

# **The Water Witch**

## **Ciarra Sims**

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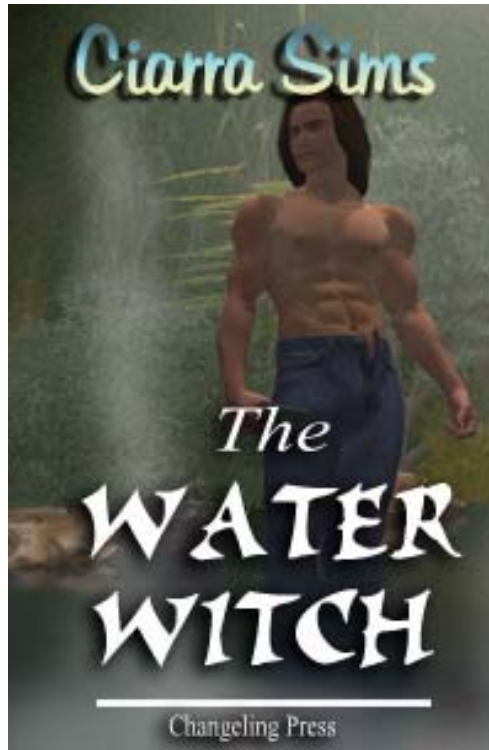
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## **Elsmere Lake**

When a man's body washed up on the shores of Elsmere Lake no one thought it odder circumstances than a tragic accident. It would be a few days or even a week before identification was made, but that wasn't unusual either. Every year the tourists flocked to the lake and unloaded their boats and Jet Skis with enthusiasm. Unfortunately, accidents, usually involving alcohol, happened, and drownings occurred. Sometimes once a year, sometimes every other year. But as the lake became more popular, the chance of a tragedy increased.

The water lapped hypnotically along the shore, a simple rhythm as old as time itself, gently eroding the silt that comprised the majority of the lake bed. Further out the water darkened as the steep volcanic crater that cupped the lake deepened into oblivion. Some said the lake had no bottom in the deepest parts. A group of scientists had tried to measure a few years back, but a freak storm interrupted their quest and they'd given up.

Now it was generally accepted the lake was near bottomless, leading to inevitable tall tales and myths of huge fish and creatures lurking in its depths. But, all in all, the stories were very good for the tourist trade.

Swimmers and water-skiers often related stories of a warm current running through the icy waters. It was rumored the volcano still expelled its ancient breath from under the lake bed, creating a hot springs effect now and then.

For the most part, Elsmere Lake was a peaceful place to live, and a restful place to visit and play.

Until the bodies started washing up.

## Chapter One

A thin sliver of moon appeared on the horizon. The placid lake shone on and off as clouds overhead reflected it at a whim. Close to shore a deep churning underneath the water caused the silt to rise as if something large were moving through the water. Something broke the surface in the darkness, creating an energetic splash, only to disappear underwater again.

From the short wooden dock on the south shore sixteen-year-old Brenda Yates shivered. "Dex, I don't want to do this. It's scary out here. Something about this place gives me the creeps."

Her boyfriend, Dexter Boyd, groaned in frustration. "You promised. It's my eighteenth birthday, Brenda. Make it special."

Brenda cast an uneasy glance at the dark waters of Elsmere. "Dex, I want the first time to be special, not creepy. Besides, what if someone sees us? My parents will kill me if they find out. You know they think you are too old for me as it is."

"Fuck your parents, Brenda. What do they know anyway? I want a great birthday present and you're it." Dex smiled up at her in the dark as he untied the small fishing boat from its mooring. "Hop in. I'll push off."

With a short leap Brenda jumped into the boat, her legs shaking precariously trying to get used to the swaying craft. Dex gave the boat a shove away from the dock and agilely leapt the distance, landing next to Brenda who was now sitting clutching the sides uneasily. Dex's jump rocked the boat, and Brenda squealed in alarm as the small boat pitched.

Dex wasted no time giving the outboard motor rope a few tugs. The motor sputtered then caught, sounding like an angry bee in the night. He wasn't a seasoned sailor by any means, but it didn't take a genius to steer the rudder straight for the

middle of the lake. When he was satisfied they were isolated, Dex cut the engine and let the boat drift. Using his most seductive voice, Dex ordered Brenda, "Sing happy birthday to me while you strip, honey."

Brenda gasped in disbelief. "Are you out of your freakin' mind? It's too cold. And if I move more than a muscle this boat will tip. If you wanted a striptease, you should have sprung for a cheap hotel room."

"Brenda. Don't make me come over there," Dex warned ominously.

Brenda knew he had a temper. His dangerous bad boy side was what made him so sexy to all the girls in school. But he had picked Brenda to be his girl. She knew what that entailed. So far she'd stalled him and kept her virginity intact with promises and teasing. But tonight was it. His birthday was "the night." Brenda tried to bargain. "How about this Saturday at the Juniper Lodge? We can order room service. I'll even spring for it."

"Brenda, you've strung me along all summer. I've never waited as long for any girl. I'm gonna rock your world tonight, babe." With a lunge he crossed from the back of the craft to the front. The subsequent rocking distracted Brenda and before she knew it, Dex had hold of her wrist and twisted it brutally.

"You little tease! Did you think I would invest this much time in a girl without some follow-through? We're gonna fuck the night away." His free hand grabbed her pink sweater and yanked it off her shoulders. The garment effectively pinned her arms as Dex fumbled under her T-shirt, finding her bra.

Brenda pulled back, but as the boat rocked violently, she had a premonition of tumbling into the dark waters.

Dex grabbed her bra cups and squeezed painfully. Her breasts were forced upward until they were clenched vice-like in Dex's palms. He ground his mouth on hers in a frenzy, even more excited by her whimpers of pain.

A hand found its way under Brenda's skirt, pinching her thighs as fingers sought panties and yanked them down. A finger prodded against Brenda's soft flesh and she wiggled to get away from the intrusion.

"You're so tight," Dex muttered. "I'll fix that." His finger prodded clumsily, then he pushed another inside her. Brenda moaned and Dex mistook the sound for pleasure. "You like that, doncha? Don't worry, baby, I know what you girls want. You say 'no' when you mean 'yes.' You say 'stop,' when what you want is to be fucked good and hard. Tonight I'm making your dreams come true. You think my fingers feel good? You're gonna like this even more."

Brenda heard his belt buckle jingle then his zipper being pulled down. She was forced backward, wedged against the wooden bench seat and the side of the boat.

"Dex," she sobbed, "don't do this, please!"

"You want it, you know you do," Dex's voice rasped in her ear.

Brenda swallowed the panic building in her throat as the wooden side of the boat jabbed into her back and Dex pressed against her, hard. His erection poked against her thighs, seeking entrance. A sharp sting between her legs made Brenda yelp as he slipped inside her roughly.

He pulled back, ready to lunge forward. Brenda's vision blurred as she yelled, "No, Dex!"

In her ears she heard a terrible hissing, like steam rising from the cold lake. A mist clouded her eyesight as the boat was enveloped in a steamy fog of sorts. The water boiled around the boat, and steam rose rapidly. The hissing grew louder as Dex's breathing grew uneven.

Brenda couldn't seem to draw enough breath and her head grew fuzzy. One moment Dex was on top of her and the next he was gone. In her mind she replayed the moment, knowing it wasn't possible, but just as if it were a movie scene, it played over and over.

She swore a pale arm reached from the hot steam over the boat and yanked Dex off of her. His eyes widened into hers, then he was flung overboard, followed by a single splash, then nothing.

\* \* \*

Dex was sinking, the water incredibly hot, like a sauna, bubbling and

oxygenated. His lungs were full, easily allowing him the luxury of imagining he could breathe underwater as he sank slowly, his mind blurring in the watery darkness.

Something white flashed before his eyes, and he thought at first it was pale moss. If Elsmere hadn't been a freshwater lake, he would have described it as seaweed, tangling about his arm, pulling him down.

In a moment of clarity, he realized the tendrils around his wrists were fingers as bleached as bone. Long, thin and sharp, the nails raked against his skin, drawing a stark ribbon of blood.

Dex kicked his legs, trying to swim away, but the grip on his wrist was an iron clasp, dragging him down. He tried to see who his tormentor was but the water was murky past a few feet.

He hit the bottom after what seemed an eternity and still his lungs held air. The impact was soft, and Dex didn't realize he'd hit bottom until he was borne backward, sprawled against the bottom of the lake.

Something brushed his face, like a wisp of material, then pressed against his body. Before Dex realized it, he was being straddled and pinned.

He felt a slow-motion touch, as the water delayed his senses. His pants were still unzipped and his cock, interrupted in the confusion, was still erect.

Whoever was on top of him had a definite purpose as his cock was gripped and stroked slowly. A flash of white swirled about and Dex felt himself slide into a tunnel.

He was tightly encased, his cock inside someone's mouth. It was the strangest sensation being sucked off underwater. There was no wet suction to hear, no lip saliva, only pure sensation as his cock was engulfed, and his skin tingled as lips moved over the tip, licking it and swallowing him inside. At first it was too weird and Dex was sure he couldn't come underwater. His senses were muted and desensitized, almost like he was having an out-of-body experience and it was happening to someone else. But then his nerve endings came alive and his cock twinged, sending a hard surprised shiver through him. His whole body spasmed violently and his eyes rolled back in an involuntary reflex to his climax.

Whoever had him pinned had incredible lungs as she sucked him again and stayed under the water, never letting up, fully intent on her mission. The body above him shifted and released his cock as the sinuous figure pivoted to face him. The white material swirled in his face blocking his view.

He watched helplessly as the figure slid down on his engorged member, effectively impaling herself in one motion. She began to ride him, more of a buoyant rocking, and Dex wanted to moan, but he couldn't afford the air loss. His balls contracted, then he exploded in an orgasm -- abrupt and almost painful. Still the figure rode him -- hard.

Dex poked her shoulder and a puff of what appeared to be smoke drifted from her person. It was a figment of his oxygen-starved brain... it had to be.

He had to rise to the surface, now. His lungs pounded as he shuddered to another orgasm, and still the woman rode him in that peculiar rocking motion.

Dex pushed against her again, frantically. He had to rise and fast.

The smoky puff met his attempt at a signal and he kicked up. The woman rode him like a bronco, ignoring his pitching and milking him through yet another orgasm.

Dex grabbed her shoulder and it burned like icy fire as she finally turned her face directly into his. With a cry of terror the remaining air rushed from Dex's lungs when he spasmed, his balls emptying the last of his cum. As he faded into blackness, the figure astride him kept on pumping, draining not just his essence, but his life itself.



## Chapter Two

Detective Delia Barnes drove quickly off the paved road, avoiding being rear-ended by the tailgating jeep hanging right on the bumper of the rented Grand Marquis. She swore vehemently. "Stupid son-of-a-bitch!"

Her newly appointed partner raised his eyebrows, seemingly about to speak. Then thought twice about it and turned his gaze to the dense brush in front of the car. But he couldn't keep the remark to himself after all. "You'd think growing up in the city you'd be accustomed to rude drivers."

Delia's neck popped as she swiveled her gaze to glare at the bronze-skinned half-Native American she'd been appointed as partner a few weeks ago. She grimaced at the pain. "Damn it, Redfeather. I've driven the last two hundred miles with nary a peep out of you and when you finally deign to speak, it's to criticize. You know what... I didn't ask for a new partner. I was doing just fine on my own."

He turned his dark eyes on her in a piercing gaze. "If you're worried about me dying on you like your last partner, don't. We Native Americans, even half-bloods, have the Great Spirit on our side."

He looked serious but Delia caught the twitch of his upper lip. "Fuck you, Redfeather. And I'm sick of calling you that. This isn't the Long Ranger and Tonto. What is your first name, anyway?"

His low voice softened. "Keonne."

"Poetic. Damn it! Is this even the right turnoff?"

"Yes," Keonne spoke decisively. "The second dirt road after the bridge."

"So glad you can count." Delia's dark ponytail itched against her neck. She longed for a shower and to get out of the heavy wool gabardine suit she wore.

Her partner spoke in a monotone as if commenting on the weather. "Are you

always such a crude-mouthed bitch or is it just to show me who's boss?"

Delia sucked in her breath too fast and choked. "I... I beg your pardon? I have seniority on this case and you're out of line, Detective."

"So report me. But if you ever tell me to go fuck myself again, I will do what obviously hasn't been done to you in a very long while. And every time you use a swear word I will screw you then and there. So the next words out of your mouth had better be a polite apology or your underwear in my lap. The choice is yours."

