her nerve endings as he passed close by her to secure the door. Molly told herself that she didn't know any pilots, therefore she must have imagined the feeling of familiarity; she settled in her seat and buckled her seatbelt.

Seconds later the roar of the plane's twin engines grabbed her attention and she gripped the arms of the seat in preparation for the take off. There was nothing more unnerving for her than to have to fly—but then she couldn't get the story first if she chose to drive to Colorado Springs. It would take hours and besides, since returning from a year of reporting abroad, amid the turmoil of famine and war, the thought of returning to the States and resuming a normal life again was something she had been looking forward to.

The small airplane vibrated as it began to taxi, sending her body into a quivering state. Mentally, she tried to adjust to her decision to fly to Colorado

Springs. Her knuckles turned white as she squeezed the arms of the seat and despite the attractive back the pilot displayed, she simply couldn't resist squeezing her eyes shut in an effort to envision herself any place but there...aboard a small plane about to lift into the air.

The pilot's voice was drown out by the increasing roar of the plane's engines and too quickly, they were airborne. The force of take off pressed her body into the pillow softness of the bucket seat. Her heart thundered in her chest. *How in the world had I ever managed to ride in a helicopter in the war torn Middle East?* Then, the pilot's voice was audible as he communicated with the ground, checking his flight plan and God only knew what else.

Molly tried to swallow down her nervousness. It was a short flight, she told herself for the hundredth time. She'd always been scared of doing things that seemed unnatural. And flying was just about as unnatural as things could be. *Flying and men.* She grimaced. At twenty-nine, almost thirty, she had been trying to convince herself that being alone was okay. She didn't need a man.

But a woman with sexual desires needs a man.

She let out a long breath and opened her eyes. Since when did she listen to her inner thoughts? She forced her eyes to look round the interior of the small plane. It was all ivory walls and tan colored leather seats. And the pilot...

Don't look at him, she told herself.

She turned to gaze out of the window but only blue sky met her gaze. And nothingness. Her stomach

pitched, sending her head into a dizzy spell that forced her to close her eyes once more. Why had she come on this trip?

"I don't serve a meal on this flight," the pilot said. "I don't even offer peanuts. And I hope you went to the john before you boarded – because I don't have one of those either."

The pilot's witty comment brought her eyes flickering open. She gazed at the back of his head. He was indeed wearing a baseball cap—a red one—and he had a set of earphones clamped across the top of his head, mashing the crown of the cap.

She was just about to smile at his rhetoric, but then he glanced over his right shoulder and she got the first real peek at him she had been given since becoming aware of him since she boarded.

"How are you, Molly?"

Molly's heart nearly stopped beating with his words. For a full thirty seconds she couldn't breathe. All she could do was stare at the side of that darkly handsome male countenance and wish she could wake up from what surely was a bad dream.

"Mike," she said in a barely audible whisper.

After a year he was once more in her presence— or she was in his...ten thousand feet above the ground— and he was in control! She felt a scream begin in her toes and start the inevitable journey to her throat.

The familiar tone of his voice sent shockwaves reverberating through her insides. Once, she had almost fallen in love with him but then she became frightened of his risky lifestyle. He had been a Marine a year ago, a fighting, Hell-bent for destruction, guy

who took what he wanted from life. A guy who answered to no woman. Molly felt that he might be unable to be true to a lover, or wife. In the end, she had made the break, disappearing in the foray of military personnel and newspaper reporters, avoiding all avenues of contact with Mike Hampton. Why in Hell hadn't she realized the Hampton in Hampton Charter might be him?

Thank God he had to stay up front to fly the plane. What should she say to him? If she had a parachute—and could summon up the courage to jump—she'd have already left the plane!

"Hello, Mike," she finally managed to croak, her throat dry as a brick. She hoped he didn't want to have a reminiscing session about old times. "How long before we land?"

He chuckled deep in his throat, that familiar laugh of his that always revealed his amusement at her. "We just got in the air, babe," he chided. "What's wrong? You in a hurry to leave my company?"

"No," she lied.

Yes! A million times. Yes! She admitted silently.

She stared at the back of his head remembering the feel of his dark hair as she ran her fingers through the soft strands. And those broad shoulders...the feel of his muscles flexing beneath her palms as he embraced her.

* * * *

Hell, he shouldn't have asked that, he reminded himself. Molly was as skittish as a new colt, leery of letting herself go, of enjoying life and God only knew

what else filled that workaholic mind of hers.

He'd have to take it easy with her this time, he reminded himself. He'd have to be gentle. And he would. He wouldn't mess it up this time. This time he'd let Molly call the shots. His eyes flickered over the instrument panel. There was a sudden vibration that warranted his attention—a quirky little jolt that wasn't there a moment ago.

"Son-of-a-bitch!" Mike spat much louder than he intended. The altimeter suddenly warned of the plane's losing altitude and the oil gauge began to show signs of losing pressure. He clicked on his radio and, as calmly as possible, began to call Frank back at the hangar, only to find his radio didn't work. The engines appeared to sputter in unison and the plane started shaking violently.

"Hang on, babe!" Mike shouted. "We may be landing sooner than planned."

One second the plane had power, and the next it didn't. *Keep the nose up! Keep the nose up!* Mike repeated over and over to himself. He had the vague sensation of being suspended on a long string, like a balloon balancing on an erratic wind current, then, when the engines kicked in of being in control again.

For the life of him he couldn't fathom what was happening to the plane. The pre-flight check had not turned up any problem, yet there they were, in the air without benefit of instruments or even radio to issue a mayday call.

He fought the plane's inevitable urge to dive nose first toward the ground every time the engines cut out. The muscles in his arms and shoulders screamed

out in excruciating pain, over-taxed from trying to keep the plane in the air.

His mind raced for an answer. He began searching the horizon. The plane's altitude had diminished but he couldn't estimate by how much. One thing he knew though, they had just entered the mountains and he had no intention of slamming the Cessna into one of the giants...not with Molly on board.

He made out the expansion of green trees directly below. Hell! They had descended so rapidly it confused his thinking. But he had to get them down safely...some how.

His gut was tied in a tight knot. His jaw clamped. His whole body was rigid in muscled tenseness. It was either try and land or crash and die. And he wasn't ready to die.

His dark eyes surveyed the slanting green mountainside directly in front of the crippled plane. He could hear his heart thudding in his ears, almost beating out of his chest. *Molly's going to want to kill me for this.* She was quiet and had to be cursing his very existence.

His keen eyes spotted a clearing between the tall pines directly ahead. Damn! He knew the rocky terrain at these altitudes. If he lowered the landing gear, the rough surface would sheer it off on impact.

"I'm not ready to die," he muttered, half praying out loud. "I'm not ready to die!"

His own words gave him courage. Determined, he fought the wind currents keeping the plane barely above the treetops as the twin motors cut out. He felt the metal body shudder as it brushed one woody

bough. Then another! And another!

The plane was now at the mercy of the trees, one moment it was sheering off green fronds and the next it was traveling through the woody limbs at a speed defying reason. If the plane would only hold together long enough to get past the trees...

* * * *

The noise of the impact on top of the trees was enough to scare Molly into fainting. She briefly remembered screaming as loud as she could before everything turned black and she slumped in her seat.

Chapter Two

He could still hear the tremendous roar of the plane as it became uncontrollably immersed in the pine trees, feel the force of his body slamming against the steering column and flying against the control panel and then into the windshield as if he weighed nothing.

Battered, but alive, he didn't allow himself time to assess his condition, instead he untangled himself from the broken seatbelt, pushed himself into a half-standing position and lurched to the main cavity of the plane to see about Molly. He heard the warning siren go off telling him to evacuate the wreckage as quickly as possible. His nose recognized the strong stench of raw fuel.

Visually searching the plane, he picked her out of the pile of loose seats and crumbled walls, still strapped in her seat, but unconscious. Blood dotted her face and oozed into her scalp. Like a madman, he rushed to get her free of the seat belt, tossing the seats that had been torn from their brackets aside.

The moment he touched her, he was thankful for her still being alive. Hoisting her into his arms, he

made his way to the door of the plane, only to find he couldn't get it open. All amount of trying to kick the door loose failed to budge it. In the end, desperate to escape and get Molly to safety, he turned to the broken windshield of the plane. A large pine bough protruded through the shattered glass and jabbed into the co-pilot's seat. For a second he swallowed down the agony of knowing that Molly could have been sitting there had they been on speaking terms. For once, he was glad she was at odds with him.

He hoisted Molly's limp body across his shoulder and climbed up on the pine bough, knocking out the remaining glass, he crawled out of the plane. Dropping to the ground, he carried her to safety.

* * * *

A strange frigid aroma pierced the darkness, filling her nose and closing her throat. The last she remembered she had found herself inside the small confines of an airplane with Mike Hampton at the controls. Then, in a fit of coughing, she suddenly jerked upright remembering his last words to her. The plane was going down!

She looked around at her surroundings. She was lying—or rather sitting—on a grassy bank amid towering pine trees, and every part of her body hurt. A chilly breeze enveloped her body, cooling her throbbing head. She raised both hands to cradle her forehead. Had she survived a plane crash? Things were so muddled.

Feeling as though she had to take some sort of

action, she lurched to her feet, only to stumble and fall head first onto the hard ground. She moaned and rolled over onto her back.

"You better stay down, babe. You might have a concussion," Mike said, hurrying over to her.

Molly blinked bleary eyes up at Mike Hampton. He towered over her like a giant Paul Bunyan. Or rather, like *two* giant Paul Bunyans. She could see double of him and neither very clearly. The thought that she was out numbered two to one brought another groan from her throat, and then she realized there were bandages on her arms, gauzy layers wrapped round and round. Then she saw the blood on her top and slacks and wondered how badly she was hurt.

Mike knelt and slipped something beneath her head—a cushion of some sort—which did little to help her vision, or make it possible for her to move out of his reach.

"Did the plane really crash?" she mumbled, squinting her eyes up at him.

"We're safe. That's the important thing," he said in a reassuring tone. .

"But where are we?" she asked, trying to focus her eyes.

"In the mountains," he said matter-of-fact.

His words sent her head spinning again and she could do nothing more then give in to the wave of blackness quickly overcoming her.

Her left arm was being stroked, the movement slow and mesmerizing. Then the hands, warm and gentle, moved onto her shoulders and began a

rhythmic kneading. She felt every nuance of pressure as the aches and pains seemed to intensify throughout her body.

"Come back to me, Molly," a low voice commanded.

The hands moved then, brushing lightly across her breasts and spanning her waist, only to follow the slim line of her body onto her flat abdomen. A slight pause, and they resumed their inspection, trailing languidly about her hips. A warm palm broached the sensitive place between her legs and then inched along each thigh, making their way down each of her legs.

"Babe. Wake up."

The voice was low, husky, tinged with a lusty bit of warning. Molly jerked her eyes open with a sudden alertness that surprised them both.

"Why aren't we dead?" she demanded, arching upward and scrambling out of his reach.

Mike sat back on his heels. "Cause I'm one Hell of a pilot, that's why," he said, shrugging his broad shoulders.

He was grinning at her, that lazy sort of grin that made the dimple in his left cheek pop. And she tried to tell herself that all memory of him had faded. She pulled in a deep breath, staring at him, assessing. He was the Mike Hampton she remembered despite her trying not to. Chiseled, handsome dark features, that quick-to-smile mouth with the full bottom lip, that straight nose accentuated by those mesmerizing dark brown, nearly black, eyes and equally dark brows. His thick dark hair displayed an entrancing widow's

peak on his forehead and caused a lock of hair to graze about his brows in a devil-may-care manner. A shudder of forgotten passion quaked through her. Mike Hampton still retained that bad-boy image she had tagged him with almost two years ago when they first met.

"This is a long way from the desert of Iran, huh, Babe?" he said. He laid his arms across his knees and looked at her. "I bet you thought you'd never see me again."

She chose not to answer his remark—at least verbally, anyway. Truth was, she had pined for him most of the past year

He pushed to his feet and Molly lay back on her elbows and watched him stride across the rock strewn ground. It was then she spied the wreckage of the plane and nearly threw up.

"It's a miracle we weren't killed!" she exclaimed.

"It's one for the books alright," Mike called over his shoulder.

A large gap in the skyline gave way to toppled pine trees and jagged remnants of trees with broken boughs and the sight of the airplane, its nose tipped against the ground, and the main body all but buried in the stand of trees, nearly made her wretch.

The Rocky Mountains were visible through the wide swath of trees the plane had destroyed. Tall gray granite peaks stabbed at the sky, snow capped and picturesque at any other time...right now their raw beauty was only a vivid reminder of her plight.

She struggled to sit up, to make sense of it all. She was alive. Thank God.

"That's beyond comprehension," she mumbled under her breath while trying to get to her feet. Raising one hand to her throbbing head, she stumbled in Mike's direction.

"Easy, babe," Mike called and rushed to her as she struggled to her feet.

"Now that we're alive, how long before we're rescued? You did manage to radio an SOS before we crashed, didn't you?"

When he didn't answer, only stared down at her, she gasped and fought the urge to hit him.

"The radio quit about the time everything else did, Molly," he admitted.

"You mean... You mean no one knows we're here?" she sputtered throwing both hands into the air.

"Frank will figure it out."

"Frank? Who's Frank?" she demanded in a clip tone.

He chuckled at her and reached out both hands to place his hands atop her shoulders, steadying her at arm's length. "Frank is my right hand man. When he doesn't hear from me, he'll know something happened."

"And he'll start searching?" she inquired in a tiny voice. All hope seemed to flag as she listened to him and realized they were stranded on the side of a mountain and not a soul knew they were there.

Mike suddenly pulled her into his arms, cuddling her against his chest.

"We'll be okay," he assured her. He rubbed her back in a consoling manner but all Molly could think about was dying of starvation and exposure in the

mountains.

"We're going to die!" she suddenly exclaimed, pushing out of his grasp. Angrily, she lashed out. "And it's all your fault!" She swung clenched fists at him, pelting his broad chest.

He merely caught her flailing arms and turned her round, pressing her back against the length of his body, crossing his arms over her midriff and holding her arms stiff at her sides. "I didn't crash us on purpose, Molly. If that's what you're saying."

His breath fanned the red tendrils at her left ear and waft across her cheek, almost disarming her.

She felt him let out a long sigh. "Truth is, babe. I'd already made up my mind to be with you one way or another before I returned you to Durango. I just never figured it coming about this way," he confessed.

Molly stood in the ring of his arms, never moving when he captured her clenched fists in his palms and brought his arms up to clasp across her chest. His warmth had quickly penetrated her thin clothing and was mingling deliciously with her own body heat.

"But trust me, Molly," he continued, his voice calm. "We can survive until help arrives. I've already scouted out the area. There's a mountain lake over that crest, and there's a box of emergency food supplies on board the plane."

"Sounds like a vacation," she said in a droll tone.

"For my favorite workaholic," he tacked on, giving her a squeeze.

"And just how long will this rescue take?" she ground out between gritted teeth.

He shrugged his shoulders in reply. "A few days, maybe. But I promise you, babe. I won't let you die."

Chapter Three

Molly sat close to the campfire and stared into the flickering yellow flames. Several hours had passed since they crashed on the mountain. She was still worrying about being rescued, and perhaps even more concerned about being alone with Mike, in the pristine beauty of the mountains, where spring greenery was undisturbed by civilization. It was quiet, serene, and given to entertaining thoughts of the mind. And desires of the senses, she tacked on, her mind warning her of the sensual man in her midst.

She had just managed to turn her thoughts to how cold she was, admitting that the warmth from the fire did little to stave off the cold mountain air, when Mike suddenly appeared at her side. She glanced upward, spying the tin of beans in his hand. Her thoughts did an abrupt turn to her empty stomach.

"Sorry, I don't have a spoon," he remarked, squatting beside her.

"You found the supplies?" she inquired, her tone hopeful.

"Some. It's getting too dark to keep looking. We'll have to try again tomorrow. Here. You'll have to eat

them with your fingers.” He thrust the can of beans into her hand.

“Thanks,” Molly muttered and accepted the tin can. She dipped two fingers on her right hand in and spooned a cold bite of beans into her mouth. They would have been terrible at any other time but just then her stomach was too empty to complain.

Molly had eaten almost half the beans when she realized Mike wasn’t eating anything. It dawned on her then that he had given her the only can he had managed to find. She quickly offered it to him.

He smiled at her and opened his mouth.

The realization that he wanted her to feed him from her fingers rippled through her. After a moment’s hesitation, she scooped out a generous helping of beans and thrust her fingers into his mouth.

He stared at her face while she fed him off her fingers. Then, when the can was nearly empty, he caught her hand and holding her fingers against his tongue, sucked and licked the food from them.

A blaze of heat shot up Molly’s arm. *It can’t be the way it once was*, she warned herself. He was the most sensual man she had ever known and when she was near him, his mere presence seemed to turn her bones to jelly. But she had run away from him—that was a fact she had to remember.

Sleeping arrangements hadn’t been discussed but Mike had spent a good portion of the afternoon erecting a makeshift lean-to from some of the pine boughs the airplane had sheered off. It was about the size of a small closet and constructed beneath a small

out cropping of rock, enough to offer a windbreak from the breeze that had intensified with nightfall.

She was dreading bedtime. It was out of the question to try and take shelter inside the airplane. It was too badly damaged. They would have to huddle together to keep from freezing and she was beyond fighting him off. Her head still throbbed despite the aspirin Mike had given her from the emergency first aid kit he'd retrieved. All her cuts and bruises seemed to ache in one area or the other, adding to her uncomfortable state of mind.

"Let's turn in," Mike said, reaching one hand out to her.

There was nothing to do but realize in order for them both to survive, they had to work together. So she set aside the bean can and placed her hand against his palm so he could pull her to her feet.

"Where do you suppose we are?" she asked, letting him tug her upward.

"About mid-way between Durango and Colorado Springs," he answered, squeezing her hand.

"Do you suppose we could hike out?" she asked, hoping he'd say yes.

"With or without your throbbing head?"

She laughed in spite of everything, then she remembered her cell phone tucked inside her purse. It was still in the plane wreckage somewhere.

"Right now, we're best off staying put. There's enough of a split in the tree line to be spotted by a search plane. We just have to keep our wits about us and concentrate on staying alive."

"I have a cell phone in my purse if you can find it,"

she offered, halting her feet and pulling him to a stop.

"Chances are, it won't work this far from a tower, but we'll look for it tomorrow," he said, smiling down at her.

Keep our wits about us, Molly thought silently as she let Mike usher her inside the makeshift shelter. She doubted she'd sleep a wink, especially with his big hot body so close to hers. Silently she told herself, *it couldn't be helped and not to be so adverse to the idea. After all, they needed each other in the present crisis.*

The fragrance of pine was engulfing as they crawled atop a plush stack of pine boughs Mike had covered the floor of the lean-to with. Molly lay down, her back positioned against Mike's front. It was a prickly bed, in more ways than one.

Circumstances dictate, she reminded herself. *Circumstances dictate.*

He wrapped both arms around her, one around her waist and the other around her shoulders and pulled her back, spoon fashion, against his body. Her thighs were nestled atop his, his firm muscles lending a haunting reminder of how his body felt unclothed. He pulled her into the hollow of his hips, nestling her rounded buttocks in his lap, so close atop his crotch that the mere touch of him made her pull in a shaky breath.

"Are you comfortable?" he asked, his mouth against her ear.

Hell no, she thought silently.

"I'm okay," she managed to reply, her senses acutely aware that they were being bombarded by his exquisite maleness.

Molly lay there, smelling the pine boughs and fighting the urge to stay awake and on guard when she felt the unmistakable firmness of a male erection pressing into her butt. All thoughts of sleeping instantly vanished with the renewal of thoughts that Mike wanted sex.

Mike's left hand began to move along her hip, sliding onto her thigh, then back up to pass across her abdomen. Momentarily he let his fingers rest against the sensitive place between her legs and his fingers press against her body. The warm pressure sent tiny pinpoints of heat shooting through the filmy linen of her slacks.

His breath was hot on her ear but she pinched her eyes shut, willing her body to sleep and not to react to his inspecting fingers. But her senses would have none of it. And Mike evidently sensed as much because with one fluid movement, his hand found the waistband of her slacks and slid inside, broaching the warm place between her panties and her belly. His fingers slid downward, found her moist warm folds, and began a slow, rhythmic rubbing.

"You feel good, baby," he whispered against her ear.

"Mike...please," she voiced in a groan.

The thought of having sex with him was rapidly gaining momentum in her head, but the problem with that was, what would happen next? Tomorrow. Or the next day. And given their circumstances, she could be pregnant before anyone came to rescue them from this damnable mountain! But making sense of the matter wasn't to be gained when his warm hand

continued to distract her thoughts.

His fingers slid amid her folds. Then the sensations he was causing her to have, made her straighten out her legs and roll to her back, opening herself up to him for more play. The cold and uncomfortable bed had ceased to matter. She gave in and yearned for the release his fingers promised.

He cupped his palm across her sensitive mound, forcing her to arch her hips into his hand. All the while his fingers teased her sensitive clitoris.

Her head throbbed from the pressure building inside her body. Then the climax began. She pushed upward against his hand, forcing him to give her the release he silently promised. His palm came down with just the right amount of pressure to send her over the edge and she felt the explosion of orgasm burst forth along her nerve endings.

He held her against the long hard length of his body, his rock hard erection pressed against her hip while she climaxed, but he didn't press her into having sex with him.

Chapter Four

Molly must have fallen asleep soon after her orgasm, for at first light she roused, aware of the heat at her back from Mike's big body nestled against her. She told herself not to think about the orgasm he had given her last night though her body had savored every nuance of the sensation.

The memory was a vivid reminder of just how much her workaholic lifestyle was depriving her of. But she was foremost a reporter—like her father and mother before her—she was conscientious in her efforts to be the best news hound she could be. Already in her short seven-year career, she had covered two presidential inaugurations, war in two foreign countries, and numerous feature stories across the United States.

There wasn't time for a personal life.

"Morning, babe," Mike murmured in a sleepy voice. He stretched, straightening out his arms and legs, then, before Molly could take any action to stop him, he lifted her body atop his, the back of her head resting atop his left shoulder and her legs stretched out the length of his. "You feel so good to touch," he said, his hand caressing her from neck to hip.

He took complete charge, as he had the previous night, only now he made no hesitation about sliding his hand into her slacks. His right hand quickly searched its way into her panties, making her gasp out loud as he delved his middle finger into her wet recesses, while his left hand slipped beneath her blouse and pushed her bra up, exposing her breasts.

"Mike!" she sputtered. "Stop!" Things were getting out of hand, she admitted and since she had no intention of rekindling their once torrid romance, she needed to call a halt to any and all future intimacy.

"I happen to know first hand, you like my playing," he said, his tone low and husky. He nipped at her ear with his teeth, and then poked his tongue into the tiny pink shell.

His fingers were inside her, thrusting and wiggling about, sending all sorts of delicious tingles wafting through her. She could hardly catch her breath. And his other hand on her breasts—her nipples were tight little buds aching to be suckled.

"Relax," he cooed, feeling her stiffen against him. "Relax and let me pleasure you."

It was impossible to relax.

His hands were driving her to the outer limits of sensibility. Suddenly she grabbed the hand inside her panties and tried to still it.

"You're about to climax. Relax. Just let it happen," he ordered.

It was impossible to still his fingers. The pressure of her hand atop his through the thin coverings of panties and slacks made the sensations grow so strong she knew she couldn't prevent from coming.

And she found she didn't want to. For an uncontrollable instant she felt like crying. It was starting all over again with Mike and every fiber in her body screamed out in objection. They had no future together – her career was her life.

"Mike!" she gasped the sensations ripped through her insides.

With a quickness that surprised her, Mike thrust her slacks and panties from her body, then splayed her out atop his body, her thighs spread wide across his lap.

The chilly mountain air pressed against her exposed flesh, vividly drawing attention to her nakedness. But then Mike quickly placed both his hands on her, parting her sensitive fleshy lips and resuming the erotic touching that had brought her to near sexual frenzy. His long fingers slid in and out of her wet tissues, gliding up and down along her slick folds.

Molly moaned deep in her throat. She arched her hips and thrust her pussy against Mike's moving fingers. Reaching, reaching for that inevitable release.

And finding it.

"Oh my God!" she yelped.

"Savor it, baby," he commanded.