Delia couldn't have heard right. She glanced at the solid figure seat-belted next to her. He had the thick, dark, straight hair of his forefathers cut and styled above the shoulders, and his profile was civilized enough. But when Keonne's hawk-like piercing gaze met hers unblinking, she knew he meant business. He wasn't quite tamed, almost feral in the way he gave her the once over, waiting for her to speak.

"Are you out of your fucking mind? You can't talk that way to a senior detective!" Delia was used to rough-talking men on the force and she had grown into the habit of peppering her words to both fit in and remind men she wasn't a soft woman but an armed police officer. One of the brethren to be treated as an equal. Her new partner had just transferred in, and apparently needed to be reminded how things were in the big city.

"I don't know where you come from, Leon, but when you partner with me, I'm just one of the boys. So get used to my way -- fucking four letter words and all."

The deep voice never changed tone. "It's Keonne and I'm from Arizona by way of a reservation. And I always keep my word."

His seatbelt snapped back, recoiling as he unhooked it. Faster than Delia could blink, let alone respond, he was on her side of the car, pinning her against the driver's seat.

His face was only inches from her own and she felt his breath on her face, smelled the licorice he'd bought from the convenience store when they had filled up with gas at the last town.

His lips were full and his tongue snaked out to run along hers. Delia knew she

should put up a fight, knee him in the groin as he straddled her hips and reached for the seat controls to both move it back and recline it.

Her tongue slipped between her lips to meet him halfway as they tasted one another. He moved against her, his groin pressed into hers. There was no mistaking the healthy bulge against her thigh.

He ground his lips against hers, clashing with her tongue for dominance. He groped in her lap, pressing the top of her trousers, until he had a firm grip on the zipper. It slid down easily, causing Delia to shiver as her cunt responded to the sound and what it signaled. A slide of wetness stained her panties as his fingers delved inside the divided zipper and eased inside the waistband of her delicate underwear.

Delia willingly fed her lingerie fetish, buying naughty things. She may have to act tough as nails, but underneath, next to her skin, she was all woman. Sometimes, the feel of soft lingerie was the only thing that saved her sanity in the horrors of her chosen career.

At first his fingers touched the tangle of moist curls slowly, seeking the softness. Then he ran the tip of his finger to the back rim, boldly changing his path, working his finger down the middle, skimming the wet center. Again he fingered her lightly then stroked, until Delia rode the motion.

Delia thrust her hips up as best she could under his weight. Her body wanted to be stroked and teased, brought to the point of no return, then pushed over the edge. But she was not in control, she realized quickly as he pushed a finger inside her, then another. His thumb took up the stroking motion as his fingers melded into one and pushed in and out.

Delia moaned deep in her throat, "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

Keonne found her way of surrender humorous. "Every four-letter word is another round of sex. Keep it up and we'll never reach our goal."

"Goals change... Ah, right there!" Delia surged against him as Keonne found her sensitive button at the top of her clit.

But he must have decided to make her suffer longer for her transgressions. His

hand pulled out of her panties and he breathed heavily of her scent on his fingers. He reached around behind him and drew out a pair of handcuffs. With a single motion he flipped one end of the cuff around Delia's wrist, forcing it up. He unbuckled her seatbelt and threaded the shoulder harness through the cuff before fastening the metal around her other wrist.

Delia was effectively bound in her seat. Her hot wool coat was yanked open exposing her prim white button-down shirt. Keonne's tawny-hued fingers looked impossibly dark against the snowy white material. One by one the buttons popped open until her demure white bra showed.

Delia's breasts were already contracted, the nipples hard against the nylon cups. She tried to flip her shoulders to close the lapels of the shirt, but Keonne only laughed huskily at her futile gesture.

His eyes wandered over the curves overflowing the top of the bra cup. With a deliberate slow movement, he traced the crescent lushness, his fingertips tickling the sensitive skin. Delia's nipples, already hard, pruned even tighter.

She bit her lip as Keonne spotted the tiny bows on each bra cup. "What's this?" His voice was truly intrigued. "As a detective I feel it's my duty to investigate."

He fingered a bow gently, then gave it a tug. It came away in his hand, taking the peek-a-boo bra cup with it. The cup dangled open, Delia's breast poking through, bare to the world.

Keonne chuckled. "I like this form of interrogation. You're full of surprises, Detective Barnes..." He tugged the other bow until it obliged, spilling out her other breast.

A finger traced the areola of her left breast deliciously slow, leaving Delia pulling at her cuffs. She wanted to run her fingers through that wonderful black hair of his, make him just as vulnerable as she. But her bonds held, and she could only watch the finger stroke her nipple, teasing it, tweaking the nub.

He kept up the motion while his head dipped to her other side. He nuzzled against her fullness then tongued her nipple, running a wet path around it, before

sucking it deeply into his mouth.

Delia lunged upward, her hips straining against his. He sucked strongly, puckering the already tight nipple into a hard pebble. With a growl he pulled with his teeth, kneading the soft skin, then licking and sucking.

Another generous slide of liquid gushed from her cunt and Delia felt a tear seep from her eye.

Keonne's head rose and his dark eyes stared into her hazel ones. "Say my name."

In a last act of disobedience Delia sweetly smiled. "Fuck you, Leon."

Keonne looked at her in disbelief. "That's another time you've sworn since I gave you my word."

"What's the matter, Indian, is your Great Kahuna not up to multiple fucks?"

Keonne smirked. "The Great Spirit taught me in the ceremony that gave me my name that food and water are mind over matter. I hungered for days before I learned what true hunger is. The spirit of the body does what the mind decrees. If I command ten erections, my body will obey gladly... as will you."

Delia gulped as he leaned and peeled her trousers down her thighs and over her knees, until they bunched at her ankles.

"Open yourself to me and I will take you one less time."

Delia shook her head. "Fuu..." His lips crushed hers and he forced his tongue inside her mouth. She liked it. Heaven only knew why she liked to be dominated when she had such a brassy personality on the job. But she liked the feel of the metal cuffs biting into her wrists, his tongue taking liberties inside her mouth and... she wanted his hand forcing her thighs wide as it was now.

The jeans he wore unzipped easily. His head rose and he grabbed the back of her neck, forcing her to look down. His dark cock was still inside his pants, but as she watched, Keonne lifted it out, letting it jut before her eyes.

Delia licked her lips. "If you undo the cuffs, I'll suck you off, like you've never been before."

"Damn right you will. After four fucks, you'll do what I want when I want..."

happily and willingly. After four more you'll beg for me to stop but hunger for more." To emphasize his control he stroked his cock so it didn't just jut out, it arched upward at an angle, long and thick.

Delia left her thighs splayed, even as she considered snapping them closed. Keonne held his erection in one hand while he straddled her, finding her pussy and opening the labia while he pressed against her.

The tip of his cock grazed her sensitive button as it made its entrance. To prove the point, Keonne stopped and rubbed the engorged head against her opening.

"Do you want it? Crave it?"

"NO! YES!" Delia almost screamed but it came out a breathy rush.

"Then say my name." He rubbed the circumcised head against her cunt entrance as she squirmed. He shrugged. "I can just enter with the tip and first inch. The friction alone will make me come when I thrust. But you need more, don't you? You need this..." He pretended to lunge forward, teasing as if to fill her.

Delia followed the motion with her hips, but he purposefully held her back. He pressed against her again, then drew back.

Delia moaned and thrashed against the cuffs. "Do me, please. I want you inside me, all the way."

"It's all yours, just say the words."

Delia let go of her stubborn pride and gasped between clenched teeth, "Keonne... Keonne Redfeather from Arizona... now fuck me!"

Keonne laughed huskily. "That's another swear word." He caught his breath as his shaft probed her. This time Delia felt him go deep and she cried out as he pulled back and lunged forward. Her juices were slick and engulfed him gratefully. He moved, rocking against her until his shaft was completely in. He pumped vigorously, purposefully rubbing her button and slapping his balls against her with every downward lunge. Feverishly Delia rode against him, straining and panting with the effort. She screamed as an orgasm shot through her, abrupt and quick. With a shudder her legs slackened and opened.

Still Keonne straddled her, hard and deep inside. "Tsk. Tsk. That will never do." He leaned forward taking the nipple of her breast into his mouth. He worked the nub, sucking voraciously.

A strong contraction rippled through Delia as the cock inside her began to pulse and thrust. A scream built in her throat at the slow slide radiating from her cunt to her stomach, and up to where Keonne feasted at her breast.

This time the orgasm washed over her from her head to her toes and her neck fell back as a raw scream erupted.

Breathing heavily, she collapsed back in her seat. With a squelch of juices Keonne pulled out and laid his erect cock against her stomach. Then he reached up and uncuffed her hands. They fell limply at her sides.

Never taking his eyes off her face, Keonne ordered, "Open yourself to me, now."

It was on the tip of Delia's tongue to tell him to go to hell, but something primal stopped her and she reached for his cock, guiding it between her legs. As he entered her she reached for his ass and kneaded him, urging him on. With a growl Keonne hit the button of her seat and it fell back all the way, flat. He worked against her, squelching in her juicy cunt until she begged him to bring her to orgasm. "Keonne, please! I need to come. I can't stand this limbo. I feel the climax building but it won't come."

"Make me come and I'll return the favor."

Delia couldn't believe that not only did he have control over his erection, but he had taken control of her body as well. She peaked toward orgasm but at the last minute it eluded her. She couldn't stand it. She had to have release.

"Anything. Just tell me what to do."

Keonne rose up slightly. "Reach between us and stroke my balls. That's it. Gently take them between your thumb and forefinger and milk them. Ahhh."

He began to shake. Then with a roar like a bull he shot a load of hot jism deep inside her, never slackening as he reached for her hand and guided it from his balls to her own opening. He rocked against her as he moved his hand over hers, and together with joined hands they stroked her clit. Delia came with a rush, holding Keonne to her

frantically until she stopped shaking.

When they both began to breathe normally Keonne kissed her neck, nuzzling gently. "You know what they say about paybacks."

"Ummm, but what a way to go about it. I could sleep the day away." Delia yawned.

"Now, now," Keonne admonished. "None of that. I always keep my word, remember? Now turn around on your knees with your ass in the air. We have a long way to go."

Delia couldn't believe her ears. How could she? And how could he, after what had just happened? But she saw his cock was indeed erect and ready for more.

Her body protested as she flopped over. Keonne raised her to her knees and positioned himself. He ran his hands over her flanks, kneading, relaxing her muscles until they were putty in his hands, pliable and flexible.

There was a slight burning and she tensed. Keonne paused. "Trust me?"

His hand reached between them as his finger circled her ass in ever widening circles. Delia quivered at his touch. "Yes." And she spoke the truth. She did trust him at this most delicate time, just as she would trust him with her life on the job.

He pressed against her and her opening resisted. Keonne gave her a moment to adjust to the pressure, then he entered her in one motion, their combined fluids easing the passage as he sheathed himself in her tight ass. The feeling of fullness alone made Delia moan but the sensation eased as he drew back then pushed inside again. All her nerve endings came alive as she began to anticipate his strokes. She rocked back to absorb the shock as his balls slapped against her and he pounded into her over and over.



## Chapter Three

Pounding, pounding, Delia felt it in her bones, in her head. It echoed persistently until she groaned and woke groggy and cross.

The door between the hotel rooms reverberated again. "Just a minute, damn it." Delia tumbled out of bed in just a shirt and underwear. She opened the door, pointing to the intruder. "It was unlocked."

Keonne Redfeather stared at his partner, whether taken aback by her lack of attire or her negligence over the unsecured door.

Delia brushed her messy hair from her face. "What? You've seen a woman in her underwear before, haven't you?"

Delia had the satisfaction of seeing Redfeather's face scowl in annoyance before his usual complacent mask slipped into place and he shrugged. "You should lock your door. It's not safe."

Delia sat back on the bed abruptly, remembering her vivid dream. It had been like that ever since she'd been appointed her new partner. They'd shaken hands and she'd practically creamed her panties. Redfeather wasn't exactly urbane. He tended to under-react in tense situations, and irritated the hell out of Delia on a regular basis. Plus, she had the primitive hots for him.

"It's only the connecting door, Redfeather. Who's going to harm me, you?"

He shrugged. "I might go out, and if someone broke into my room, you'd be a sitting duck."

"Your chivalry is duly noted, Redfeather, but this Glock I carry says, 'Safe and sound'."