Molly withered and trembled. Never had she experienced such climax as Mike could bring from her. He had an uncanny mastery over the ability to wring pleasure from her body. He knew just where to touch, how hard to rub, when to slide inside her wet canal, how to bring her to the brink and then push her over the edge.

Chapter Five

Mike's hands were hot along her bruised thighs and buttocks as he helped her pull on her panties and slacks inside the small confines of the pine lean-to.

A little embarrassed by what she had let him do to her, she couldn't look at him, not his face, anyway, but she did catch the sight of the sizable bulge in the front of his jeans. It looked as though the seam was in danger of splitting wide open.

She hurried to crawl from the lean-to first, meeting a blast of icy cold air square in the face and letting out an audible yelp. But Mike was slower to emerge, probably trying to figure out how he was going to walk with that hard cock straining at his fly.

She smiled a knowing smile and began gathering sticks and twigs to build the campfire. What was done—was done. There was no sense regretting it. And besides, trapped there as they were there wasn't a woman in the world who would be able to resist him. She let out a long breath. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw him emerge from the lean-to. He was hobbling about a little bent over. Hiding her smile behind one hand, she shook her head at the

sight of him. Well, he had been the one to instigate the sex play.

"You won't object to more beans for breakfast, will you?" Mike asked joining her as she struck the cigarette lighter to the small pile of kindling she had assembled.

"Not at all. I'm ravenous," she replied, shivering with the morning chill and hoping the fire caught soon.

"Sex will do that to you," he chided, making it seem an effort to kneel at the campfire.

Molly glanced at him. The teasing grin he aimed at her went straight to her heart. She had missed him she let herself admit. Honestly. She had a real void in her life where he used to be. She suddenly had the urge to kiss him. She leaned over and gave him a quick peck on the cheek.

"What was that for?" he asked in a curious tone, his dark eyebrows shooting upward on his forehead.

"For two orgasms," she admitted. Unable to resist, she skimmed one palm lightly across his bulging pants front, making him jump in surprise. She giggled slightly and quickly snatched her hand back. Then she hurried to pull the tab on the bean can and began gobbling down the cold morsels. Without a second thought, she offered a large scoop on her fingertips to Mike.

"Open wide," she ordered, poking the beans inside his mouth. Damn! There was little use in trying to keep her distance from him in their present situation.

They finished the beans and then resumed the search of the wreckage in hopes of retrieving more

food items and her purse with the needed cell phone. But alas, when Mike finally managed to locate her purse and she got the opportunity to try using the phone, she found it wouldn't work, just as Mike had told her earlier. They were too far out of range to get a call out to anyone. She suffered a short bout of sadness so she pretended to need to go to the bathroom so she could have a few minutes alone to cry. But when she returned from relieving herself behind a large rock on the outskirts of the campsite, she found Mike suspiciously absent.

"Where did he go?" she murmured, placing her hands on her hips and scanning the clearing.

It was quiet on the side of the mountain. The sky was azure blue and there wasn't a cloud in sight. It would be a great day for a hike or hikers, should any happen to stumble upon their campsite. But then it was chilly too. She rubbed her hands along her bare arms.

A bit of scouting led her to the crest of a grassy hill and the discovery of the mountain lake Mike had told her about. It was about the size of a football field with the mountain rising up all around it. It was there she discovered Mike perched on the bank, a tree limb suspended out over the water. He was fishing.

"Are you catching anything?" she yelled, both hands cupped around her mouth. She sure as hell hoped he was. The beans they had shared for breakfast were hardly satisfying.

He glanced over his shoulder, spying her standing on the ledge overlooking the small lake, and held up a fish by the tail.

"Wonderful!" she called and began making her way down the steep incline. *Now if you could just catch a T-bone steak...*

"Careful of those rocks," Mike called, his dark eyes on her. "Don't fall and bruise anything I'm particularly fond of."

"I don't have anything that isn't already bruised or cut," she called in return, feeling the agony of moving almost bringing tears to her eyes.

She made her way down to where he sat on the bank and perched beside him. Surprisingly it was warmer here hidden from the wind, and after a few moments she sprawled out on the soft green grass and became engrossed in watching him fish.

"What's that you're using for bait?" she asked hoping he wouldn't tell her it was their rations.

"Worms," he replied. "I dug some over there. And the hook is a bent piece of metal from the plane and the line is a piece of leather piping off one of the seats." He grinned at her. "I used to be a Boy Scout."

"Bravo," she said, clapping her hands together. "Bravo."

"One more fish and we'll have dinner," he said, smiling at her.

Molly stretched out on her back, clasping her hands behind her head. Closing her eyes against the bright sunshine overhead, she tried to dose. She hadn't gotten much sleep last night—what with Mike snuggled so tightly against her and her senses warring with each other. All in all, it had been a restless night.

Suddenly a shadow blocked the sun from shining

on her face. She could tell even through her closed eyelids. Then she felt the water beads fall on her cheeks and jerked her eyes open.

Mike stood over her running his hands through his wet hair. And he was naked. His entire body was dripping wet.

"I thought you were fishing," she said sitting up in surprise.

"You were sleeping. And yes, I was fishing. And I caught two more fish for dinner. Get up. Come swim with me. The water is surprisingly warm."

He reached her hand and pulled her to her feet, then began helping her remove her clothes, not giving her the opportunity to refuse him. His hands came into contact with her warm skin with every opportunity, burning her flesh, and she gave in to the call of her body.

In moments she was naked and he lead her down the steep slope to the waters edge. Then she waded in, catching her breath at the frigid temperature.

"You lied to me!" she shrieked. "It's freezing!"

"Come on," he beckoned, diving in headfirst and surfacing about ten feet out. He gave his head a shake, sending water spraying from his dark locks. "The coldness will help ease your bruises, and work wonders on your aches and pains," he told her, which was true. But he wasn't really sure what the mountain water would do to her cuts.

"And what if I get some unknown infection in all these cuts?" she countered as though reading his mind. But she was already wet to some extent, she admitted, staring at him when he didn't answer right

away, so she merely shivered and dove in, then popped back up to the surface shrieking. She felt frozen, but invigorated. She began to swim, heading after Mike as he swam toward the center of the pool. She felt amazingly well, less sore, just as Mike had predicted. She caught up with him in the middle of the pool quickly and started treading water trying to reach the bottom with her toes.

"It's deep," he said, taking in a breath of air he plunged beneath the surface.

Molly turned from side to side in search of him. Despite the pristine blue of the water, she was unable to see into its depths. She felt his hands on her body and grew scared of what he might have in mind. She quickly kicked free of his grasp and headed toward the grassy bank so she could scramble out of the water. So far she had only allowed Mike to fondle her body—and he had always been fully dressed—but they were both naked in the water this time.

She scrambled up on to the bank, and began squeezing water from her hair. Shivering, she looked round for her clothes, spying them on the other side of the lake. Gingerly, she began picking her way over to them as Mike swam across the water in her direction. Before she could get dressed, he climbed out of the water beside her.

He didn't speak but Molly caught his dark eyes skimming her wet body and it was all she could do to keep from running away. If she allowed him to have sex with her now she would find herself right back in the same situation she had run away from a year ago. He grasped her by one wrist and pulled her down on

the green bed of grass.

In defense, Molly sat on her heels, her knees bent, and her hands across her breasts. Mike gave her a gentle push, levering her backward, her knees in the air. Then he brought his mouth down between her legs and began to lick his tongue amid the smooth folds. Damn! He was hard to resist—but then it had always been that way between them.

Molly moaned and grabbed his head with both hands. Again she gave in to the urges of her body. Splaying her fingers amid his dark hair, she held his head in place against her pussy and rocked against his probing tongue.

“Relax,” Mike instructed. “Relax and let me pleasure you.”

She stretched out on the green grass with her arms above her head. Her full ripe nipples rose up like hardened rose buds atop her rounded breasts and Mike continued with the assault on her pussy, his tongue gliding in and out of her hot recesses.

Molly’s inhibitions dissolved. She admitted defeat. Her efforts to keep distance between them were failing miserably. She slowly relaxed, her knees easing to the ground opening her up for Mike’s further exploration. Then she felt the onset of climax and bit her lip at the exquisite raft of sensations as they began in her belly and curled out, flooding her abdomen and limbs with untold bliss.

“Tell me you like what I’m doing to you, babe,” Mike said, his tongue moving on her pussy.

“Oh, I like it, Mike. I like it,” she heard herself admit.

He pulled her sensitive clitoris into his mouth and suckled it, nearly causing Molly to swoon. Then he reached up to her breasts and fondled her taut nipples, kneading the fleshy mounds until she thought she would explode with want.

Then Molly climaxed again from his mouth, her clit held tightly between his lips, his tongue lathing it into orgasm.

Chapter Six

He was being very tender with her, she knew. At any one of their sexual episodes he could have plunged himself inside her, speared her with his long cock and relieved his need. But he had pleased her only.

A conversation they had once came to mind. In a moment of sensual embrace, when she had known Mike was sexually aroused, she had broken away, only to have him come find her. It was then she dared to explain her fright at becoming intimate.

"I don't have time for a personal life," she divulged.

"There's more to living than working," he informed her, his dark eyes imploring.

She had fought her feelings for Mike, and ran away from him, only now to be stranded on a mountain and dependent on him. Truth was, Mike was the reason she was alive. He had taken care of her since they survived the plane crash.

He worked his mouth up her body, kissing, licking, sucking, paying particular care to each bruise and scrape on her tender flesh. Then he cradled her in his muscular arms and began kissing her mouth. Long,

deep, searching kisses. His tongue breached her lips and explored the sweet recesses of her mouth, slicked across her teeth and became entangled with her tongue, coaxing it into play. Soon Molly followed his tongue with her own into his mouth, her arousal reviving her senses.

"Tell me to make love to you, Molly. Say that you want me."

His lips moved against hers and his breath fanned her cheeks. He was all hot and needing; his cock was hard and pressing against her naked thigh. Her body burned for his touch. She needed the sexual fulfillment he could give to her, both mentally and physically.

For what seemed like an eternity, Molly gazed up into Mike's dark eyes. Was there love in the ebony depths? The realization caused her to blink in wonderment. Or could she actually identify love since she had never really experienced it with a man before?

She stiffened her body beneath his hands. Desire still raced along her nerve endings; she still felt like molten silver in his grasp, but what would she do about her feelings once they were off the mountain?

Suddenly, he levered himself upward, to a standing position and poked out his hand to help her up.

She felt terrible for what she was doing to him—denying him fulfillment when he had unselfishly pleased her previously. But there was more at stake than a few minutes of sexual bliss, she reminded herself.

His cock was long and engorged, and he made no motion to hide himself from her gaze. He obligingly tugged her to her feet when she stretched out her hand and once she was standing and secure in her footing, he began putting on his clothes. She did peek at him just in time to see his uncomfortable attempt to push his extended cock inside his fly.

A pang of regret stabbed at her and despite the orgasm he had just given her with his mouth, she had to admit the sight of his wanting to make love to her with his hard cock, made renewed sexual arousal travel through her senses.

For several moments Molly stood clasping her linen slacks and cotton blouse to her chest, staring at Mike as he finished dressing and then turned his attentions to the fish he had caught. He could have easily overpowered her and forced himself on her. No one would be the wiser. After all, they were stranded on a mountain perhaps hundreds of miles from anywhere. The thought gave her a chill.

Mike would never rape me.

Why should she have that thought?

Confused by her own questioning, she began pulling on her clothes, her eyes going over Mike's muscular figure as he began cleaning the fish on the bank of the lake. She watched his hands as he used the small pocketknife he took from one pocket of his jeans. He was skillful, very adept at wielding the sharp blade.

Something bothered her about Mike carrying a pocketknife, but then she put it down to a carry over from his time spent in the Marines. A knife was

probably a survival tool, as was the cigarette lighter he had produced to light the campfire.

She hurried dressing, noticing how the effects of the cold water had seemed to lessen her aches and pains. She pulled off the wet gauze Mike had placed over the cuts on her arms and inspected each gash. There was still more gauze at the campsite for another bandage or two. Then she climbed back up the grassy slope to the makeshift campsite. Already the sun was hanging low in the sky. Soon it would be dark and they would be spending another night in the pine bough lean-to. She needed to reach some sort of decision about how their relationship was progressing. She needed to either decide to have sex with him or refuse to allow him to continue to pleasure her. It just wasn't fair. She let out a long sigh. Her stomach was empty. And she was tired of being trapped on the mountain.

"Trapped on the mountain," she repeated again.

The crash still bothered her. She raked one hand through her damp hair, splaying her fingers through the shoulder length locks. She was an investigative reporter, after all. It was her nature to be suspicious, to question, to look for answers.

The odor of fuel permeated the site and probably would until it rained...or snowed. She grimaced at the thought, but accepted the fact that it would probably occur before they were rescued. It snowed on the mountains even during the warm months because of the elevation.

Rescued. She was ready. Things were heating up too fast between her and Mike to risk hanging round

the crash sight for much longer. The memory of their afternoon swim in the mountain lake came rushing back. She needed to make a decision about him—about *them*.

“Here you are.”

She looked up and saw him coming through the trees and she felt a sudden surge of longing just looking at his big body. He was getting to her, she admitted, breaking down her defenses bit by bit.

“The fish is cooked. Let’s eat,” he stated, halting and motioning for her to come to the fire.

Chapter Seven

“This is the best fish I ever ate,” Molly announced. For some stupid reason she thought she should compliment him on the fish since she had refused to have sex with him.

It seemed funny suddenly. She laughed and continued the intricate job of eating the flaky fish off the green stick Mike had roasted it on. The flesh was hot and sometimes burned her fingers before she got the bite to her mouth, but her stomach was feeling better for her efforts.

He sat across the campfire from her eating his fish and barely glancing at her. She could feel the strain between them and knew her unvoiced refusal at the lake earlier was responsible. She had rejected him. And he was hurt.

“I’m sorry about this afternoon...at the lake,” she muttered, feeling as though she should make amends. After all, he had been so good at taking care of her. And those orgasms!

“That’s in the past,” he said, not looking up. “Let’s not talk about it.”

“Alright,” she replied in a low voice. Was he angry

with her as well as hurt? Should she fear him on another level? She almost cussed out loud. Sometimes her suspicious nature—that investigative will of hers that both her parents praised so highly—well, sometimes it got in the way of reality.

She let out a long breath. Of all the damn predicaments, she thought. Stranded on a mountain with no means of communication. She silently cursed her cell phone and made a mental note to pack her purse with provisions should she ever land in a similar situation. It galled her that she didn't even have a comb or a stick of gum in her fashionable leather bag. And when had she become so fashion conscious? She wondered, glancing down at her blood splattered blouse and slacks.

"Let's try hiking out of here tomorrow," she suggested, watching his expression. The yellow glow from the campfire played across his handsome features, adding a dark sensuality to his already intriguing countenance. He raised his eyes and looked at her.

"Have you ever hiked in the mountains?" he asked, his tone nonjudgmental.

"No. But how hard could it be?" she quizzed. "We're on a mountain and in order to get off it, we just climb down." She shrugged her shoulders, as though it was the easiest thing in the world.

He shook his head and tossed the fish skeleton attached to the stick into the fire. Then he rose and came over to sit beside her.

"Honey," he began, placing a hand against her back. "I know you want to get off this mountain." He

let out a long breath.

Don't say I want to get away from you. Because I don't really think I do. Was it possible she had finally reached an agreement with herself concerning him—concerning *them*—while she sat there across the campfire from him eating fish? It made as much sense as anything else in her life just then.

"But trying to hike out of here is probably the most risky thing we could undertake," he continued, his tone solemn.

"Mike, we survived the crash. Wasn't that the most risky part of this whole thing?" she countered, raising both hands into the air.

"This mountain more than likely adjoins another mountain, and another mountain. We could wander for weeks and never get off these fucking rocks."

His voice was tinged with anger and Molly felt the tension in his hand on her back. He had slid it up her spine and it rested at her nape. A measure of caution rose up inside her, though she refused to heed it.

"How *did* we manage to survive the plane crash, Mike?" she dared to ask. She turned her head towards him, locking their gazes. "The body of the plane is a smashed ball of steel. How *did* we survive?"

He pulled in a deep breath.

"People don't usually survive airplane crashes in the mountains," she continued to press, her brows drawing into a frown.

"We must be living right," he alleged, chuckling slightly in an effort to play down the event.

She wasn't buying it. Her suspicion was obvious.

"Tell me what really happened," she demanded.

"Did you crash us on purpose?"

"No, babe," he hurried to say, shaking his head. "Both engines failed. You heard them."

"Yes. I remember hearing a sputtering noise just before you said we were going down. But how did either of us survive with just minor injuries?" Her stomach churned as she waited for his answer.

His fingers flexed at her nape.

"I fought the plane as best I could, Molly. Finally, I made a judgment call and decided to try and set it down." He paused. "The next I knew, the plane was careening through the trees and then it stopped. You were unconscious in your seat. I guessed you had been knocked out when your briefcase was thrown out of the overhead compartment." He paused and made an attempt at a smile. "Overhead compartments are dangerous you know." He drew in a deep breath. "Then I rushed like Hell to get you out of the plane."

Molly covered her mouth with one hand. Hearing him talk about what happened while she was unconscious suddenly made her see how much of an ordeal they had lived through. And all her questions sounded so stupid.

Then suddenly, she was in his arms, holding him tightly, trying to visualize their near-death escape. She tried like hell to push her suspicions away.

"I never planned it, Molly. I swear. Plane crashes aren't planned, honey. They just happen."

"I believe you," she whispered, her fingers threading through the dark silky hair at his nape. "I believe you." Hot tears filled her eyes. "I believe you."

Chapter Eight

His mouth was hot against her lips, firm, yet not demanding of her. Awareness shot through her body. She had instigated the kiss; she had made the move that landed her in his embrace.

And what an embrace it was!

His arms were strong, muscular, and oh so warm. His palms were flattened against her back, slowly and hesitantly drawing her against his chest.

And what a chest he had!

Memories tried to surface, tried to block out and overtake the sweetness engulfing Molly. She fought her inward battle to be in Mike's arms, to give of herself to the one man she thought she could fall in love with. She fought the urge to pull away, to end the inevitable before it ventured any further.

"Make love to me, Mike," she said in a rush, her lips parting only slightly. She hurried to get the words out before she changed her mind. "Make love to me."

He stiffened as though trying hard to believe he had really heard her words, and then it was all systems go. He scooped her off the ground and cradled her body against his broad chest as he strode

toward the pine bough lean-to.

Molly blocked out all thoughts aside from the sex about to take place. She clung to Mike, her arms surrounding his neck. Her face nestled into the hollow of his throat. She could smell his scent, a tangy, woodsy aroma mingling with the pine tree scent surrounding them. She could feel his warmth penetrating her clothes.

Mike knelt at the low entrance of the lean-to and lay Molly on the makeshift pallet they shared. His fingers found the buttons on her blouse and began to release them, his knuckles brushing her bare throat and then her breast as he peeled the cotton fabric from her body.

The glow of the campfire barely gave enough light to illuminate the dark interior of their little hideaway, their windbreak from the mountain cold, but there was adequate illumination for Molly to make out the smile of satisfaction on Mike's face.

She raised her hands and helped him with her blouse, hurrying to release her bra and slip off her slacks and panties. Then they both removed his clothing, her nimble fingers helping to pull the t-shirt over his head and release the snap on his jeans.

Naked, they stretched out atop the pine boughs as though they were familiar with doing just that—going to bed together, naked, unashamed. In the past they had shared many sexual interludes—the final had been on the evening before Molly decided she must break from him.

The pine boughs were rough, not at all the choice of bedding, but Molly soon forgot that her soft

contours were being scratched and poked when she went into Mike's arms.

He pressed her gently down atop the boughs and covered her body with his, his skin melding and mingling with her soft curves. Her breasts flattened beneath the firm muscles of his chest and he then began moving his mouth down the long column of her throat to tease her nipples. One by one he suckled, nipping and tweaking her rosy buds until they peaked ripe and begging. He moved his mouth lower, claiming first her flat abdomen and then dipping into the sensitive place between her legs.

This is so right.

His tongue lavished her slick tissues, bringing her to near climax. Molly clutched at his muscled shoulders, her fingers entwined in his dark hair. He was an exquisite lover. She urged him to come to her.

"Take me now. Take me now," she whispered, her tone quivering with sexual arousal.

"Are you sure, Molly?" he whispered.

His words almost confused her.

"Yes," she answered. "Yes."

He crawled up her body, a low moan escaping his throat. He lowered his big body atop hers and his hard cock stabbed her between the legs.

At first Molly stiffened and Mike pulled back.

Mike raised up off of her quickly. "Did I hurt you?"

"No," she replied, her hands pulling him toward her. *It's been such a long time.* She had forgotten how big he was. How very big!

He lowered his body atop hers once more and with

his hand, guided his stiff cock inside her, pushing in slowly and giving Molly a chance to get used to his size.

Then he began to move!

Molly wound her arms around his waist and began moving with him, matching her hips to his hips, her thrusts to his thrusts.

The fragrance of pine engulfed her senses as they mashed the pine needles beneath Molly's back. They set a rhythm that was exquisite and Molly clung to him and shut her eyes, reveling in the act she had finally allowed herself to have.

Her muscles began to knot as the sensations of climax bore down on her. She arched her hips higher, opening herself up for Mike's thrusts. Then the promise was fulfilled. The orgasm began, a heady spiraling feeling that defied all reason.

"Oh, babe," Mike whispered.

Molly moved her hands from his shoulders to his thrusting buttocks, urging him deeper into her body, calling up that sexual release she hovered on.

Then it exploded inside her, careening throughout her body and shaking her senses. She rode the wave of ecstasy, tall and buoyant, savoring the delicious spirals as they came on her.

Mike bucked his hips and seemed to explode inside her letting out a great gasp of air and driving his mouth down hard onto hers, kissing her with wild abandon.

It seemed to last a long time but then the sensations seemed to wane too quickly. Molly was spent; panting heavily and feeling so serene she wondered if

they really were lost in the mountains. Everything seemed right with the world just then.

Chapter Nine

“Me Tarzan. You Jane.”
Molly giggled and snuggled against Mike’s naked shoulder. Daylight filtered through the frilly pine boughs and made yellow shadows on their naked bodies.

“I guess the jungle would be warmer,” Molly remarked tracing a fingertip along the trail of dark hair leading from Mike’s navel to his groin. He had an early morning erection that beckoned to her hand.

“Don’t do that unless you’re prepared to...”

“What?” she cut him off. She wound her fingers around the base of his erection and squeezed gently. She kissed him on the cheek, prompting him to turn his mouth toward her for a kiss.

“Are you sorry about last night?” he asked, his dark eyes assessing her face. The cuts on her forehead and left cheek were on their way to healing though they had appeared somewhat deep. He lifted a red tendril from her temple and felt its softness, and then he stroked his fingertip along the crest of her cheek to her mouth. It was lush with full lips and he hurried to kiss her again, his tongue poking inside to taste her sweetness.

"No," she replied. Her hand was momentarily stilled on his erection but the bulbous head of it was poking into her belly like a big, hot poker. She began to move her clasped fist, easing it back and forth along the solid hot length.

Mike drew in a quick breath at her sex play and then he ran his hand along her side, across her hip, then slid it between her legs, finding her pussy. He began to fondle her slippery wet folds, teasing her with his fingers until she began to pant.

Her hand moved faster on his erection and his fingers worked her clitoris with heated urging.

"You're going to make me climax," she whispered against his lips.

"That's the idea," he returned, his breath coming in short gasps.

Molly ground her pussy against Mike's fingers and let it happen inside her body. The sensation was almost too good to distract her from what she was doing to him until she realized her hand was wet because she had brought him to release as well!

They lay together, catching their breath, their bare bodies being cooled by the sudden breeze that rifled through the pine boughs. The unmistakable sound of something foreign to the mountain penetrated the lean-to.

"I hear a plane!" Mike exclaimed, scrambling to roll over and find his clothes.

They were momentarily tangled in arms and legs as they rolled about the small confines trying to get dressed sufficiently to exit the shelter.

"The Hell with it!" Mike bellowed and burst out

the narrow opening stark naked.

Molly managed to sort out her clothes from his and rapidly pulled them on before exiting the lean-to on quick feet, buttoning her blouse as she ran toward Mike trying to spot a plane from the sound overhead.