"I asked you to call me Keonne. It's not like I'm on the warpath."

"Sorry." Delia realized her shirt barely covered the top of her thighs and sitting

as she was, her underwear was plainly visible. And the crotch was in plain view and sopping wet.

She should make some effort at modesty but it wasn't like she was a shy teenager. She was thirty and, partner or not, she wanted Keonne Redfeather in her bed.

He was a cool one; she had to give him that. Most guys would either blush and stammer, backing from the room, or make a blatant pass, but not Keonne. He just kept on talking like it was no big thing seeing his partner's legs spread casually in a hotel room.

He ran a hand through his thick, dark hair. It might have been a nervous reflex but if it was, he didn't shift his feet or divert his eyes. "If we want to be on the road by eight, you'd better shower and dress. Unless you plan on treating the folks at Elsmere to a peepshow."

Delia snapped her legs together and tried not to show her disappointment over Keonne's lack of interest. Damn him! "I'll be ready in fifteen. Bring the car around to the front."

"You're the boss. I had breakfast at the café, but we can swing by a fast-food place if you're hungry."

"Thanks for thinking of me." Delia bit out the words. He'd been eating while she'd been having a wet dream. Somehow she didn't mind the trade-off.

Her grin was the first thing that disconcerted Keonne and he blinked before turning away and disappearing through the connecting door.

When they were on the road and Delia's wet hair air-dried, she thought Keonne glanced at her a few times while he drove. She refused to look his way. It was a power thing, and Delia as a woman detective was careful to keep her power. In the academy she'd been hit on more times than she cared to count. Now after ten years she was used to it. But this Keonne thing had to be conquered.

Since it was one-sided on her part, it spelled weakness, and she couldn't allow it.

They came to the lake before the town and Delia enjoyed the early morning view of the placid vivid blueness. The sun sparkled off the water as they drove along the

shoreline road. The trees blocked the view for the most part but occasionally through a break the lake beckoned invitingly.

"It's hard to imagine such a beautiful body of water being dangerous," she mused.

Keonne didn't look her way as he drove. "Beauty often has an ugly side."

"Yeah. Well, I've never heard of rip-tides in a lake, but seven drownings in such a short space of time is looking less and less like accidents."

"It is strange," Keonne concurred. "According to the last witness, his friend and he were swimming on the north shore and thought the water too cold. Then a current, almost hot, swept them out and his friend just disappeared underwater. The water cooled and the current stopped pulling him away from the shore. He swam back and phoned the sheriff's department. So far that body hasn't turned up. But the divers haven't been able to find anything nor have they experienced the rip-tide or warm water phenomenon."

"Yeah, well." Delia pinned her almost dry hair up in a casual nod to fashion. "I'm thinking the teens were either high or drunk. Maybe it was just an accident."

"They have a lot of accidents at Elsmere."

Delia flipped the switch and rolled her window up. "So any other witnesses report the water current before a drowning?"

"No. There are no other witnesses, just bodies. The locals say there are warm springs underground, feeding into the lake, but not enough to account for a temperature spike. You empty a cupful of warm water into a gallon of cold water and you still have cold water. The lake's too vast to be affected by warm springs. Besides the algae would feed like crazy on the warmth and Elsmere is algae free, according to the tourist brochure."

"Sure." Delia's cynicism got the better of her. "Beautiful and pristine. Come on and stay awhile, good folks, maybe even die."

Keonne shook his head. "You think the drownings are related?"

"Damned if I know. Maybe there's something in the water that affects the victims

and they pass out or become incapacitated. Let's check the obvious before we go all out."

"The obvious?"

"Drugs and alcohol. These lakes attract a fast kind of crowd. They drink, smoke a few, maybe do some coke, then hit the water. They believe they're superheroes... Invincible."

Keonne turned off onto a dirt road. He parked the car a few hundred yards from the water's edge. Without a word he got out of the car and approached the shore. The ground here was pebbly and sloped to the bank. Without regard to his loafers he waded up to the water and bent over, scooping a handful. He sniffed it then took a taste.

Delia got out of the car and yelled, "You have a death wish? If there's *E. coli*, you are going to be one unhappy camper."

Keonne got to his feet. "The toxicology report of the last victim says he was free of drugs. Sometimes warm springs emit sulfur into the water but there doesn't appear to be any strong odor or taste. I wouldn't exactly call it mountain spring fresh though."

"I'll take your word for it." Delia shaded her eyes and scanned the lake. "It's a big lake. Want to check the mysterious north shore before we go into town?"

"Later." Keonne wiped his wet hands on his trousers. "I want to change before checking the water firsthand."

"You're going in? Are you fearless or just nuts?"

Keonne chuckled. "I was warned about you. They said you'd break my balls if given the chance."

"The guys at the precinct are full of nonsense." Delia snorted. "They haven't got enough balls as it is. That's why I'm here and they aren't."

"Yeah, why are we here?" Keonne got back into the car. "Isn't this out of our jurisdiction?"

"Yep. But we get full cooperation with the county sheriff. It seems one of the teens who drowned is the mayor's nephew. Go figure. We don't have enough homicides in the city, now we have to go to the sticks and confirm this is a party haven

for drunk kids.”

“You are cynical, Detective Barnes.”

“I’ve been doing this longer than you, Red... uh, Keonne. And call me Del, everyone does. I’ve seen a lot on the force and none of it pretty. Most caused by out-of-control humans. Senseless garbage that could have been avoided. People just basically suck.”

Keonne drove slowly for the next few miles, entering the town of Elsmere. “You want to stop at the sheriff’s first?”

“Yeah, may as well play nice and introduce ourselves. See if there is any recent news about the drownings.”

The sheriff was a small man who ran a tight ship. He watched the two detectives enter the dispatch office and knew immediately by their business dress who they were.

“Barnes and Redfeather? Yeah, we’ve been expecting you. Get you some coffee?”

The sheriff served them both cordially enough and they sat at his desk sipping the hot brew and comparing notes. Sheriff Stanley Beamish knew he couldn’t keep the case local any longer, so he gave in to the order to cooperate without much fuss. Besides, hell if he knew what was going on down at that cursed lake.

Delia took a gulp of scalding coffee, spilling some on the folder in her lap. As she wiped at the spreading liquid the sheriff volunteered, “Don’t matter. That’s the gossip folder.”

“Gossip folder?” Delia opened the manila folder.

“One of my deputies got the idea to interview the local residents who’ve been here the longest. Old-timers and retirees. Jeez, the nonsense they spout. Seems they remember folks disappearing in the lake for at least forty years.

“Now we’ve had our share of tragedy... suicides, diving into the water and splitting skulls open, nothing far-fetched. All the deaths are accounted for. This year it just seems there are more of them. Now some folk claim there’s a lake monster, gobbling up people... The tourists are beginning to bring cameras and camp out on the shore in hopes of getting pictures of the creature. I can tell you, in all my fifteen years I

have never seen a creature in that lake. Course, I don't swim, so I don't go near the water, but believe me, if there was something in there I'd know about it."

Keonne looked interested. "Have any of the victims shown any unusual trauma to the bodies?"

Sheriff Beamish considered the tawny-skinned detective. "You don't investigate many drownings, do you, son? We don't find the body right off in most cases, so some form of decomposition has taken place. The body bloats like a toad until you can't even ID the victim from a photo."

Delia thumbed another folder. "How come there are no autopsy records in here?"

"You'd want to see the town doctor about those. He sent the bodies to the county coroner and received a copy of the autopsies, when they were done at all. Way back when, the town labeled the occasional drowning accidental and left it at that. It's only now that we have a string of bodies that anyone has given a second thought to autopsy records."

"So what's your theory, Sheriff?" Keonne looked the sheriff straight in the eye.

Delia had to give him credit. It wasn't easy coming into another law officer's territory and taking over. Keonne knew it and was smoothing ruffled feathers by asking an opinion.

Sheriff Beamish looked considering, then took a breath. "With the rumors and the body count it would be easy to attribute the deaths to old myth and folklore... but as a lawman I know it's just what it seems, tragedy in number. Kids drinking and doing heaven knows what and overestimating their abilities. That's all, no more, no less."

Del and Keonne left the sheriff with little more than they already knew. Keonne spoke as they walked down the town's main street. "So far we have the accident theory and coincidence that the victims have all been teens, who it's surmised were partying hard. But the sheriff mentioned legend and folklore, and the report from the locals interviewed brings up something unidentified in the lake."

Del stopped in her tracks. Her clothes were beginning to cling in the rising

temperature. "You've got to be kidding! I know your Native American blood is talking here. You think the people of Elsmere offended some lake spirit who's seeking retribution?"

Keonne grinned and Del wasn't sure if she wanted to slap him or jump his bones.

He shook his head. "I didn't say that. But urban legends usually have their origins in truth. What theory are you favoring?"

"The victims are young teens, all drownings -- they exhibit an 'accidental' pattern, and a pattern of deaths add up to one thing."

Keonne looked disbelieving. "A serial killer... out here?"

"Why not? You think the city has the market cornered? What do we know about these town folks? There's bound to be a few loose screws in the bunch." Del looked at a man passing by in the opposite direction. He called a polite 'Good morning.'

"You want me to arrest him now for good manners?"

Del punched Keonne in the arm. "Sure, make fun of me, but evil has no regional boundaries."

"It's far-fetched," Keonne insisted as they reached a brick two-story building with a broad sign proclaiming, 'Elsmere Medical Center-Michael Layton M.D.'

"You who spout monsters is calling my theory far-fetched? You'd better let me do the talking in here, or they'll lock you up and throw away the key."

Keonne laughed and Del was glad he had a sense of humor. Maybe their partnership was going to work after all. If she could just keep her mind solely on the case. But jeez, why did he have to be so earthy and masculine. Even dressed in a suit and tie, it was easy to imagine what lay underneath. And even easier to imagine him lying between her legs, licking her sweet pussy, until she writhed and demanded he climb on top of her and lay his cock on her stomach, teasing her into begging for a long, hard fuck.

She could almost feel his weight bearing down on her, finding her cunt and sliding easily inside. She would be wet for him and meet his thrusts until it was impossible to tell who was in control. And just when she couldn't stand it anymore, she

would clench her vaginal muscles, claspings Keonne inside her, forcing him to come. He'd become her minion in bed to do with as she would. Delia knew she was a control freak. It was part of her nature and had stood her in good stead to make it in a profession dominated by macho alpha men.

The cock inside her would try to withdraw but his own lust would drive him to thrust all the harder, until he burst inside her. The sound of Keonne's deep cries echoed in her ears as Del found herself back in the present.

"Are you all right?"

He held the door to the building. Del was caught off-guard by her raunchy daydream. "Oh yeah," she breathed, then reprimanded herself. "I mean, of course. Why wouldn't I be?"

"You had the strangest look on your face." Keonne regarded her intently.

Del found not just her uniform clinging, but her underwear was sopping wet. Damn it, she had to get this lust problem out of her system! "I'd suggest you pay attention to this case and not worry about me. I can take care of myself."

"Okay, kemo sabe."

Del glared at her partner's humor. The medical building was only two stories, but the number of offices was daunting. It seemed many doctors and specialists came from the city a few days a week and used Elsmere as a part-time office to see patients.

Doctor Michael Layton held court in a corner office where the waiting room was crowded with patients both young and old. As a general practitioner the good doctor had a loyal following. He'd established a full-time practice in Elsmere early in his career and the citizens trusted a town resident.

The receptionist stared at Del as if she'd grown an extra head when she suggested they see the doctor right away. The harried woman disappeared into the back and came back with the news. The doctor wouldn't be done with his patients until after six and could see them then.

So much for professional courtesy, Del fumed.

Keonne didn't seem to mind and tried to soothe Del's ire. "He is a doctor and has



an obligation. This case is not his priority, the roomful of patients is.”

“I’ve had enough of your equanimity, Keonne. As a matter of fact I’m pretty much sick of you. Let’s get our rooms at the motor lodge and you do your detective work and I’ll do mine.”

“Okay by me. You’re the boss.” His mocking tone grated against Del’s already taut nerves.

Del needed space. She really had it bad for her partner. That was a fact. Worse, it was making just standing near him impossible, and she thought she would explode if she didn’t vent her temper. *Damn it, the man won’t even give me the courtesy of a fight.*

The motor lodge was nothing special, but it had clean linen and a cold shower and that was all Del required to make her happy. Keonne disappeared into his room and Del did the same. She stripped down, leaving her wool city clothes where they fell, until, naked, she hit the shower spigot.