She paused and searched the sky. For the life of her she couldn't tell which direction the sound was coming from. Then it dawned on her to light the campfire. Even if the search plane—which she hoped to God it was—couldn't catch sight of Mike in all his naked splendor maybe the smoke from a fire would be spotted.

Racing against what might be only seconds, she hurried to gather the small bunch of kindling lying near the ring of stones and struck the cigarette lighter. Her fingers faltered on the strike wheel, resulting in only sparks coming from the butane lighter.

"Damn! Damn!" she cursed out loud.

She glanced over her shoulder. Mike was still searching the sky hoping to catch sight of the plane. She *had* to get the fire lit before the plane left the area!

"Come on now, you bastard!" she cursed the lighter as it sparked again. "Come on!"

Her hands shook as she poked the lighter beneath the small bunch of dried sticks and hit the strike wheel with her thumb again. A flame appeared and she held her breath and guided it to the smallest twig near her hand.

"Come on... Eureka!" she shouted in victory.

A little yellow flame sputtered and flickered as she urged more kindling into its reach. Another quick glance over her shoulder to check on Mike's efforts

and she yelped in delight when she returned her eyes to see fire. It was going. It was taking hold and burning. Quickly she heaved more twigs on it then got to her feet and headed over to help Mike try to signal the plane.

Chapter Ten

Molly gazed into the azure blue sky and felt her hopes flag. Neither her nor Mike saw the plane, though its sound was unmistakable. She turned toward Mike as he started walking back to the campsite. She smiled at the sight of his big naked body, putting aside the fact that the plane hadn't passed over the crash sight.

"If that pilot only knew what he missed," she said shaking her head.

Mike waved a hand at her and headed to the lean-to for his clothes.

"It's too damn cold up here to go naked," he said upon his joining her at the campfire. "Building the fire was a good idea though," he commented, zipping up his fly. He placed both hands on his hips and turned his inspecting eyes overhead. "I know Frank sent that plane out."

"It didn't even come over us," Molly said in a dejected tone.

"He thinks I might have gone off the flight plan," he offered.

"Did you?" she quipped.

He shook his head. "No. I just didn't *finish* the

flight plan, babe."

"But how can you be sure if the instruments weren't working?" she pressed.

"Because everything was fine until both engines started acting up, cutting out and dying, then it was only a matter of seconds before the plane started losing altitude."

Molly heaved a big sigh. "I sure wish he'd have flown over us."

"He'll be back, babe. I know Frank, and he'll be back. He won't give up on us. He's a good man," Mike insisted.

His words bolstered her courage somewhat, that, and the positive tone of his voice. That was one thing about Mike that always intrigued her. He was always positive. As she thought about it, he was always trying to make her be positive as well.

"Let's go catch our breakfast, babe," he insisted, stretching out one hand to her.

"Ugh! Fish for breakfast," she objected, screwing up her face at him.

"We'll pretend they're donuts," he said, then laughed. He grabbed her by one hand and pulled her toward the lake.

Mike rigged up another fishing pole and line for Molly and they both fished perched on the grassy bank out of the wind. Before too long they had caught enough fish to roast for breakfast, or brunch, since the sun had moved directly overhead.

Molly stared at the skewered fish suspended over the fire. It smelled good and her stomach was growling with hunger.

"This is the third day on this mountain," she began. "How much longer are we going to stay here?" She pinned her gaze on him, trying to will him to speak an answer that she would agree with.

"We're waiting on the search plane to spot us, honey. We've been over this," he said trying to keep his tone reassuring. He poked more sticks into the flames beneath the roasting fish.

"I know." She glanced down at her dirt soiled slacks and grimy blouse. "But I want some clean clothes." She felt like hell and knew she looked equally as bad. She still had aches and pains, and those damn cuts on her arms and face were worrying her. What if they left scars?

"We can wash our clothes in the lake," he quickly suggested. He smiled at her, nodding his head.

She threw up both hands. "You survivor," she remarked, shaking her head at him.

"It's true," he insisted, grinning broadly.

"Yes. This mountain has all the creature comforts," she admitted in a droll tone.

"Well, not all of them. There's no beer," he added, giving her a wink with one dark eye.

"Beer!" Molly exclaimed. "Beer!" She glanced round for something to throw at him, then, in a moment of weakness, decided he didn't deserve to be hit since he was obviously just trying to lighten her mood. He didn't even drink beer as best she remembered. She let out a long breath and stared at him. She shouldn't be taking out her frustration on him.

"I'll do a little scouting and see if there are any

berries growing around here," he said, tending the fish.

It was a tricky task to cook fish on a stick. Once they began to cook they were likely to slip right off the stick so Mike tended them carefully, making sure no portions were lost.

"Well, I hope you don't rustle up a bear when you're looking for berries." She spoke nonchalantly, and didn't see the raised eyebrow Mike displayed.

"Eat up," he ordered, handing her a fish on a stick.

"Bon appetite," she mumbled, accepting the food.

Chapter Eleven

Molly sat on a rock near the fire and thought about their predicament. By this time the story she was headed to cover, had been grabbed by another reporter. Funny, she thought, shaking her head. Any other time she would have been furious at herself for missing the opportunity, but right then, she couldn't even think about anything outside of their immediate situation.

"Maybe it's because I'm into this mess up to my eyeballs!" she bit out.

She got up from the rock and walked around the fire. She didn't regret having intercourse with Mike. In fact, her decision to do so had, in some way or other, relieved her of a heavy burden—the burden of wondering if he really cared for her or she for him, to be more to the point.

Yes, she did care for Mike, and her feelings were growing by the day. Her depression was lifting, she realized. Still, in the back of her mind she wondered how she could have both, a personal relationship and a demanding career.

She gave her head a quick shake, sending her tousled hair dancing about her shoulders. Surely they

would be rescued soon. She spun round on her heel. It was time to go check the fishing poles for a catch. In the back of her mind she wondered how many fish were in the small lake. She shuddered to think what might become of them if they hadn't come down near the water.

She traversed the steep slope down to the waters edge and carefully checked both lines. Neither had a fish on its makeshift hook, though one hook was without bait. She grimaced and pulled a night crawler out of the bean can Mike had taken to house his bait. Fighting back the urge to throw up, she poked the wiggling worm onto the metal shard and threw it back into the lake. Wiping her fingers on the grass, she hoped Mike got back before time to check the lines again. Fishing was more a man thing, she decided, still trying to justify murdering the worm.

Mike was just returning to camp when Molly climbed up the hill from the lake. Strange, she thought, noting the direction he was coming from. He had left in the vicinity of the lake. She was waiting for him at the campfire, adding more wood to the flames by the time he made it all the way into the camp. They had decided to keep the fire burning throughout the day just in case the plane came back and they were too busy to build one.

He was carrying his t-shirt and grinning, striding toward her in that loose-limbed way he always walked.

"You have food!" she yelped, running to meet him.

"Gooseberries," he said, showing her his bounty.

"I've never eaten gooseberries," Molly exclaimed.

She reached into his makeshift basket and extracted a handful. Without fanfare, she popped one into her mouth. "Oh my God it's sour!" she said, making a face.

"Don't you dare spit it out!" Mike cautioned with a laugh.

"I'm not," she said, chewing real fast and frowning. "Where did you find them?" she asked when she was finally able to swallow the sour fruit.

"Yonder," Mike said, gesturing over his left shoulder with his thumb.

"I thought you went in the direction of the lake."

"I did," he was quick to answer. "And since I don't intend to become lost in the woods, I circled the perimeter of the plane wreckage. And there's lots more berries on the bushes so when we eat these, we can go pick more."

"Just like going to the supermarket," she said, grimacing from the tart flavor of the berries.

"Catch any fish?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Nope," she replied, eating another berry. "But I came up with another idea while you were gone. Want to hear it?"

He smiled at her and touched her cheek with his forefinger. "I'm open to suggestions," he said.

"Well," she began with her eyes pinned on him. "Since the cell phone doesn't work at this altitude suppose we hike down the mountain until we get in range of a receiving tower."

He shook his head and smiled at her. "Honey, our best bet is to stay put," he insisted. "I'm certain Frank will send out another search plane. And besides, I

have another way of relieving your restlessness." He reached for her, clasping one big hand behind her nape and dragging her against his chest. He kissed her mouth. Tasting the sour gooseberry juice on her lip, he licked at it with his tongue.

Flames of desire flooded Molly's body. He was right. He did have other ways—or at least one—to relieve her restlessness.

Chapter Twelve

They agreed to hiking down the mountain for a time just to try her theory about the cell phone. Mike made another check of the fishing poles to be sure they both had bait and they set out intending to return before dark.

The woods were dense and trees grew almost on top of each other, their limbs entwining and stabbing at the sky. Thick underbrush and fallen, rotting pine needles covered the ground, concealing dangerous holes and washes.

"Damn!" Molly spat as she turned her ankle and was forced to sit down from the pain. She sank into the underbrush as she looked round for Mike. They had promised to keep each other in sight but at the moment she couldn't locate him at all. She looked round, wondering which one of them had forgotten to watch out for the other.

"What happened?"

Molly almost jumped out of her skin when he suddenly appeared directly behind her.

"I turned my ankle," she confessed, grimacing with the shot of pain piercing her foot and calf.

"I better have a look," he said, coming to her aid.

"It'll be okay in a second," she lied, rubbing her leg with both hands.

"No sense taking chances. Let's have a peek," he insisted.

He knelt in front of her and took her ankle in his hands. With a look of reassurance on his handsome face, he pushed up the leg of her slacks and exposed her calf. He ran his hands over her ankle, grazing the top of her foot and eventually slipping off her loafer.

"See. I'm okay," Molly commented.

The warmth of his hands on her bare foot sent a raft of sensations traversing up her leg. He had never touched her foot before and now that he was inspecting every tiny inch of it, she realized his hands were warm beyond compare, not to mention how gentle he was being. It was almost more than she could tolerate.

"Nothing appears to be broken," he said, grinning at her. He wiggled her foot round, holding on to the calf of her leg, then slid his fingers to her toes and inspected each separately.

Molly was beginning to like the attention. Her body was relaxing and sinking down further into the odoriferous underbrush. She leaned back on her elbows and watched him through half-closed eyelids. Her thoughts started to center on the pleasure he gave and how good it would feel if he touched every part of her body like this.

He held her bare foot in his hands and looked down at her. A lazy grin spanned his face, intensified perhaps by the three-day growth of dark beard and the lock of black hair that dipped low on his forehead.

He was the focus of her thoughts, she admitted as she continued to lock gazes with him. Her insides were quickly heating up and thoughts of having sex right there amid the forest underbrush was on the verge of becoming reality when suddenly the roar of a plane sounded overhead.

"Listen," Mike said, raising his eyes and trying to see through the treetops. "Another plane!"

He was gone in an instant, yelling over his shoulder for Molly to put on her shoe and catch up to him.

Molly scrambled about, retrieving her shoe and getting up, and then she began running through the trees back to the campsite.

She was out of breath when she burst through the trees into the clearing. Mike was scanning the sky, one hand shading his eyes.

"Do you see anything?" she yelled, walking toward him.

"Not yet. But I can hear the engine," he replied, his tone hopeful.

"Which direction?" Molly questioned. She couldn't figure out why she was having such a hard time deciphering which way the plane was coming from.

"There!" Mike yelled, pointing one hand.

"There it is!" Molly yelled, spying the plane up in the sky.

They both began running round the site, waving their arms and yelling at the top of their lungs.

Then, to both their delight, the plane flew directly over them!

"He saw us, Mike! He saw us!" Molly yelled, a

bubble of happiness filling her heart. She threw herself into his arms and hugged his neck. "We're gonna be rescued!"

Mike squeezed her in his arms. Then he kissed her happy face. "It's possible that the pilot saw us," he said against her ear.

"I know. Don't get my hopes up," Molly repeated. But she felt so certain that the pilot had seen them and that very soon they would be off that mountain that she decided not to think otherwise.

She felt elated. She raised her hands to Mike's nape and pulled his head down so she could kiss him. Long and promising; a kiss that relayed her joy of the moment.

"Listen. The plane's circling back," Mike told her, breaking the kiss. He tipped his head and scanned the sky.

Happiness intensified inside Molly. She broke free of Mike's embrace and began flailing her arms over her head and calling at the top of her lungs. "We're here! We're here!"

The plane was lower that time, almost skimming the treetops as it came into view and the expression on Mike's dark features told Molly he was certain they would be rescued.

The silver belly of the plane was a welcome beacon as it sliced overhead, its broad wings sending shadows about the clearing. The roar of its twin motors was music to her ears and when it passed over them, it dipped its wings and then began to climb, signaling that they had indeed been found!

Chapter Thirteen

“There’s a hot bath in my future!” Molly exclaimed, grinning broadly and clapping her hands.

They had gone to the lake to clean fish for their dinner. Previously Molly had stayed at the campsite while Mike performed the chore—deeming fish cleaning too gruesome a task for a woman—but since the rescue plane had spotted them, she was eager to do anything to make the time pass.

“How soon do you think they’ll be back for us?” she asked Mike.

“Not today, babe. It’s too near dark.”

“Crap.”

Mike looked up from cleaning the fish. “Are you objecting to spending one more night here with me? Haven’t I been the perfect gentleman?” He grinned, making the dimple in his left cheek pop.

Molly smiled and she could feel a red blush heating her cheeks.

“I’m cold and hungry,” she admitted.

Mike held up one cleaned fish. “I’m almost ready to feed you.” He gave her a wink with one dark eye.

"And then I'll warm you up."

Molly felt her cheeks flame at his words. She quickly turned her head to look out over the pristine blue of the mountain lake. He hadn't once pressed her about her leaving him. Not once since they'd been trapped on the mountain. In fact, at times she had gotten the feeling that they had never been separated. She glanced back to see he had returned his attentions to cleaning the fish. Why hadn't he questioned her?

"Mike," she began, making up her mind to bring up the subject.

"Yeah, babe?" he replied, his eyes on the knife blade he used.

"What have you been doing for the past year?"

"You mean since the time you ran out on me?"

A tremor of surprise skittered through her insides. She hadn't expected him to counter her question in such a blatant manner.

She sucked in a steadying breath. "Yeah. Since the time I ran out on you." Maybe he expected her to deny it...or maybe not. He didn't look up or even pause in his cleaning the fish.

"Well, let's see. Aside from nursing a broken heart..."

"Mike," she drawled.

"It's true," he asserted, glancing at her.

The look in his dark eyes said as much. And Molly made herself busy inspecting the green grass between her feet.

"If I didn't have fishy hands, I'd come over and give you a good shaking, Molly Clark!" he stated, staring at her.

The tone of his voice jarred her senses. She jerked her head round to see him frowning at her.

"I... I'm sorry," she muttered, trying to decide what to say next. In retrospect, she wished she'd kept quiet.

He finished cleaning the fish. Threaded the flesh onto sticks, rinsed his pocket knife and his hands, then turned and climbed the bank, all without saying another word

Molly followed him up the grassy bank, feeling alien in his presence and trying to decide on the right words to quell his anger at her.

Mike positioned the skewers of fish over the fire and added more sticks to the blaze. Molly took a seat on a rock and held out her hands, warming them. It seemed colder than it had been or maybe she was just feeling the icy chill Mike cast her way.

"I'm sorry I barked at you, babe," Mike said, raking one hand through his dark hair. "But the past year has been a long one without you." He looked at her across the campfire, his dark gaze assessing her face. "Your leaving was a surprise to me."

"You know how important my career is to me. " She saw the tiny muscle in his jaw flex and stilled her tongue.

"There's more to life than reporting the news, Molly." He rose to his feet and strode back and forth before the fire, his hands thrust into his pockets. "Millions of women have careers *and* personal lives." He let out a disgusted huff of air. "Your own parents are evidence of that fact."

Molly winced. And Mike's acute gaze caught her reaction. At once he rounded the campfire and

stooped at her side, his hands clutching her upper arms.

"What is it? Did I touch a nerve?" he demanded, a frown creasing his brow.

Molly shook her head.

"Talk to me, babe," he encouraged, his anger dissolving.

Where did she start? Did she tell him how she managed to find attention with either of her parents? Did she tell him she used to have to call their offices to speak to them even when she was a child? Suddenly it all just came pouring out—the loneliness, the feeling of abandonment.

He drew her into his arms and she pressed into the sturdy warmth of his muscled chest, seeking consolation from all the memories. "I didn't know," he whispered against her ear. "But we could make it work, honey. We could make it work."

Then he just held her in his capable, strong, warm arms. And Molly drew the conclusion that in his arms was the most wonderful place in the world.

Chapter Fourteen

Mike cupped Molly's chin and tilted her head back so he could possess her mouth. Tenderly, he brushed his lips across hers, the pink flesh barely making contact. He touched her full bottom lip with the wet tip of his tongue, feeling her response in the tiny tremor that quaked through her body.

The wind had intensified with the coming darkness. They had been forced to put out the campfire and crawl inside the pine bough lean-to, but the air easily penetrated the makeshift structure, surrounding them in a frigid blanket that touched every facet of their bodies.

Molly shivered, both from the cold night air assaulting her body and the torrid barrage of kisses Mike pummeled her senses with, even the rough scratch of his unshaven face lent an aura of sensual feeling to the act. She huddled as near to him as humanly possible, knowing he took the brunt of the cold since he had his back to the opening of the lean-to.

"I'm freezing," she confessed, her teeth on the verge of chattering.

"I'm doing my best to heat you up," Mike replied in a whisper.

He stroked her breast through her blouse and bra, not daring to undress her since frostbite was a real consideration in the temperature that surrounded them.

Molly laughed softly and hugged him closer. He smelled of the woods, the fire, even a faint hint of fish clung to his t-shirt.

"You're gonna write about this, aren't you?" he asked, his hands rubbing her back. "You could write a book about this, Molly."

"I know. Except I'd have to leave out all the good parts."

They laughed, both knowing Molly was talking about the sex.

"At least this is our last night on this damn mountain," she said, a gruffness to her voice.

"Maybe," he replied, his hands stroking her back.

"I'm sure of it, Michael Paul Hampton," she asserted.

He laughed deep in his throat. "You sound serious," he remarked, giving her a hefty squeeze.

"I *am* serious. This time tomorrow night I'm gonna be neck deep in a steaming bubble bath. And after that I'm gonna sprawl out in my own bed and I'm gonna sleep like a baby," she informed him in a positive tone.

He was quiet for a time, holding her and stroking her back.

"Mike," she said, her voice taking on a low tone.

"Yeah."

"I'm inviting you to my bubble bath," she said.

"Thanks. Can I participate...or do I just get to watch?" he asked, holding his breath waiting for her answer.

She giggled softly. "You are invited to participate," she replied, snuggling as close to him as she could.

"I'll be there with bells on," he assured her.

"Great," she chirped.

"There's just one problem, Molly," he said, his voice soft.

"What's that?" she asked, drawing back to look at him.

He caressed her right cheek with his fingertip. Then he bowed his head and kissed her lightly. "I don't know where you live. I haven't known for a year."

Molly was quick to shush him, placing the tip of her index finger across his lips. At once he caught her hand and kissed her fingertips, then he lowered her hand to his fly and pressed her palm against the hard bulge in his jeans.

Molly giggled softly. "It's too cold to take our clothes off."

"You know the Swedish go out and roll in the snow," he said in a convincing tone.

"I'm not Swedish," she refuted in a lilting voice.

"Neither am I but if they can survive such a stunt..."

Molly giggled as he began tugging at her clothes. Within a few seconds he had her stripped naked and was crawling atop her, his rock hard erection positioned between her legs.

"Oh, you're warm," she exclaimed, pulling his naked chest against her breasts.

He lunged into her quickly, piercing her with his big cock. Then they began to move, clinging together in shared warmth.

Molly's shivering soon gave way to mounting pleasures as the movements sent her blood circulating in a frenzy inside her body. She hadn't thought it possible to be warm on that night but she soon deemed her speculation in error.

The pine boughs beneath her back rustled, releasing their remaining pungent scent and the frigid temperature continued to fan its icy breeze through the voids in the boughs. But Molly and Mike were engrossed in their lovemaking.

He thrust deep inside her warmth, making her catch her breath and arch her back, opening herself up for him. She dug her nails into the ropy muscles running long side his back and he dipped his head to claim her open mouth. Tongues tangled and licked; a nipple was suckled, then released to be cooled by the chill looming inside the shelter.

"I'm coming, babe!" he announced, his big body on the verge of orgasm.

"Wait for me!" she insisted, her breathing ragged.

He pulled back, almost to the point of extraction, then pushed back in again, slowly, deeply, only to repeat the slow rhythm again, bringing Molly closer to the brink.

"Oh!" she breathed. "Oh, Mike!"

He moved faster reacting to her whispered words.

Molly dragged in a deep breath and began a rapid

rhythm, clinging to Mike's bucking hips, her nails digging into the flexed muscles lying just beneath the smooth flesh.

"Faster," she ordered in a breathy tone.

Their makeshift bed rustled and rose up fragrant and heady around their naked bodies. Mike thrust his hips strongly and Molly met his lunges, burying his erection deep, deep inside her.

Molly clung to him while the sensations spiraled through her body. Nothing compared to the way Mike could make her feel. Nothing.

A crescendo of titillating sensations exploded along her limbs, making her senses reel and taking her breath away.

Chapter Fifteen

The helicopter propeller kicked up the dust and dried twigs covering the clearing as Mike and Molly eagerly awaited a rescue device to be lowered to them. The air was swirling around them, beating unmercifully at their bodies, nearly throwing Molly off her feet.

"Hang on, babe. We'll be out of here in a few minutes," Mike yelled, trying to make himself heard over the roar of the chopper blades. He wrapped one arm around her shoulders trying to shield her from the swirling debris the wind threw at them.

Molly squinted through the dirt and wind, her eyes shielded with one hand, her gaze on the open doorway in the side of the chopper. Within moments she saw the metal cage being readied by one of the chopper crew and felt her stomach begin to tremble. They were really being rescued!

The metal crate, a seat actually with a metal grid, was lowered, and the wind beat at it miserably. All night long they had been battered by strong winds on the mountain and still it continued, perhaps harder and swifter since daybreak.

Mike raced ahead and caught the wire seat,

motioning for the man at the chopper door to lower it a little more. The helicopter hovered overhead, the strong wind battering its gray sides and challenging its rotor.

"Come on, babe," Mike called, waving an arm at Molly. "You're first."

Molly ran over to him, clutching her battered purse in one hand. Her hair was being whipped into her eyes so badly she could hardly see. Mike lifted her into the basket, tucked in her legs and feet, then, giving her a thumbs up signal, waved at the crewmember running the lift, and the metal seat took off with its cargo.

Molly tried not to scream as the basket swung round and round, then side to side. The force of the wind was unreal. She hung on to the metal sides of the basket, her fingers clamped so tightly her knuckles were aching. Her heart thundered in her chest and felt like it was about to jump out of her throat, but she kept telling herself it would all be over soon.

It seemed like the longest time before Molly spied the big metal helicopter right beside her seat and glimpsed the face of the man who had sent the basket down. He reached out and caught the metal cable and swung the basket inside making it slam on the helicopter floor. She scrambled out, glad to be aboard. Within seconds the basket was being lowered for Mike and Molly strapped herself into a seat just behind the pilot.

It seemed only seconds before Mike climbed out of the rescue basket and they were flying off. Molly

breathed a sigh of relief and leaned back against the seat. Mike and the two men aboard were shaking hands and talking but she didn't care—she just wanted to let the relief at being off the mountain travel through her.

Chapter Sixteen

“I’m not letting you out of my sight.”

Mike captured Molly round the waist and guided her to the main entrance of Hampton Charter.

Inside, Frank looked up from the desk, a telephone receiver against his ear. He waved at Mike and grinned, then grinned at Molly.

Molly returned the man’s smile. She guessed she had him to thank for sending the search plane and their subsequent rescue. She allowed Mike to usher her into a small office off the front foyer.

She felt dirty and unkempt. Her hair was scraggly and hadn’t seen a comb in all the time they had been on the mountain. And she was hungry. She glanced about the small office, wondering why Mike had ushered her inside. She was anxious to be on her way back to her place so she could bathe and get some food.

Movement behind her caused her to step aside. It was Frank and he carried a fast food sack in one hand and two sodas in the other.

“I’m starving,” Molly exclaimed, watching Frank set the sack on Mike’s desk.