The water was icy but she didn’t care. She leapt under the showerhead and let the cold liquid shock her body. For a brief moment all thoughts fled her mind. There was no raging lust, no lake drownings, just her senses being frozen by the frigid water. Del’s skin tightened into goosebumps and she was relieved she’d found a way to get Keonne out of her system. She might freeze to death, but it was preferable to the raging inferno of her body craving what she couldn’t have.

Without thought Del found her hands on her breasts, stroking them upward, feeling the already hard pebbled nipples. She tweaked them painfully, thinking the pain would keep her sane, but instead she imagined Keonne’s teeth, nipping the buds, taking them one by one into his mouth, sucking gently, then more forcefully, until Del moaned and reached for his hard body.

He would resist her touch, wanting the control she fiercely guarded. He’d suckle her nipples until they were chapped from the friction, then lave them over and over until the moisture between her legs dripped like thick honey, begging to be hungrily slurped up.

The pain, the gnawing craving washed over Del, until she couldn’t separate the

physical yearning from the mental reality. Her hand wandered almost shamefully down to her pubis, pushing through the dark curls, shyly stroking. A ripple of anticipatory pleasure shimmied down Del's body. She no longer felt the icy coldness of the water splashing over her. There were only her fingers on her pussy, stroking rhythmically, her hips gyrating, urging for release.

In Del's mind it was Keonne's fingers stroking her, manipulating her on a whim to do whatever he wanted. His long fingers probed her, teasingly withdrawing to encircle the rim of her pussy. Then they delved inside, working magic and agony in the same touch.

His thumb found her sensitive button and pressed. Del's knees shook and she was forced to lean back against the shower's tiled wall to brace herself. She rode her hand by bending her knees, pumping and absorbing the shock.

She trembled as a glorious wave of feeling washed over her. Her spine tingled and signaled her body was ready. Her hips jerked with the first spasm and Del allowed a moan to escape from her lips.

The sensation spiraled until wave after wave jolted her. Frantically she tried to recapture the feeling as the tremors subsided, leaving her momentarily weak and shaky.

Now the cold water was just annoying, so she adjusted it to warm and rinsed quickly. When finished she wasted no time and turned off the spigot. A sound at the doorway caused her to start as she reached for a towel.

She knew she had closed the door but now it stood halfway open. Maybe it hadn't closed tight and a draft had opened it. But the sixth sense of her job skills warned her someone had been there.

Wrapping the towel tight around her, Del checked the hotel room. Empty. On the dresser a piece of paper caught her eye. Scribbled hastily, the words leapt off the page at her. *Del, I'm on my way to the lake, will hook up later. K.*

Del let out her pent-up breath. It had only been Keonne in the room. Only? She wondered if he'd been in the doorway, watching her in the shower. How much had he

seen?

It wasn't that she was shy, but Del liked to call the shots. Besides, how had Keonne gotten into the motel room? This time there were no adjoining doors. Del shrugged. It was a waste of time thinking about it.

Served that fool right if he had gotten an eyeful. Del hoped he'd gotten the hard-on of his life.

## Chapter Four

Keonne drove the rental car haphazardly toward the north shore. When he'd gone a mile past the turnoff and realized his error, he slapped the steering wheel in frustration.

Damn that woman! He'd been warned before even meeting his new partner, she was aggressive and it was best to treat her just like one of the boys. Keonne could appreciate that. The female officers on the force worked twice as hard to ensure they earned the respect of their peers. It was much the same for Keonne with his Native American blood. He wasn't quite accepted by his people and he didn't blend in with the white man's world either.

But nothing had prepared him for Delia Barnes. She was hard-boiled, cynical, mouthy and sexy as hell. When he'd seen her in just a shirt in the hotel room yesterday, her legs splayed open and her underwear clinging to her slit, he could only think of one thing and it had taken all his self-control to feign normalcy. And now today, having just seen her in the shower, touching herself, he was hard as a rock. One part of him had stood transfixed as Del had pleased herself, unaware of his presence. Another part of him wanted to say something, call attention to himself before peeling off his clothes and joining her.

But she was his partner and they had to work together. And how would it look to be banging his new senior officer the first week out on a case?

Damn! He was between a rock and a hard place. And that hard place was between his legs. Keonne shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

He spotted another turnoff, barely discernable through dense brush, leading toward the lake. He spun the wheel crazily, further proof of his agitation, and fishtailed off the pavement and onto the dirt track.

It was only a short distance until the lake was in full view. The sun reflected off the water, so blue it hurt the eyes. Keonne found it hard to believe something so beautiful could harbor anything sinister.

But as he left the car and walked through the tangled brush, following little more than a rabbit path to the water's edge, the water before him took on a darker, murkier tinge.

From this angle gone was the brilliant blue hue. In its place were shadowy depths that gave no hint to what lay below. It was easy to believe kids could be deceived as well and think the water harmless as they partied and swam, overextending their human strength. The vast waters wouldn't give up her dead easily. Keonne made a mental note to ask the town doctor the time variance between the drownings and the recovery of the bodies.

Keonne had changed into jeans and a plain black T-shirt at the motor lodge. He had no qualms about stripping down to his briefs. The cool water would be welcome after the peep show with Del center stage.

His cock was still hard and just the memory of Del fingering her cunt, rubbing the liquid center as she moaned and rode against her hand made him horny all over again.

Keonne waded into the water, bracing himself against the cold. The small pebbles beneath his feet had a slimy feel that made him want to cringe, but he waded out deeper where mossy grass took the place of the stones on the lake bottom. He was up to his waist when the bottom beneath him dissolved away and he was forced to tread water. It was as if the shelf of earth just dropped off into fathomless depths.

Keonne struck out swimming, checking the water for anomalies of temperature. It was icy cold and his erection faded quickly. He kept an eye on the shore and was within easy distance if there were any problems.

There was a splash and a ripple as a frog leapt off the distant bank into the water. Nothing else stirred on this side of the lake. Across the way, Keonne spotted a fisherman on the distant far shore, sitting, a thin curl of smoke from a cigar or cigarette

languidly rising in the air.

Keonne looked again at the shore behind him. Was it an optical illusion or was it farther away than before? The water about Keonne was murky as he stopped and treaded in place. A few tendrils of fog appeared and the water grew warm. A strong current from underneath began tugging at him, pulling him gently but insistently away from the shoreline.

What the hell? Keonne struck out in a strong freestyle, his arms churning the water furiously. He made some headway and saw the shoreline closer.

The undertow grew stronger and tugged again. The water was quite warm, almost hot as the fog grew into steam. Keonne could no longer see across the lake or even the embankment nearby. He grew disoriented and was no longer sure which way the shore was.

He stopped still in the water. The steam cloud around him was close and clammy, the water churning like jets in a hot tub. Keonne felt his briefs being tugged down and he fought the impulse to reach for them. He needed to stay above the water, keep his wits about him, or he'd lose his edge and become exhausted fighting the current.

What was the loss of his underwear in the scheme of things? But the undertow that pulled down his underwear then did something so deliberate, Keonne almost panicked. He felt his cock lifted, caressed by the water, stroked and then he swore a mouth engulfed him.

It couldn't be happening, but he knew it was. He felt himself swelling, unable to help his body's reaction to the insistent pulsing, the motion of being sucked off. His balls were palmed and he shivered uncontrollably. The pressure was building and he knew in moments he would shoot his load.

With a cry he tried to think of something else but the only thought that came to mind was Del, naked in the shower, masturbating before his eyes. Keonne cried out as his cock jerked and he came in the water. The foam from the churning wake soon washed away the evidence, but Keonne's cock was stroked again. Then something

tugged at him and jerked him underwater.

In an instant, Keonne shook off his body's impulse to go slack. His muscles were mushy after coming so forcefully, but his instincts for survival were strong and demanded he fight.

Keonne went under once, kicking out and regaining the surface. With another kick he connected with something in the water before he made for the shore, his arms flailing in arcs, eating up the distance.

Instantly the water chilled, and the churning stopped. Keonne was relieved to feel the lake's bottom once again beneath his feet as he charged up the shore and fell on the bank.

His briefs were gone, but he could have cared less about his nudity. Whatever was in the lake, Keonne knew one thing -- he had kicked it in his bid for freedom and his foot had come in contact with something soft and fleshy. Keonne could have sworn it was human if not for the undertow and heat that no human had been responsible for.

Keonne shuddered as he remembered his cock being seduced and milked. His people believed in water spirits, but nothing had prepared him for this. He watched the water warily. The steamy fog was gone, evaporated as if it had never been. Across the way the fisherman still sat, unaware of any commotion on the other side.

Lake Elsmere once again looked idyllic and bucolic, the perfect tourist stop. Keonne heaved himself off the bank to gather his clothes. He noticed a scrap of white looped about his toe and picked it up carefully. It was just a scrap of material, yellowed, like old lace once pristine white.

Keonne tucked it in the pocket of his jeans as he got back into the car and drove back to the motor lodge.

\* \* \*

An hour later Jim Scranton grabbed a six-pack of beer and headed down to the boathouse. Frustrated, Jim took a moment to glance up at the old two level cabin that perched on a hillside overlooking the lake. He'd been offered a fat price for the land. He knew the cabin would be bulldozed to make room for the new development planned on

this side of the lake. State-of-the-art condos were coming, but not if Jim could help it. He'd inherited the cabin from his father, just as he had from his father before him. It was a family heirloom and one of the first structures on Elsmere Lake. The development companies could go to hell for all Jim cared. They would gain his land over his dead body.

Jim entered the creaky old boathouse without misgivings. Sure the place needed repairs that he couldn't afford, but that was beside the point. The door leaned off one hinge and the old bass fishing boat docked inside was ancient.

Jim popped a beer open and took a drink of cold brew. His life was crap right now, but it was bound to get better. His wife of fifteen years was going through some sort of mid-life crisis and withheld sex. Jim had just last night taken her out to Jiffy Burger and bought her the bonus meal, springing for a dessert freeze, but where was his bonus?

He'd driven home with his arm draped over her shoulder, giving Alma's breast a pinch that signaled he was frisky. And what had he gotten for his lighter wallet? A firm, 'Not tonight, Jim. My head is pounding like a jackhammer.'

Jim had tried again later before bed. He'd walked up behind Alma and nudged his boner against her ass. She almost screeched, "Gawd-damn, you scared the hell out of me. Don't be poking me with that thing! Git away, now. I'm going to bed. You go watch TV."

Jim was fed up. No sex for almost three months. The only thing that satisfied him now was beer, and even that was going to get warm if he didn't get out in the water and submerge it while he fished.

Jim finished off his brewsky and threw the empty can in the boat. It pinged against the side and fell with a hollow sound. As he grasped the pull chord and gave it a tug the boat sputtered but died immediately. Jim gave another tug, harder... The boat fizzled. It wasn't like ol' Betsy here to be persnickety about starting. Jim gave another tug, almost falling back with the effort.

When the boat barely gurgled, Jim tilted up the motor. What the hell? There was



something long and white wrapped around the propeller. Shreds of an old sheet or something similar. Yellowed with age, it looked none too clean. Jim unwrapped the item and draped it over the bow. He grabbed the pull rope when he heard a squishy noise like something sodden being dragged in the shadows of the boathouse.

“Who’s there?”

There was no answer but another sound a little closer, squelching like wet clothes dragging across wood.

The hairs on the back of Jim’s neck stood up. But the warning came too late as something launched itself into the craft and tackled Jim, throwing him off-balance and into the bottom of the boat.

Long sharp claws shredded his clothes like they were tissue paper. Jim thought a cougar had gotten him and grabbed for the throat. But his hands encountered a sodden mess of white that stuck to him like glue.

He tried to throw whatever it was off, but it refused to budge. Jim rose up, knocking his head against the seat bench. Momentarily stunned, he felt the heavy burden shift and tear at his pants.

Cool air hit his privates and then something grabbed his cock in an icy cold grip. He could hear the drip of water from the white-shrouded mass as it positioned itself and sank down on his cock.

Jim regained his fight and pushed at the thing as it rocked onto him. But his hand encountered mush and there was nothing to fight as his cock hardened and responded.

He groaned in the same breath as he yelled. But the boathouse merely echoed his cries as he was relentlessly fucked. He spilled his seed over and over in the following hours, unable to dislodge his attacker, whose insatiable appetite only grew more voracious.

His balls ached and shriveled, his penis shrank, and still he orgasmed to a rhythm he was helpless to control.

Jim uttered a last plea, “Lord, let me be.”

At that, a high-pitched cackle came from his attacker and for once it raised a white milky face, eyes dead and empty. Jim screamed as he pitched one last time and the creature on him bent over to press a withered face against his lips, sucking the breath from his body and leaving an empty husk.

## Chapter Five

Keonne was unusually silent, even for him, as Del met with him for a late lunch. She'd decided not to bring up if he'd been in the doorway while she showered. It didn't matter. Her new partner was as untouchable as a eunuch in that respect.

But he barely ate as she took her fourth piece of pizza and bit into the melted cheese with gusto. She wiped her mouth and considered the man across the table from her. "So why the silent treatment?" It was out before she could bite back the words. "Look, if it's the shower thing, don't sweat it. I'm human, you're human. Just forget it."

"The shower?" Keonne looked straight at her. "Oh, that..."

But he didn't say anything else, and worse than Del now knowing he had witnessed her little sex show was the fact it hadn't fazed him... at all.

Del almost growled, "That's it? That's all you have to say? You are the coldest son-of-a-bitch I've ever met, Keonne Redfeather. The absolute coldest!"

Del slammed down her glass of soda and stood, reaching for her purse. Keonne's hand shot across the table and stopped her.

"Del, I went down to the lake..."

"So?" Still angry, Del threw at him, "Lake monster scare you?"

"There was something. I don't know what, but the water temperature changed. A current caught me, there was a steamy fog, and I swear something grabbed me and..."

Del wasn't sure if he was yanking her chain. But his face was so earnest she sat back down. "You're serious, aren't you?"

"Dead serious. There is something in the water. It... I kicked at it and got away, but it was so weird and I almost wanted it to continue."

"Continue what?" Del watched as Keonne's face turned a reddish hue. He was

embarrassed!

"It... It seduced me. I mean it took off my underwear and..."

Del's eyes narrowed. "It screwed you? Oh, come on!"

"I didn't say that." Keonne's voice deepened. "But it performed fellatio on me and I couldn't help but succumb."

Del burst out laughing. "Let me get this straight. You blew your wad in the lake while having some sort of warped fantasy, and now you're vouching there's a sex fiend monster in the lake? Jeez, Keonne, you should have just jumped in the shower with me. I'd have blown you and then some."

"Fuck you, Del!"

It was Keonne who left the table first and Del wondered how the hell she had gotten a new partner who was sexy as hell and bonkers.

She took the car to the medical building hoping Dr. Layton would be finished early. To her surprise Keonne was already in the waiting room.

"What the hell did you do, run all the way from the pizza parlor?"

Keonne barely looked at her. "I needed to get some fresh air. Walking clears my mind."

"Look, Keonne. I'm not saying you didn't think there was something in the lake, but look at the facts, it's not possible."

"I know what I saw and what I felt, Del. There's something in that lake."

Del could see he was earnest. He really believed what he said. "All right, but when this case is over, and the truth about the drownings being coincidental accidents comes out, you and I are going to have a serious talk about this partnership."

"I'm not crazy, Del."

"All I'm saying is, you saw me naked in the shower and it led to some warped water monster fantasy. I'd like to see Freud analyze that one."

Keonne only glared as the doctor came out. Michael Layton was middle-aged but not in temperament. He walked quickly, used to a hectic schedule, and didn't mince words. "You're here about the string of drownings? Come this way to my consultation

room where we can talk. I have a conference in the city tomorrow so let's keep this short and to the point."

"Look, Doc, we've waited around all day, the least you can do is answer a few questions." Del smiled, trying to keep the irritation from her voice.

The doctor could appreciate a pretty woman. "I'll answer what I can, Detective."

"Barnes. Just call me Del. Short for Delia."

The doctor loosened up and smiled. "All right, what can I do to help, Del?"

The look of annoyance on Keonne's face made Del smug. He might be crazy but she still wanted to boink his socks off.

She tried to refocus her thoughts. "The drownings at Elsmere Lake seem to be increasing, any worries on that?"

"I've been the doctor here longer than most folks have lived here. The increase in tourism has brought a different sort of crowd."

"You mean, younger and wilder?" Keonne verified.

"Yes. That and a different attitude. It used to be the folks around here knew everyone by name. Called 'hello' in town, made an effort to keep in touch. But these days, it's grown impersonal."

"How does that contribute to the drownings?" Del watched the doctor's face.

"The last deaths were out-of-towners. Reported missing by either partying friends or family when they didn't return home. But the earlier ones well... they were homegrown folks. Used to be a neighbor went missing we'd hear about it within hours, but now it's days."

"Yeah, but the majority of the victims were teens from out of town. We have records on seven." Del could tell by Keonne's restating the obvious he wasn't sure of the doctor's purpose.

Doctor Layton shrugged. "You have the records on seven teens and I have the records on twenty-two men. You want those to compare?"

Del and Keonne both answered in unison. "Twenty-two?"

Del picked up the thread. "We weren't aware of the total number."

Layton looked annoyed. "Look, I called the authorities and told them something was fishy five years ago when the bodies started popping up regularly. But they waited until a public figure's nephew drowns to investigate? It's not my fault. The town's just gone computerized a few years back. I pulled the other files by hand from the city's Hall of Records, if you can call that archaic mausoleum that. You are welcome to those, plus the others."

"What others?" Del stared.

Doctor Layton looked at her closely. "I've been here awhile, but not forever. The old Doctor McClellan died but he filed death certificates on the town folks like clockwork, and the doctor before him. Before that, it's anybody's guess, but I've tallied an astronomical number of drownings in the last fifty years for a town this size."

"How many?" Del almost whispered.

"One hundred fifty-four."

Keonne was the first to assimilate the info. "We'll take those records. Does your library have newspapers on file from the town's inception?"

The doctor shook his head. "All the way back to the 1880's. I never gave much credence to local gossip but maybe there is some shred of fact to the old legend."

"What legend?" Del knew she shouldn't listen to old wives' tales, but Keonne would ask if she didn't.

Dr. Layton grinned. "Mind you, I don't subscribe to the belief but it is weird. Elsmere Lake is formed from a volcanic crater."

"So?"

"That hill on the north shore millions of years ago used to be much steeper. Geologists have tested the ground recently for seismic activity for the builders who want to develop condos on the north shore. They found lava ash and black silt all over the region."

"You saying the volcano is still active?" Keonne asked.

"Oh, no, there was no activity. Hasn't been for hundreds of years. But that hill used to be the volcano that formed the crater the lake nestles in. Anyhow, when the

native tribes came along they worshipped the volcano god that belched the steam from the mountain, and to keep the god pacified they sacrificed living things. At first goats and a few game animals, but the steam rose and lava spewed, wiping out the primitive village. Rebuilt, the natives took a more substantial approach and sacrificed virgins, one a year and the volcano grew quiet... happy."

Del grinned. "You've got to be kidding."

"I'm just repeating the legend that has been around since I can remember. Anyway, the time came for the yearly sacrifice and the natives wrapped up their live virgin in the ceremonial white shroud, winding the lacy netting around her face to show her shyness and purity. But rumor has it this girl was not pure and deceived her people. Thus, when she was thrown into the volcano, the god was angry and responded by wiping out not just the village but the whole area, forming the lake crater in the massive eruption. Then, we settlers came along and here we are."

"Such baloney!" Del scoffed. "And I suppose that thing supposedly in the lake is the pissed-off god of the volcano?"

"Not exactly. The story goes the volcano god was so angry he demanded the feckless girl stay in the lake and claim sacrifices at his behest forever. She, on the other hand, preys on men. Not just any man either. She's particular and likes 'em pent up and frustrated. It seems she can smell a virile man a mile away in the water and hones in on 'em. Like a shark drawn to blood, she singles out her victims and makes them pay for her eternal ruin and damnation."

"All right, I've heard enough." Del rose. "We'll take those files on the drownings if you don't mind, and see if we can find the real culprit behind them."

"Sure." The doctor was only gone a moment and returned carrying a box. "Here you go. I have copies, so help yourself."

Del was watching Keonne. He'd taken a scrap of white from his pocket and was fingering it absently. She cleared her throat to get his attention so he would take the box from the doctor.

As he did so, Keonne asked, "What do they call her?"

"Who?" Obviously Doctor Layton had already transferred his thoughts to the present day and the upcoming conference.

"The thing in the water. Legends have names..."

"Ah yes." Dr. Layton smiled. "The Water Witch. They call her the Water Witch."

\* \* \*

When they left the medical building, Keonne loaded the box into the trunk of the rental car. He handed the keys to Del.

"Where you headed?" she questioned.

"It's early. The library's still open. I want to get a look at the old newspapers."

Del watched him. "You don't look so good." It was true -- under his tan, his skin had an ashy, washed out look. "Why don't you go on back to the motel, unload the files and get some rest. I'll pull the old obits and any info on drownings in the days of yore."

He looked about to argue.

"Give me some credit, Keonne. Just because I don't give this 'Water Witch' theory any credence doesn't mean I won't investigate all the angles. The past drownings may have a link, be it serial killer or something in the lake that causes hallucinations."

Keonne held up the scrap of white. "I didn't hallucinate this."

"What is that?"

"I found it wrapped around my toe when I pulled myself out of the lake this afternoon. It came off whatever attacked me in the lake."

"Keonne, I don't know what happened out there, or what you think happened, but give me a break! You don't honestly think an ancient pissed-off Water Witch is behind these drownings, do you?"

"I don't know what to think," Keonne admitted. "I do know what I saw and felt. I'll see you at the motel."

As Del walked the short way to the library she realized her cynicism was one more wedge between Keonne and herself. Lust or not, she was never going to get him in her bed. That was even more certain than this 'Water Witch' was bullshit.

By ten p.m. Del was not above seeing ghosts herself. Her eyes had scanned every



newspaper on microfiche since the town's inception. She had a list of ever growing names that just about had her convinced something was up in Elsmere Lake. Her serial killer theory was shot to hell. The drownings had been recorded as far back as the town existed, well over a hundred years. Some were considered accidents, some suicides, and all except two were men.

Damn, she hated to give this kind of info to Keonne while he had such a wild notion as a 'Water Witch' in the lake. There had to be a reasonable scientific explanation.

Maybe there was a natural phenomenon at play. Some chemical in the water that caused blackouts or a volcanic leftover natural gas. It was easy enough to send a water sample to the city lab for analysis. It would take a week but it would explain the tragedies. But why were they suddenly increasing?

Del gathered her papers and asked about calling a cab. The librarian gave her a shake of the head. "Sorry, we had a cab company, but it went out of business. If you want to hang around until eleven, I'll finish my shift and give you a lift."

Patience wasn't one of Del's strong points and she thanked the librarian, declining the offer. She began the long walk to the motor lodge. A pickup truck pulled up with a couple of teenagers.

"You need a ride?"

Del looked them over. They looked clean-cut and small town, but she wasn't used to the generosity of strangers. "I'm headed to the motor lodge by the highway."

"That's okay. You're the detective from the city, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

The girl looked unsure. "I... I need to talk to you. Please get in."

Del scooted in the cab, forcing the girl to move close to the driver, another teen. He drove competently enough as they left the town's main street.

"I'm Missy. Missy Stewart. Dex Boyd was my friend."

Del remembered one of the victims had been named Dexter. "Sorry to hear that. Dex was out in the lake at night with a girl, wasn't he?"

Missy looked upset. "Dex and Brenda were going together. Dex used to go with me but he wanted..."

The driver jerked the wheel. "He wanted in her pants and Missy said no, so Dex dumped her."

"Shut up, John."

"Dex was a scumbag and you know it, Missy. Brenda as much as said he tried to rape her when he... uh, fell out of the boat."

"Brenda?" Del verified. "The witness to his drowning?"

"Yeah," Missy sighed. "Brenda can't swim, but Dex *was* an excellent swimmer. He was on the swim team. I don't understand how it could have happened."

"Maybe when he struggled with Brenda, he hit his head and fell into the water," Del suggested.

"Maybe," Missy whispered. "Only Brenda said that's not what happened."

"Tell me how it happened." Del watched Missy's face as she tried to decide whether to open up. "Did Brenda hit Dex and knock him overboard? Is that how it went down?"

"No!" Missy cried. "Brenda said she was lying back in the boat with Dex on top of her. He was angry she wouldn't give it up for him and well, Brenda swears..."

"What?" Del waited.

The driver, John, almost missed the turn to the motel. "Hey, Brenda doesn't get high or anything but jeez..."