“You two are lucky to be alive,” Frank said, handing a burger to Molly and then Mike.

"We know that, buddy. And thanks for believing we were." He offered his hand to Frank then drew the old man into his arms and hugged him. "Thanks for sending the search plane."

"I would have picked you up when I spied you but its pretty rough country up there," Frank said, shaking his head. "Landing spots are at a premium."

"That was you in the search plane?" Molly asked round a mouthful of hamburger.

"Sure was. I was determined to find some trace of Mike or his plane," Frank answered, his jaw set in a convincing clasp.

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart," Molly said, her words choked. "You truly saved our lives."

"You're welcome," Frank said, grinning. He turned curious eyes on Mike. "What in hell did you find to eat up there on that damned mountain?"

Me, Molly thought, smiling and meeting Mike's dark gaze. She felt a blush travel up her throat and redden her face before Mike dragged his eyes away.

"Luckily," Mike replied, a sly smile on his face, "we discovered a lake with some fish in it."

"And gooseberries," Molly added, her voice sounding strangely hoarse.

"Fish? In a mountain lake? How did fish get in a mountain lake?" Frank asked, a perplexed look on his aged face.

"How the hell do I know, Frank. But they were there and we caught some of them. We had fish twice a day," Mike answered in a clip tone.

Ignoring the men, Molly helped herself to another burger and popped the top on her soda can. Usually

one burger was her limit but she hadn't really gotten filled up on the fish and gooseberries they had been forced to eat on the mountain.

"Really good burgers," she complimented, looking at Frank.

"I thought you both might be hungry," he replied.

The phone at the front desk rang just then and Frank left the office, leaving Molly and Mike to eat in silence.

Once they were done eating, Mike took the keys for his truck from a desk drawer and led Molly out the back door of the business. He held on to her hand until they reached the pickup, a late model silver Chevy parked at the back of the lot.

"Where to?" he asked, ushering her into the passengers seat. "I'll bring your car over later. Right now you're riding with me," he announced, sliding into the drivers seat.

Molly smiled at him and gave him her address. In a matter of minutes they were pulling up in front of her apartment building. She took her keys from her purse and unlocked the door then she glanced at Mike, realizing he didn't have more clothes to change into if he was expecting to collect on her invitation for that bubble bath.

He chuckled and dipped his head to kiss her. "I'll be back later," he said plucking the ring of keys from her hand.

"I have to bathe alone?" Molly commented, faking a pout.

"I'll take a rain check," he called over his shoulder.

"Oh, okay," she gave in, pushing the door into the

room and stepping inside. "I'll be here waiting. Hurry back."

Chapter Seventeen

Molly bathed and washed her hair enjoying every moment of it. She'd never take soap for granted again, she vowed as she lathered her body.

Half an hour later, Molly emerged from the bathroom wrapped in a terry robe, her wet hair encased in a thick towel, the cuts and scrapes on her face, legs and arms treated with antibiotic cream. She felt as though she had been away for weeks, rather than a few days. In some ways her own apartment—the place she had called home for the past year—seemed foreign. She strode through the living room, her gaze taking in the pure white walls and neutral furnishings. Her desk sat beneath the only window in the room, her computer perched atop it. A series of notebooks opened to various scribbled pages containing notes on stories she was covering were stacked in a neat pile on one corner.

She headed for the small kitchenette in search of a hot cup of tea. Despite the half hour spent in the shower she still felt chilled inside. The tiny room was neat and clean, no dirty dishes piled in the sink or pots on the stove. Truth was, she rarely cooked. Her

job was so demanding—or she was so demanding of herself—that her meals mainly consisted of fast food grabbed whenever she could.

She didn't have much of a life—a home life—she admitted. But then she had grown up with parents that were always on the go.

She pushed the thoughts aside and rummaged in the pantry for a tea bag. Thoughts of Mike filled her mind as she found the tea and filled a large mug with water to heat in the microwave. Their stay on the mountain had been an experience she'd never forget. In numerous ways, it had been quite eye opening. She leaned against the small breakfast bar and waited for the water to heat, her arms folded across her chest.

Where did their relationship go now?

The microwave buzzed and she retrieved the cup of hot water. Dunking the tea bag in it, she went toward the sofa. She curled up, tucking her feet beneath the hem of her robe. Strange, she thought, she hadn't checked her answering machine to see how many messages she'd missed, or turned on the computer to check for emails. It was almost as though something had taken precedent over work.

She sipped the hot tea and relived the days and nights on the mountain with Mike. He was the same man she had broken away from earlier. He was still protective of her, and quite able to fend for himself in difficult situations. He saved her life on that mountain.

But then he put them there in the first place.

There was a note of suspicion embedded in the whole episode surrounding the plane crash and their

stay on the mountain. The fact that Mike could land the airplane amid the trees without killing them both was a mystery. She recalled his comment when she asked him how they had survived.

‘Because I’m one hell of a pilot.’

Maybe he really was. Or it would appear so.

She pulled the towel from her hair and combed her fingers through the red strands. She didn’t want to be suspicious. She didn’t want to be anything except glad they were off the mountain and returned to their lives.

She levered herself off the couch and went to blow dry her hair. She was too suspicious. She was too much a news hound. She wanted proof of everything. She wanted every question answered to her satisfaction.

Mentally she began making notes of all the little things that bothered her about their stay on the mountain. The crash—or landing as Mike claimed—she couldn’t explain how that happened, except to say it had to be a miracle. Or Mike had some magical powers she knew nothing about and the fact that he was adamant about not trying to hike out of the mountains. Would it really have been such an impossible task?

And where, exactly, had the plane gone down? Were they as far from civilization as she had been given to believe?

She threaded her fingers through her dry hair, fluffing it away from her face. Her arched brows drew together in a frown as she recalled old Frank discounting the fact that fish were in the mountain

lake.

She needed answers. All her suspicions were adding shadows of doubt to Mike's character. She didn't want to believe or—or God forbid—be able to prove he had deceived her in any way.

She dressed and went to the computer. The world was at her fingertips. Any question she could ask—some site had the answer.

Chapter Eighteen

Molly blinked her eyes at the computer screen. The aerial map she had found of the Rockies was so detailed that she realized she would have to know the flight plan Mike had filed in order to calculate where they had gone down. Either that or she needed to call the helicopter rescue that had picked them off the mountain. But, if she did the latter, would Mike find out she was investigating what happened?

She pulled her bottom lip between her teeth and nibbled on it nervously. He had insinuated she should write about the mishap. And if she did decide to put it on paper, she would have to know the details.

She leaned back in her desk chair and considered the consequences. She didn't want Mike to get the idea she didn't trust him.

"How do I cover my ass?" she murmured out loud.

A knock on her door ended her speculation...or plotting. The feeling that she may be going behind Mike's back almost made her ill.

He stood there when she opened the door, all six foot four inches of gorgeous male. And her pulse leaped in her wrist. He was cleaned up, dressed in denim jeans and a red polo shirt, and he had shaved. Molly almost gave in to the urge to reach out and stroke his smooth cheek.

"Are you going to let me in or are we just gonna stand here and gawk at each other?" he said, giving her a lopsided grin.

"I'm sorry," she sputtered, taking a step back into the room. "Come in."

He stepped across the threshold and headed to the couch, a brown manila envelope in one hand. Turning, he poked the envelope out to her. "Here's some information I think you might need so you can write your story."

Molly accepted the envelope and felt a pang of shame for even thinking she would go behind his back. Then she became acutely aware of the aerial map still on the computer monitor. She wondered if Mike had noticed and cut her eyes to his back as he crossed the room.

"The coordinates are in the envelope," he said, pausing and turning to glance at her. He then resumed his trek to the sofa in the room. Taking a seat, he turned his dark eyes on Molly still standing near the front door holding the manila envelope he had given her. "The only question I can't answer for you is how those blue gill got in the lake."

Molly giggled, a short, nervous burst that seemed to spontaneously leap from her throat.

Mike leveled his dark gaze on her, watching,

waiting.

The next move was hers. And whatever decision she made—however she decided to play out the game—would be remembered by both of them for the rest of their lives.

She decided to be honest.

“I do need answers, Mike,” she confessed crossing the room and sitting beside him on the couch.

He gave her a slight smile. “You think I planned the whole damn thing, don’t you?”

His words hit her right between the eyes. Wham. He had put her suspicions into his own words and hearing them stung.

He suddenly pulled the envelope out of her hand and dumped its contents on the coffee table. “It’s all here.” He rose to his feet and headed to the door. “Except the explanation for the fucking fish.”

He opened the door and walked out.

Molly was so stunned that she couldn’t get off the couch to run after him. She just sat there, her mouth gaping open.

Five minutes passed. Ten minutes passed. Fifteen minutes passed. Finally, the awful realization dawned. Mike was pissed and he had walked out on her.

She pulled in a steadying breath and reached for the papers on the coffee table. Trying to focus her eyes—she was on the verge of crying—she managed to make out a copy of Mike’s flight plan and the exact location of where they had been rescued by the helicopter marked on an aerial map—like the very map she had called up on the computer screen.

After spending several minutes looking over the papers, Molly agreed with Mike. It was all there except for proof of why the fish were in the mountain lake.

Chapter Nineteen

Molly phoned her parents home but neither of them was in. She left a short message on their answering machine, not mentioning that she had recently been rescued off a mountain. They weren't even aware of her absence and she regretted having to admit it to herself.

She called the newspaper and arranged to take a few days vacation. Then she packed a small suitcase and left her apartment. Luckily on Mike's final visit he had driven her car over from the charter office. It was parked in the lot near the building the first time she ventured out—which was three days after his visit. She had given him that long—foolishly—to have time to change his mind.

He hadn't changed his mind apparently, for he hadn't returned.

She had made reservations at a small mountain retreat—of all places—Alpine Manor about sixty miles from Durango. She planned to check in, go to her room, and stay there for a week, during which time she would put the entire story of their experience on the mountain on paper—minus the sex, of course. And, she decided, she'd even record her

suspensions about the days and nights spent with Mike, including the mystery of how the fish came to be in the mountain lake. She'd write the whole damn story beginning with the crash. Maybe then she could make some sense out of it.

She arrived at Alpine Manor just before dusk and checked in. The hotel was exactly what she expected, given the name. It was rustic, with pine log siding, and set amid towering green pine trees, and totally out of view of any major highway. She felt secluded the moment she entered the lobby.

She was given a brochure of all the hotel's activities, including dining room hours and room service rates. There were several hiking trails behind the lodge and even a stable with mules to rent if she wanted to explore the woods to any depth.

Molly declined to sign up for any of the activities, despite the raised eyebrows of the desk clerk. He's probably thinking I'm suicidal or something, she thought silently.

"I'm here to write," she told him, hoping to dispel any other ideas on his part.

"Will Mr. Clark be joining you?" he inquired, one eyebrow lifting slightly.

"I'm alone," Molly clarified. She didn't bother mentioning that Mr. Clark was her father or that she wasn't married.

Her room was typical hotel, queen bed, with draperies and bedspread that matched—purple flowers on a rose colored background. There was an ample bathroom with a shower and the typical array of hotel soap along with packets of shampoo. A small

coffee pot and wall mounted hair dryer 'for her convenience' the brochure covering the room denoted, and a small TV.

She threw her suitcase on the foot of the bed and flipped the locks. She'd unpack since she was staying for a week.

Pajama clad and armed with her laptop, her notebook, and the contents of the manila envelope Mike had left at her apartment, she sprawled in the center of the bed. But inspiration was slow in coming. The whole time she had driven to the hotel, she had gone over how she would start her story only to find she now had a super case of writer's block. How can that be? She wondered, glancing at the contents of the envelope, then forcing her eyes to the blank computer screen.

Finally, she resorted to turning out the lights and going to bed. But she wasn't sleepy. She turned on her back and clasped her hands behind her head. Something had changed inside her and she wasn't quite certain of what it was.

She stared out of the window in the room. Since she was on the third floor, she decided to leave the drapes open so she could look at the nighttime sky. She had never been unable to write before. Always, the words were there with the eagerness to put them on paper.

Stars studded the small patch of sky visible through the window. The tall pines near the corner of the building raked their frilly boughs against the siding as the spring breeze blew them about. It was a chilly night.

Not as chilly as those nights on the mountain.