Missy took a breath. "Brenda swears something reached into the boat and grabbed Dex, throwing him out of the boat and into the water."

"Something?" Del questioned. "You mean like the Water Witch?"

"Hey, that's just a stupid legend." The teen driver laughed. "But if Brenda says something threw Dex out of the boat, then that's what happened. You figure out who or what did it."

The truck came to a halt in front of the motel. Missy gave Del a pleading look as she got out of the cab. "Just find out what happened out there, okay? It's spooky not

knowing, and like I said, Dex was a friend."

Del watched the truck pull away, back toward town. Just what was going on in Elsmere Lake?

## Chapter Six

Keonne's light was off so Del went directly to her room. There was plenty of time to compare notes in the morning.

Lying in bed Del scanned the notes she had taken at the library. So many deaths in the lake over the years, too many to attribute to accidents unless there was a common denominator.

Del fell asleep puzzling over the mystery. She dreamed, but this time it wasn't the usual Keonne sex dream. It started out hot, with both her and Keonne at the lake.

Keonne stood at the shoreline looking out across the water. The sun was sinking low and everything was bathed in a pinkish halo. Del walked up behind Keonne and gave him a gentle tug on the sleeve of his shirt.

She sank to the ground, unbuttoning her own shirt and letting it slide open. Keonne watched her as she ran her fingers over her bra cups, pinching her nipples through the tricot lace.

In the pink light, Keonne went down on his knees and, bending over her, lifted her breasts out and palmed them. His mouth traced the puckered creases around a nipple before fastening his lips to the nub and sucking avidly.

Del rose up and arched her back, urging Keonne on. He slithered down her body, unsnapping her pants, and eased them down from her hips. With deliberate slowness, he knelt between her legs, running his tongue over the thong underwear Del wore. He teased the sliver of material, positioning it at her moist entrance so her clit was trapped in place, moving the tender skin with his tongue, back and forth, as Del's fingers clutched then released the dirt beneath her.

Keonne closed his mouth around her clit and sucked hungrily, working it with his tongue in the same motion. Del felt a slide of wetness just as Keonne moved her

underwear aside and began lapping her juices. She orgasmed loudly with only the lake to hear her cries. Keonne raised his face and smiled.

Something alerted Del to the danger but she was too late to respond. Keonne was yanked from between her legs and dragged toward the lake. Del saw a flash of white then thick fog enveloped her, making it hard to breathe. The air roiled with a heaviness that clotted her lungs. She crawled toward the water, following the drag marks, but there was no sign of Keonne. Del waded into the water but the current kept pushing her back to the shore.

She screamed Keonne's name and thought she heard his cry from out in the lake, but the thick fog obscured her vision. She fought the current and waded until she was forced to swim, but there was nothing except silence. Then in the fog something bumped against her. From its size it might have been a log except it was soft and fleshy.

The fog lifted and for a brief moment Del stopped breathing. Face down, Keonne's body bobbed in the current, his dark hair streaming in the water. But when Del turned him over it wasn't Keonne's face that stared back at her, but a malevolent thing with filmy eyes and gray shredded skin stretched taut over a skull. As Del stared, the thing's grim mouth contorted in a smile and mottled lips peeled back from black, rotten teeth.

"Come to me. Give me a kiss, pretty one." A gnarled bony hand gripped Del around the back of the neck and pulled her face into the water. She was dragged underneath, kicking her legs, opening her mouth in a soundless scream as something white filtered into her throat and a thick shroud choked out the last of her life.

\* \* \*

Del shot up, the pain in her foot sharp and fresh where she'd kicked the footboard. A sheen of clammy sweat bathed her body and ran between her breasts. Damn, this case was getting to her!

Brushing her hair from her eyes, she swung out of bed and padded to where the plastic water pitcher and glasses sat on the counter.

She filled the pitcher with tap water and took a swig, spitting it into the sink.

Pure swill. What was it the motel keeper had said? "Don't drink the tap water, it's from the lake, and it'll kill ya."

Shit! Del dumped the pitcher and pulled her shirt flaps closed. There was a water dispenser just down the walk at the end of the corridor.

She felt like garbage, irate and only half awake, plus her foot ached like the devil. She really didn't give a fuck who saw her half-dressed as she made her way to the water machine. She filled the pitcher, stopping to add a few cubes of ice, then turned and ran smack into a hard form.

She didn't mean to shriek but the sound was out before she could get a grip. The pitcher slipped and would have fallen if steady hands hadn't caught it. "Del? What are you doing out here in the middle of the night?"

"Jeez, Keonne, you almost gave me a heart attack. I'm getting water. What are you doing on the prowl?"

"I heard noise outside my room. It must have been you. Are you limping?"

Del was very aware his hands were covering hers on the pitcher, but she made no move to disengage. She had the insane urge to lean against him, smell him, just to be sure he was okay. The dream was still vivid in her mind and she shuddered.

"You okay?"

Del shook off her weakness. "Fine. Couldn't sleep."

"And you're limping because?"

"Vivid dream. Don't ask. Can we go back to our room, I'm freezing." He seemed to have missed her stupid slip of saying 'our room,' and instead took off the terrycloth robe he was wearing, wrapping it around Del's shivering form.

"The ice in that water won't help," he chided as Del stared.

He was wearing only briefs under the robe and even in the dim light Del could see every outline and bulge... and it was a hell of a bulge.

"Uh, thanks." She allowed herself to lean against him momentarily. Damn, he felt so good, solid and warm, even undressed as he was. She wanted to snuggle against him and fall asleep in his arms, safe and secure from nightmares of death.

He led her back to their rooms. At her doorway he stopped. "You okay? That ankle I mean?"

"Yeah." Del shucked off his robe. "Here. Thanks for the loaner. You want to come in and compare notes on the case? I discovered some interesting facts..."

But Keonne was staring at Del. Her shirt lapels were draped open and the curve of her breasts was plainly visible. The rift grew wider, showing the softness of Del's stomach down to her underwear.

Del was aware of her lack of attire, but it wasn't until she saw the growing bulge in Keonne's briefs that she knew she had an effect on her usually stoic partner.

Keonne spoke raggedly. "I don't think coming in is such a good idea. I'll see you in the morning. We can compare notes then."

He turned and was gone, leaving Del with a slow grin spreading over her face.

\* \* \*

It took Del four cups of coffee at the café the next morning before she could even think straight, let alone discuss the case with her partner.

Keonne devoured a big hearty breakfast as Del toyed with her scrambled eggs.

"You plan on eating those or you saving them for a rainy day?" Keonne forked down the last of a stack of pancakes swathed in syrup.

"I'm not much of a breakfast person." Del excused herself to use the restroom. When she came out, Keonne had already opened her notes and was reading avidly.

"Sorry," he apologized. "You seem reluctant to get started this morning. I'm just breaking the ice. So after all these *accidents*, you still want to argue there's not something in the lake killing people?"

Del sat down to nurse her coffee. "First, they're all men. Well, all but two. And those two were suicides. But, while I concede it's strange that since the town came into being, so many have drowned, I'm going with the plausible explanation that the *something* in the lake is chemical."

Keonne pushed back his plate. "I know what I saw and felt."

"Listen, Keonne, I believe you up to a point. I think in your mind you saw and

felt something. But what if there is a chemical leaking into the lake, causing hallucinations and perhaps blackouts, leading to the drownings?"

"Why don't you just call me crazy, Del?"

"I mean it, Keonne. I'm going down to the lake to gather a water sample for analysis. The city lab can confirm or deny my suspicions."

"Wouldn't we smell or taste a chemical?" Keonne looked a little more relaxed. Maybe he was coming around to her theory.

Del shook her head. "Natural gas has no odor. A smell is added to aid in its detection to prevent poisoning. It's possible whatever is in the lake is tasteless and odorless. Besides, that swill they filter into the tap from the lake isn't exactly liquid honey. It's pretty rank."

"Suit yourself." Keonne reached for the check.

Del gave him a half-smile. "Old habits die hard, eh, Mr. Chivalry?"

Keonne looked none-too-happy to relinquish the bill, but Del was the one with the expense account. She paid and briefed Keonne on the way out of the café. "Last night I hitched a ride with a couple of teens. They knew one of the victims as well as the witness listed in the sheriff's incident report. Only the witness said in the report Dexter Boyd fell out of the boat. She told her friends something else. I say we interview her and see what story she sticks with."

Keonne agreed and they drove to Brenda Yates' parents' house. It wasn't hard to find the address. Located across from the high school in a ranch style neighborhood, the Yates house looked like any other on the block.

Brenda was summoned by her mother and nervously sat with the detectives in the tidy living room with her mother at her side.

Keonne began. "We have the report on file about your boyfriend Dexter's drowning."

Brenda's mother cut in. "He wasn't Brenda's boyfriend. Brenda is not allowed to have a boyfriend. She's too young."

Del looked at the protective parent. "Mrs. Yates, I'm sorry, but I ate a big



breakfast and I'm as thirsty as can be. Is it possible to get a glass of water from you?"

"Of course." Mrs. Yates looked uncertain but her manners bade her to perform the task.

When she was out of earshot Del picked up the thread of conversation. "He was your boyfriend, wasn't he?"

Brenda's eyes filled with tears. "Yes. But I wouldn't do what he wanted. I tried to talk to him, explain we should wait, but he threw himself on me and then he... he... tried to..."

"Rape you?" Keonne looked angry.

"No!" Brenda protested. "He was different than I'd ever seen him, but Dex wouldn't have really hurt me. Honest!"

Keonne didn't look so sure. Del pushed the questioning faster before Brenda's mother could return. "So you didn't push Dexter out of the boat?"

"No! I told the sheriff, he fell."

"That's not what John and Missy told me you confided to them."

Brenda looked wide-eyed. "Promise me you won't tell my parents. They would think I'm on drugs or something."

"Okay," Del agreed.

"Dex was wild. He pushed me down in the boat and held me down. I couldn't get up. He was too heavy. Then I noticed the fog. It came out of nowhere and I swear something reached into the boat..."

"Something?" Keonne leaned forward in the armchair he sat in.

Brenda whispered, "I saw an arm reach out of the fog and jerk Dex out of the boat. It happened so fast. One minute he was lying on top of me, and the next, this white creepy arm grabbed him and he was gone. They found his body the next day, tangled in the reeds by Mr. Scranton's boathouse. I swear that's the truth!"

"All right." Mrs. Yates was back and Del took a few obligatory gulps of water. From the awful taste she could tell it was tap water filtered from the lake. "That's all the questions we have. Thanks."

Outside Keonne looked vindicated. "Now are you convinced?"

Del tried to snatch the car keys from him. She missed and he held them out of reach. "Fine, you drive. Convinced of what? That some boogey monster is grabbing males? What the hell kind of theory is that? You want to file that in a report? Be my guest. I'd prefer to finish my career outside of a padded cell, thank you very much."

"What's next then? You want to dangle me as chum in the lake until this thing takes the bait? Would that be proof enough?"

Del knew he was teasing and she really didn't believe there was anything to this lake monster, but last night's dream hit close to her heart. A flash of Keonne lying face down in the water filled her vision.

"Del? You okay? What's wrong? You're as pale as a ghost." Keonne's hand tilted her chin up.

"Nothing. Let's go to where they recovered this Dexter's body. I want to take a water sample from there."

Keonne watched her closely. "You are a hard case, Barnes, you know that? Partners are supposed to share, to confide. But all I get from you is a brick wall. You don't want me for a partner, do you?"

Del swallowed. She wanted him under her, over her and every which way as a partner. But she couldn't very well blurt it out. They were in the middle of an investigation, for heaven's sake! "Look, Keonne, when this is over we'll talk. I have issues and you're one of them, but not in the way you think."

Already Del knew she'd said too much and she clamped her mouth shut.

Keonne started the car. "Fine, but this is not over, not by a long shot. If I'm not the one eating you, I'll find out what is."

Del choked on laughter at his choice of words. "Yeah, you do that, Keonne. You find out what's eating me, or rather what's not." She snickered.

"You're weird, Barnes. Cute, but weird."

## Chapter Seven

They drove to the Scranton place. Out of courtesy, they knocked on the rustic cabin's front door to announce their intentions to the owner.

Alma Scranton introduced herself, but stated her husband Jim had taken the boat out yesterday and hadn't returned.

When Del raised her eyebrows at this, Alma hastily assured them, "Jim is peeved about some things. He gets that way and takes the old boat across the lake to Mick's Bait 'n Tackle. He stays with Mick and ties one on, then comes back within a week. After fifteen years of marriage, you get used to a spouse's peculiarities. Go ahead and do what you've got to do. But if by chance Jim does come back let him know you're not developers. He's touchy about that subject."

"Developers?" Keonne questioned.

Del answered what she knew. "I heard in town this side of the lake is being scouted for condos."

"Yep," Alma agreed. "Jim's the holdout. This old cabin ain't worth much and the developers would give a good bundle for the land. Sure would be nice to have a new place all fixed up, closer to town. But Jim won't hear of it. That's part of what's gettin' his goat. That and refusing his conjugal rights."

Keonne looked across the lake as if embarrassed by this admission. Del smiled. "Fifteen years, it's bound to become a duty after a while."

Alma breathed deep. "Thank you! A woman knows these things. I tell you, I cook, I clean, and this old rat-trap don't look the better for it. Then Jim comes around sweet talkin' and thinks I'm in the mood just cuz' he is. He buys me a new place and my mood will surely improve. But he's a stubborn cuss, so here we sit just moldering away."

Del wasn't sure if it was the cabin or herself Alma Scranton was referring to. She excused herself as Keonne started down the path to the lakeshore and Del had to jog to catch up. Her feet skittered on the trail and she bumped into Keonne.

He caught her before she could collide more solidly. "Whoa. You in a hurry?"

"I was about to ask the same thing." Del laughed. "You squeamish about marriage or the sex act in general? The way you skipped out on the porch back there was almost a clean getaway."

Keonne still held onto her and Del found she liked it.

"I just think if you're married to someone for years and you love them, the spark shouldn't go out. When I get married it's going to be to someone that feels the fire as much as I do."

"Is that a proposal?" Del quipped, but Keonne didn't look amused. "Oh, no, I've got myself an idealist for a partner. Jeez, Keonne, couldn't you be a one-night stand kind of guy, like a hundred thousand other red-blooded males?"

"Nope." Then he did crack a smile. "It's all or nothing for me."

Then Del did pull away. As much as she did want Keonne, she never thought beyond the sexual attraction. What if it was something more? And apparently Keonne took his relationships very seriously. Damn! She wouldn't get a piece of his great ass without strings attached. How bad did she want him? Bad, she conceded, very bad.

They passed the boathouse as a breeze came off the lake. The reeds where Dexter Boyd's body had been found were diagrammed on a rough sketch in the copy of the sheriff's report. They were just a little down the shoreline and it was no hard chore finding the spot.

Nothing about the area appeared suspicious. It looked just like a hundred other spots around the lake. Del took the jar she'd brought out of her coat pocket and bent to scoop a sample of the water. Farther out something splashed in the lake and she jumped, spilling some of the liquid.

"I saw that." Keonne looked at Del then back out at the water. "It was just a fish jumping. Admit it, Del. This case has you spooked."

"Too much caffeine has got me spooked, Keonne. I'll leave Water Witches and folklore to you and your Native American blood. Ughh! That's a foul smell. They had a fish die-off recently?"

The wind had switched and blew a noxious odor in their direction. Keonne turned toward the boathouse. "You've smelled that odor a dozen times before, Del, what do you think?"

"Oh, hell!" Del straightened, capping the jar tightly and sliding it back in her pocket. Following Keonne, she approached the rickety structure. The door hanging off the hinge creaked noisily, but even so they heard the buzz of flies clearly.

Keonne groped at the boathouse wall and found the light switch. Del covered her nose with her sleeve as the rotten smell of death flooded the air.

The body was easy to locate, or rather what was left of it. The shell of skin covering the bones was scarcely complete. Bloating of the face was apparent, and the mass of flies blanketing the corpse made it hard to spot details.

Del's stomach lurched and she bit her tongue to keep the bile down. Some scenes just got to her more than others. This one was rank. "Call the sheriff. Get him and the coroner down here," she ordered, her training taking over.

But Keonne was looking at the boat and walked along the dock to kneel down parallel to the motor. He reached into the water.

"Keonne, you know better than to touch anything!" Del watched as he peered closely.

"This white material is the same as the sample I found on my toe yesterday," he confirmed. He flipped out his cell phone and punched up the number for the sheriff.

A few hours later Sheriff Beamish identified the body as Jim Scranton's. Dr. Layton was called back from his conference to do a preliminary report on the death. When he was finished he imparted the news. "Jim Scranton appears to have died the same way as the others. He drowned."

Keonne was uncharacteristically antsy and paced the examining room where the body had been laid out. "But he wasn't in the water. He wasn't even wet."

Dr. Layton shrugged. "Until the body is shipped to the city for a full autopsy, I won't have the official findings. But his lungs are full of fluid, both water and mucous."

"Mucous?" Del questioned.

"It appears to be mucous," Dr. Layton repeated. "Extremely thick with almost a sticky texture."

"Let me get this straight," Del double-checked. "You're saying he was drowned then tossed into the boat?"

Keonne looked thoughtful. "Or he drowned in the boat. Something flooded his lungs until he choked to death."

"Don't start with me, Keonne." Del wanted to slug her partner. "I suppose it's possible he fell in the water, hit his head and was able to pull himself out of the water, but died in the boat as a result."

Dr. Layton peeled back the sheet covering the corpse on the table. "And just like the others, he ejaculated until his seminal vesicles were completely milked dry."

"What?" Del and Keonne responded in unison.

Del thumbed her notes. "That's not in my report."

Dr. Layton shrugged. "It's in my medical records and the conclusive autopsy reports. All the victims showed signs of multiple sexual activities prior to death. They were all milked dry of sperm."

"Whoa!" Del stamped her foot. "Brenda Yates said Dex did *not* rape her, and he was out of the boat before anything happened. Either she's lying or..."

"We have a sexual predator in the lake," Keonne finished.

Dr. Layton shook his head. "You don't understand. A male would have to have sex over and over for hours to deplete the testes of all these fluids -- leaving dry channels. And even then, there would be some ejaculatory fluid in minute trace amounts. These bodies were as dry as the desert. It's not possible for a human being to do this through normal sexual activity."

Keonne watched Del's face. Her features said loud and clear, "Don't say a thing."

As they left the medical building Del turned to Keonne. "Go ahead. Give me an

earful.”

Keonne stated matter-of-factly, “Whatever it is, it preys on males. I’m going to go a step further and guess sexually frustrated males.”

“How do you make that assumption?”

Keonne rubbed his jaw line. “The Dexter teen was all over Brenda. Scranton’s wife admitted she had cut him off. I’m willing to bet the others over the years were red-blooded males with a normal sexual appetite who weren’t getting their rocks off regularly. Whatever is in the lake feeds on them. And since the deaths are increasing, it could mean something is making the creature more agitated and voracious. I’m betting it’s the new development. The machinery and earthmoving. Maybe even the water temperature is affected.”

“You make a lot of unsubstantiated assumptions, partner,” Del reminded him. “We need hard facts. I dropped the water sample off at the medical building’s lab. They agreed to test it for me. It saves time sending it to the city. I’ll send another sample for extensive testing. But this can’t wait.” Del stopped in her tracks. “Your theory is this Water Witch feeds on men’s libidos? *And* its victims are sexually frustrated males? It went after you, Keonne.”

They were at the car. “So? I’m human, Del. I saw you in the shower before I went to the lake. Do you know how horny I was? Jeez, woman, how much is a man supposed to take?”

Del couldn’t believe her ears. But the next move was hard to mistake. She found herself pushed up against the car. Keonne’s warm lips covered hers and it became a war of tongues.

Del couldn’t get enough of him as she tasted and nearly devoured his mouth. His hands came up to cup her breasts under her jacket and she leaned into him. There was no mistaking she wanted him as much as he obviously wanted her. Del could feel his erection through the slacks he wore, and she couldn’t help but reach down and cup the bulge.

“Damn it, Del,” Keonne ground against her lips, “what are we suppose to do

now?"

"I think that's obvious." Del smiled.

"No," Keonne argued. "We're on a case. We're partners."

"It doesn't have to affect our working relationship, Keonne. Ahhh, that feels so good." He was kneading her breasts through her blouse.

"Don't be naïve. It will affect everything we do together."

"God, I hope so," Del muttered as she slid her hand into the opening where she'd unbuttoned his fly.

The sound of footsteps reminded them they were in the medical building parking lot. "Damn it," Del moaned, "I've waited for this from the moment I met you and now it happens in a public place? Son of a bitch!"

Keonne stepped back and blocked the view as Del rearranged her rumpled clothes. "You've wanted me? Jeez, lady, I thought you were just naturally sexy as hell and my libido was going haywire. I've never had to beat off so much in my life as I've had to these last few weeks."

Del grinned. "It's nice to know the feeling is reciprocated. What say we go back to the motor lodge and compare techniques?"

Keonne looked as miserable as any person she had ever seen. "I... We can't. Not until the case is over and we put in for a change of partners."

"No!" Del's frustration came to a head. "Fuck your ethics, Keonne. I want you so bad I can taste you. I dream about you. I think about you. I don't want to wait another day!"

"Sorry, Del. That's the way it has to be. Cold showers all the way around."

Angrily, Del grabbed for the car keys. "I need the car. You do whatever it is you plan on doing to ease your conscience, Keonne. But this is your idea, not mine."

Del left him in the parking lot staring after her as she drove off.



## Chapter Eight

Del drove out of town and around the lake, taking the fork to the south shore. She was hotter than she could ever remember being in her entire life. If Keonne had stripped her naked and plunged his cock into her right there in the public parking lot, she wouldn't have protested. She'd have welcomed it. Damn it, she wanted him body and soul and she didn't want to wait another day! She couldn't be near Keonne and not touch him, try to seduce him. It just was the way things were. Maybe her hormones were running haywire, but it was Keonne who was driving her crazy. Her body couldn't help but give off signals.

Trying to get herself together, Del made the first rational decision of the day. If she solved the case, she could have Keonne. The sooner the better.

A few businesses dotted the shoreline of the south shore, mostly boat rentals and Mick's Bait 'n Tackle shop. Further on, a large warehouse structure obstructed her view of the lake. The sharp odor of resin drifted in the air, making Del wrinkle her nose.

She parked beside a few battered vehicles and approached the door of the warehouse. Inside it was an assembly line of workers, handcrafting, painting and refinishing boats and various watercrafts.

A man in green overalls spotted Del and came toward her. He wore a painter's mask and cap to protect his hair and face. "Can I help you? We aren't open to the public."

"Sorry." Del flashed her badge. "I'm just curious about the activity around the lake. I assume you dispose of your waste properly."

The man shuffled Del outside. "Of course. All chemicals go into sealed drums. There's no dumping in the lake if that's what you're implying."

"I'm not implying anything, merely asking." Del tried another tactic and smiled

a full grin. "Look, I just need to verify all the angles, you know, dot my T's and cross my I's... on the paperwork." She feigned a silly laugh. "I mean..."

The painter relaxed. "It's okay. Paperwork sucks. That's why I gave up management to design these boats."

He gestured to the dock area where new boats gleamed in the sunlight. "Check it out. These babies are the cream of the crop and are bagging me the bucks. See that cover?"

He gestured to a larger boat whose canopy cover was sheer white. "That's my patented product. It's a sheer netting that allows sun to pass through and lets you tan, but protects against harmful UV rays. Pretty cool, huh?"

Del was staring at the cover. The material was almost lacy in appearance. She walked to the boat and touched the pliable material. It was plausible. "You missing any of this new stuff?"

"Funny you should ask. Someone broke in and stole some tools a few months back, took a bolt of my SunMesh. Lot of good it'll do them. I patented it and no one can use it without me suing."

"Do you mind if I take just a scrap of SunMesh? I'll show it to some of the guys from the department, might result in a few referrals. They love new inventions and gimmicks."

"Sure. I'll get you a swatch."

Del was humming a tune as she drove along the lake, making a full circle. The white SunMesh was a missing link in the lake drownings. "Water Witch, my ass," Del laughed as she fingered the mesh fabric. It was the same as the stuff wrapped around Jim Scranton's boat, and from Keonne's imagined encounter in the lake. It could look like a shroud to a disoriented clouded brain. That was Del's next goal -- to prove the lake was host to a deadly chemical leaching from somewhere into the water.

She ate at a roadside diner, enjoying chicken fried steak smothered with gravy and hot apple pie. Maybe her life wasn't so bad after all. The food made her forget her immediate problems. It was growing late and one thing was for certain. Del could no

longer sleep in a motel room a few feet away from Keonne, without wanting him so bad she would do just about anything to be with him that night. It was the responsible thing to do, she assured herself, to put the lake between them as she found a small motel on the south shore and checked in. From her room, she called the motor lodge where Keonne was and spoke quickly. "I'll be back sometime tomorrow."