Her mind kept returning to those nights and days on the mountain with Mike. They were memories that just wouldn't go away no matter how she tried to dispel them. Work. Well, work had somehow lost its appeal for her. She felt restless and on edge.

She threaded her fingers through her hair and then sat up in bed. She was twenty-nine years old and had never felt that way before. She was uncertain and hesitant, as though she didn't know her own mind, what she wanted or needed. Her parent's marriage had been a nightmare dictated by careers and deadlines. How could she possibly believe she could have Mike *and* her career when she had witnessed first hand the effects of such a tough challenge?

Her time on the mountain had lent itself to chance. At any time a wild bear could have come and eaten them both, though she seriously doubted Mike would allow it. She had to smile at the silliness of her thought. There weren't any bears in the area—or at least none found them. Maybe Mike was to thank for that too.

How was she going to spend a week, cooped up in that hotel room? She let a short laugh leave her throat. She couldn't write anything. But then she didn't really want to, she admitted, a note of surprise filtering through her.

All she could think about was Mike and the time she had spent with him.

"I believe I love the man," she said aloud.

Chapter Twenty

Molly checked out of the hotel with the first light and drove back to Durango, straight to Hampton Charter. She parked her car in the front of the building and went inside.

The office smelled of fresh brewed coffee and motor oil. What a combination, Molly thought, but she remembered the interior of the plane smelling faintly like motor oil when she first boarded it that fateful afternoon. Frank poked his head through the open door of Mike's office when he heard Molly come in.

"Well, hello," he greeted, coming toward her. "You look a whole lot better than the last time I saw you," he said, shaking her hand. "Those cuts on your face and arms are just about healed."

"Morning, Frank," she replied, shaking hands with him. "Yes. And my bruises are fading too." She glanced round in search of Mike.

"He isn't here. Just took off with a group to Colorado Springs," Frank said. "Won't be back until tomorrow. Care for a cup of coffee?"

"No, thank you." She turned to leave but a large map hanging near the front door caught her eye.

There were several red pins marking locations.

"Those are plane crash sights," Frank said, walking over to the map. "This one is where you and Mike were." He put one finger on the head of a pin and turned serious eyes on Molly. "He's one hell of a pilot you know, else he'd never been able to handle the plane when the engines started failing."

Molly remembered she had seen a flash of fire out the window and heard the sputtering.

"A thing like that can turn a plane upside down and roll it over and over until it smashes to the ground."

Molly's jaw dropped open. Lucky for her she'd gotten hit in the head and knocked out stone cold or else she'd have died of fright.

Frank shook his head from side to side. "It was a miracle alright. Just a miracle. If you didn't believe in them before—you can believe in them now." He grinned at Molly. "Sure you won't have a cup of coffee with me?" he asked, changing the subject.

She returned his smile. "Alright," she accepted, her eyes returning to the aerial map. Her curiosity was peaked by it. Frank went to get their coffee and Molly tried to make out the area where Mike had set the plane down. A small dark area very near the pin might be the mountain lake.

"I'm still puzzled by those blue gill in the lake," Frank said handing Molly a cup of coffee. "The only thing I can figure is that some time back somebody must have had a mountain cabin up there, a hunting cabin, maybe, and they must have started stocking the lake." He shook his head. "That's all I can figure."

Molly made mental notes of her conversation with Frank. Then once she was back in her apartment she gave her friend who worked in the county deed office a call hoping to unravel the mystery.

"That area is all government property," her friend informed her.

"But not always. That lake didn't appear to be man made. Somebody must have owned the ground, or homesteaded it," Molly insisted.

"My records don't go back that far," the woman replied. "Sorry."

Molly hung up the phone. There had to be some way of finding out who stocked that lake. She went to her computer and began searching. The Rocky Mountains were crawling with prospectors looking for gold during the 1800's. The papers Mike had brought to her identified where the plane had gone down and true, the area was now part of a national forest, but those prospectors were enterprising people.

Too curious to abandon the search, Molly didn't stop for the night until she realized her head was throbbing and her shoulders ached.

Come morning she resumed her search, to no avail. In the final conclusion, she deemed the fish had mysteriously appeared there—in the same manner Mike had managed to set the airplane down without killing them both.

What does it matter anyway? She thought. Mike is gone and I'll never get him back. The fact that we had fish to survive on—and torrid sex to keep us going...

Sex.

Had it been the sex that started her thinking?

She got up and paced the living room floor. Sex with Mike was good. Hell. It was everything she remembered it was. And more.

She shook her head. How could she have ever not trusted him? He had shown her he loved her time after time. He had tended her on the mountain when she was injured—cut, battered, bleeding, with her head throbbing so badly she could hardly see straight. He had brought food to her—food he had caught with his own hands. He had built them shelter. Hell! He had done it all on that mountain. He had saved her life and kept her from freezing to death with his very body.

A shiver of longing wafted through her. She missed him. And she wanted him back.

Chapter Twenty-One

Molly sank back amid the froth of pale pink bubbles, her hair piled atop her head, her arms stretched out on the sides of the bathtub. She heard the apartment door open and waited.

He knew of her presence in the apartment even before he laid eyes on her. It was a quirky feeling he got in the pit of his stomach, a tiny little tremor that shot along his nerve endings and made his heart beat a little faster. He pulled in a deep breath, savoring the fragrance of her bubble bath as he neared the bathroom door.

"I thought I'd bring the bubble bath to you, honey," Molly said, her eyes locking with his as he stopped in the open doorway. "I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?"

He sighed audibly and yanked his t-shirt over his head. Releasing the snap on his jeans, he kicked off his boots as he crossed the tiled floor to the tub. In a second, he pushed his jeans down the long length of his legs and kicked them aside.

His cock was well on its way to full erection. The

gods were smiling on him, he decided, his senses reeling. At once the sadness he had been toting around over losing Molly again, faded away.

Smiling, Molly drew up her knees, making room for him as he stepped into the tub. The water level rose, sloshing over the rim of the tub onto the floor and the heat in the water seemed to intensify as he sank down inches from her bent legs.

"Come here," he said in a husky voice. He wouldn't allow her to drive him away this time, he vowed. He leaned toward her, his right thumb and index finger clutching her chin. He covered her mouth greedily with his own, kissing her as she had never been kissed before and setting a flame igniting inside her body.

His hands found her breasts and skimmed their softness with his palms, lifting each in the warmth of his hand, and then he parted the froth and gazed at them. He lifted Molly slightly, bringing her breasts out of the water. With slow stroking fingers, he brushed away the soap and began a slow inspection of each fleshy mound.

It was like he had died and gone to heaven. She was willing and available and he craved her with every part of his being.

Mike pulled each of her nipples into his mouth and teased them with his tongue. Molly caught her breath and cradled his head in her hands watching his mouth on her nipples. It was exquisite torture—touching and being touched, awaiting the ultimate coming together, that blissful joining that pleased them both.

His hands worked lower, sliding beneath the water to skim along her wet thighs, then into the sensitive region between her legs. His fingers delved inside her, heating her more than the hot water she was immersed in. She gulped in a breath of air, feeling heady with the sensations he was bringing to her body.

He pulled her beneath him, his hard erection at once finding her slippery sex. With one fluid movement, he slid inside her, the water splashing about their naked bodies. Her warmth engulfed him, surrounded his hard cock in a heated pleasure cave that he loved to enter. An uncontrollable shiver of hot lust traveled through him.

Molly held on to his waist and met his mouth when he craned his head to kiss her. She had never had sex in the water before, but she had the feeling this wouldn't be the last time.

The water splashed with their movements and the water faucet momentarily got in the way but the flood of sensations washing over her were well on their way to overtaking Molly's senses. She closed her eyes and gave herself over to Mike's mastery, allowing him to raise one of her legs around his waist so he could have more room to move freely.

When the orgasm rocketed through her body, she yelped out loud. Mike thrust into her deeply when he reached his own climax. Then she closed her eyes and savored the battery of sensations zinging through her body.

The warm water was engulfing and the waning orgasmic tingles were beyond compare. Molly hugged him tightly, secure in his strong arms. She felt content.

Mike began to play with her left breast, tweaking her nipple and running his fingertip around its circumference. He pulled in a deep breath, and sat up, breaking their contact.

Molly felt an immediate chill when he left her. She leaned over the edge of the tub and retrieved the sponge that Mike knocked to the floor when they had made love. She leaned toward him, and began washing his chest. It was beautiful. Muscular, smooth skinned, with a most appealing swatch of dark hair spanning out to cover both his nipples.

He gave her a lopsided smile. "Pete McCall," he said.

"What?" Molly asked, halting the hand with the sponge in mid-air.

"Pete McCall. He was the guy who put the blue gill in the lake."

Molly blinked her green eyes at him and then she laughed, shaking her head.

"That's the last piece of the puzzle, babe," he said, giving her a curious look. "This McCall guy was a trapper and, as the story goes, he was trapping in the mountains and stumbled on the lake by chance. He fished it, caught nothing, but noticed all the raccoon tracks around it and figured if there was fish in it, it might attract more game. So he hauled a load of fish up the mountain side in a barrel on the back of his burro and dumped them in."

That's incredible," Molly remarked, staring at him.

"I don't know how successful he was trapping after that. But he was a guy with ideas," he said, chuckling slightly.

"I agree," Molly said, smiling. The whole thing about the fish and the lake suddenly seemed humorous.

"Want to know how I found out?" he asked, one side of his mouth quirking upward in a smile.

I'm not sure, she thought, but she nodded her head yes.

"I just flew Pete McCall's great grandson to Colorado Springs. When we flew over the mountain range he began to tell me the story of his grandfather."

He stroked a fingertip across Molly's bare shoulder. Then he cupped his hand behind her neck and pulled her body atop his.

"I'm hard again, babe. Sit on me," he ordered, deliberately changing the subject.

Molly willingly straddled his hips, positioning his erection against her opening. Slowly she sank down on to him, feeling the long hard flesh filling her with its heat.

Mike held on to her hips as she began to move.

"Mmm. You feel so good," he said, closing his dark eyes.

Slowly she continued to move up and down atop his cock. She swiveled her hips, rising up and then sinking back down on his erection. It felt wonderful.

"Now that you know how the fish came to be in the lake, you can stop being suspicious. You can stop

investigating. You can stop thinking I planned the whole thing so I could be alone with you. Hell. I looked high and low for you when you hightailed it out of Iran." He halted his words, shaking his head.

Molly couldn't handle talking with his cock thrusting inside her, so she stayed silent and brought them both to orgasm, then she slumped against his chest, her breath coming in short gasps.

"I love you, Molly," he whispered, his breath hot on her ear as he wound his arms around her.

Molly snuggled against the side of his neck. "I love you too, Mike. And I'll never be suspicious of you again."

"Then you believe I didn't plan to strand us on a mountain?" he asked in a husky tone.

"I know you didn't," she said, kissing his neck and inching her way upward to his lips. "I know you're brave, and loyal, and wonderful, and..."

"Will you marry me?"

Molly's heart somersaulted in her chest.

"We can make it work, Molly," he assured her, his hands rising to clasp her upper arms. "Together, we can do anything, babe. Didn't we prove that on the mountain?"

Molly stared into his dark eyes. She did love him — truly. And she had been fighting a battle within herself against it. Hell! She hadn't been able to write anything in days! Maybe there was more to life than chasing news stories.

"Give us a chance, Molly," Mike urged. His cock was growing hard once more and it was nestled quite nicely beneath her butt. "I promise you all the sex you

can handle," he said, smiling at her.

She stroked his cheek with her fingertips. He was everything she could hope for in a man and he had just proposed to her. What was she waiting for, the sky to fall on her head?

"I'll love you forever, Molly," he whispered. "So I'm going to ask you again. Will you marry me?"

A bubble of love rose inside her. It wasn't every day a girl survived a plane crash and got rescued off the side of a mountain. Hell! She was super woman! She could do anything!

"Yes," she replied, her voice filled with conviction. "Yes, Mike, my love. I'll marry you and together I know we can make it work!"

The End

About the Author

I've been living my dream of writing for pay for fifteen years, but when I'm not at my desk, I enjoy riding motorcycles with my husband Dave. We've toured the lower forty-eight states and had many wonderful adventures. We have plans to visit Alaska and Hawaii in the next two summers. When I'm not traveling or writing, I enjoy reading and taking long walks with my sweetheart.