"You okay, Del?" Keonne sounded frustrated.

"I'm good." Del tried to keep calm and cool. "I'm a big girl, Keonne. I'll survive. But when I get back we're going to talk."

"About the case?"

"Among other things. See you tomorrow, Keonne." Del was about to hang up when a devilish thought crossed her mind. "Hey, Keonne?"

"What?"

"Ready to crawl into those cold sheets alone?"

"Don't do this, Del." Keonne sounded miserable.

Del thought about all the sleep she'd lost in the past weeks and of Keonne feigning indifference to her. He had played her well, making her think she had no effect over him. Meanwhile, she'd been in a state of constant tortuous arousal. Well, turnabout was fair play! "Are you wearing those tight briefs that show every single delicious inch of your cock, just waiting to be taken out and stroked? You could have had me tonight. And tomorrow night. Every night. Just the two of us naked, lying on top of the bed, the light on so you can see my naked body. Hot and silky, just begging for your touch."

"Del, show me some mercy."

"Keonne, could you do something for me? Now, right now."

"What?"

"Peel down those briefs and run your palm along your cock. Come on, you know it's grown hard just listening to me talk about it. You want to, don't you? As soon as I hung up you were going to jerk off, so why wait? Let me talk you through it. Take it out. Stroke it up for me, long and hard."

She heard Keonne's breathing deepen and rise. "You have it out, don't you? It's jutting in front of you, but it wants more. Much more. Close your eyes. See me. See me on my knees, kneeling between your legs. My tongue is out and I'm touching your cock, running along the side to the very tip. Oooh, is that precum? You are a bad boy, starting without me. Very bad."

"A boy? Believe me, Del, what I want to do with you is no boy's fantasy. I'm all man, and my cock is so hard for you it hurts."

Del swallowed the lump in her throat. Maybe this call was not such a good idea. Already her pussy was hot, picturing Keonne sitting on his bed, his cock out and begging for attention. She closed her mind to her doubts as she continued. "My tongue is running along your erection, coating it, mixing my saliva with that bit of precum. My hands are on your balls, cradling, stroking them, as I take your cock in my mouth. Can you feel me taking you into my mouth?"

"Yesss... I feel it." Keonne was panting now. "This is crazy, Del. Come back to me. Let me feel your body on mine for real. It should be your hand on my cock, guiding me to your sweet pussy."

Del's eyes moistened. "It has to be this way... for now, Keonne. Let me pleasure you as I relax my throat... let you touch the back of my mouth, then I bob up and down. Feel me applying suction?"

"Oh yeah, Del. Your throat is tightening. My balls are tingling. I'm going to come."

"Not yet, lover. Wait for me. As I suck you my hands are on my tits. I press them up and stroke the nipples. They're hard and want you to suck them until they ache. But I want to taste your cum. My body wants you everywhere. My cunt is wet for you. My sweet ass yearns for you to fill it with that stiff cock. We have all night but no... you twitch in my throat and begin to spurt..."

"Yes!" Keonne groaned into the phone.

"I pull my head back and your hard rod is creaming. My body wants to have your cum slathered all over it. I place your cock between my full breasts and you fuck

them. Are you thrusting, lover?"

"I'm thrusting, Del. I'm coming all over you. I want to be inside you... your ass, your cunt... Come back tonight, Del. We can be together for real, not some crazy phone sex."

Del heard his groan as he poured his release into what she assumed was his hand. His breathing slowed.

"Where are you, Del? I want to be with you."

"Keonne. I want that, but you were right. This case comes first. I'll be back tomorrow and we can go over things, make decisions." Before he could talk her out of it, Del hung up. It wouldn't take much more to make her jump in the car and drive back to the north shore and Keonne's arms. As she'd talked to him, seducing him over the phone, her hand had been cupping her breasts, feeling his tongue glide over the nipples. She swore she had felt him cream over their fullness, his cum dripping between them. Del groaned with frustration. When this case was over, there was going to be some serious lovemaking combined with down home fucking going on.

After a bad night of sweaty sheets and light sleep, Del went back to the roadside diner where she'd had dinner the night before. After her usual four cups of coffee, her brain began to come alive. The waitress, a middle-aged woman with her hair pulled into a tight bun and flat, sensible shoes, smiled knowingly. "Bad dreams?"

Del shook her head. "Bad reality. You know where I can get some good dirt on the lake and the town goings-on?"

The waitress laughed. "Just your luck. You probably picked the one joint with a waitress who doesn't pay attention to gossip. You want any news? You go to my Great-aunt Jo. Jeez, she admits to being eighty-four, but I tell you, she's been that for about ten years now."

"Where might I find Aunt Jo and is she coherent?"

"More coherent than you or me. She likes to talk. Look her up. She'll enjoy the company. That little cottage by George's Antiques is her kingdom. Just knock and enter. She always has a pot of hot tea on."

Del was prepared for a bit of eccentricity as she entered the small cottage, freshly whitewashed and planted with pansies and petunias in window boxes. But she wasn't prepared for the wall-to-wall dolls that were everywhere in the cottage. Even the sofa was crowded with dolls. Bisque dolls, straw dolls, Raggedy Anns, everywhere, dolls.

Even though it wasn't cold, in a rocking chair before a fire sat what might have been another doll. Except this one rocked slowly, back and forth, crocheting with a speed that belied her age.

Del spoke low so as not to startle the woman. "Mrs... uh... I'm sorry I spoke to your niece and I don't know how to address you."

The tiny woman chuckled. "Aunt Jo is just fine, whether kith or kin. Come on in and sit a spell. There's tea under the cozy on that table. Help yourself. You come about the lake and the locals?"

Del started. Was the woman psychic?

Aunt Jo tilted her head. "Telephone. My niece called and told me to expect you."

Del released her breath. This whole case was getting the best of her good sense. "It's just some background on the lake I'm looking for. You don't happen to know the history of the north shore, do you?"

The old woman chuckled. "Child, I spent many a summer skinny-dipping in that lake... longer than you've been alive, I reckon. And the north shore has the warmest water. Why, every summer as a teen we used to pile into those old cars and descend on the shore, like a flock of seagulls. Got to the point the townsfolk began to complain. Then Canton George dove off and split his head on a rock. Drowned. And that sealed the whole skidoo. We were banned from the north shore."

"And that was the only accident?"

"Naw." The tiny woman stopped rocking. "There were plenty of young men showing off to their girls, got liquored up and went in the water. Some of them just got carried away, both by the current and their own pride."

"The current? Aunt Jo, why is there a current in the lake?" Del sat forward to catch the wizened woman's words.

“You want me to tell you there’s a lake spirit? A Water Witch, I know they call her. It’s bunk. No, missy, I could spin that yarn into a sweater with sleeves a mile long, but truth is, the north shore has hot springs running underneath. I guess it has to do with the old volcano but nevertheless, the water flows warmer there and even hot in spots. It’s no spirit, just Mother Nature at her fickle best. There’s a couple of spots where the old crater sucks the water under then expels it further out. I know because one of them divers from the survey company came to look at the dolls with his daughter, and explained it to me.”

Del smiled. So much for the Water Witch dragging her victims under. There *was* an eddy effect in the lake, but it was natural, not the boogie monster. She spent the better part of an hour discussing the vast doll collection Aunt Jo had accumulated over the years, then she was on her way.

She stopped once more on the north shore before heading back to town. The lake looked far from dangerous now that she had an explanation that she could wrap her mind around. But would Keonne accept the evidence so she could fulfill her fantasy and wrap her legs around him? Del’s thoughts warmed at the idea and her temperature rose. She needed the evidence in writing. Then Keonne was going to be hers, mind, body and that delicious cock.

Del looked out at the lake. The current was swirling in spots, almost bubbling. Yep, it all made sense. And the icing on the cake was the report that had to have been filed at City Hall, before the developers could begin their excavation and bulldozing. She turned to head back to the car when a splotch of white caught her eyes, tangled in a cluster of reeds a ways down the shoreline.

Del approached the spot carefully then chided herself. *You have all the facts. Don’t be a fraidy cat.* She bent to retrieve the scrap, stretching over the water, when something grabbed her from behind, long cold fingers scratching her skin.

## Chapter Nine

Del turned around swinging. She wouldn't go into the lake without a fight!

Her fist connected with Sheriff Beamish's jaw, knocking him backward and almost off his feet. His eyes registered shock at her sudden attack. "Whoa! Detective Barnes, it's me." He rubbed his jaw. "You have one hell of a left hook, lady."

Del tried to calm her racing heart. "Sheriff, what are you doing here? I nearly thought..." Embarrassed, Del shied away from her admission. "Well, never mind, but what *are* you doing here?"

"I patrol the shoreline every morning since the hullabaloo about the recent drownings. I saw you turn off to the lake and thought I'd let you know the lab sent back those results you wanted on the lake water. You were about to put your foot in what we local folk call swamp mud. See that patch by your right toe? One more inch and you'd have sunk to your ankles. Messy and dangerous, if you break an ankle."

Del wanted that scrap of white. "Thanks, Sheriff. I need a stick." Without question, Sheriff Beamish located a piece of cane allowing Del to retrieve her quest. To her disappointment it turned out to be just a shredded old sock.

When Del didn't elaborate the sheriff rubbed his aching jaw. "You have some peculiar habits, Detective Barnes." He left her to resume his patrol.

Del drove into town, stopping at the Medical Center to visit the lab. The quick perusal over the water analysis left her with little to draw any conclusions. She asked the lab technician to break down the analysis into layman's terms. The young man gave her a superior smirk. Del wanted to give him the same left hook she'd delivered to Sheriff Beamish, but she swallowed her ire and plastered a sweet smile on her face.

The technician began in a monosyllabic tone. "Carbonates, calcium, sulfates, sodium, potassium, chloride, nitrates, phosphorous, manganese. Standard stuff."



Del's brain caught at something. "Nitrates? Don't they use some form of that for male impotence?"

The lab technician stared. "Uh, yeah. A derivative has been found to bring on a uh, beneficial... uh..."

"A hard-on?" Del watched as the technician blushed to the roots of his blond hair.

"Yes," the tech confirmed.

"Anything strange in the water? I see more than one form of nitrate listed."

"Well, the potassium nitrate is the same as saltpeter. It's usually found in the soil around the lake. But with development and earth disturbances it's not uncommon for it to filter into the lake."

"What would happen if a person happened to swallow this potassium nitrate?" Del questioned.

"Not recommended, as it causes a depressant effect on the heart."

Del cocked her head to one side. "Could it cause a person to have a hard-on and quit breathing?"

The tech shrugged. "I suppose, if the circumstances were right. The temperature has to be quite warm to trigger a topical reaction."

"What do you mean?"

The tech looked uncomfortable. "The nitrate has to be absorbed through the pores and that occurs more readily in warmer temps."

"Like hot water?"

"Yes."

"But none of this is harmful in the tap water that is filtered from the lake?"

"Oh no." The tech looked more comfortable, like he was back on firm ground. "That water is filtered to remove the higher concentrations of chemicals... like the potassium aluminum sulfate and potassium permanganate regularly added to oxidize the manganese to manganic dioxide and improve the taste."

"Whoa!" Del stopped him. "Speak my lingo."

"Alum powder is added to control the manganese which is used to inhibit algae growth in the lake," the tech explained.

"Alum, as in making homemade Play-Doh?"

"Yep. The same."

"But that is also a preservative that dries fruit for canning."

"They used to use it for that, but it's not recommended anymore, just like nitrates can be used for asthma."

"Gee, I can see why. Okay, Sparky, hold onto your briefs. Suppose a person absorbed these nitrates in hot water and swallowed a gallon of alum. How can I put this delicately? Would such a person risk death by a massive bout of stiff-dick and dehydration?"

The technician began to cough and Del knew she had over-shot her mark. "Never mind. You dwell on that one for a few years, Sparky. I think I can figure it out on my own."

Del left the poor guy gasping for air as she exited the lab and put her facts in order. If the lake chemicals were causing the victims to stop breathing while also feeding their sex organs, then how far-fetched was it that the alum was shriveling their peckers and absorbing the seminal fluids after they drowned?

It wouldn't be hard to prove once she had the complete report from the city lab and the conclusions on paper for official documentation. Del felt pretty good about herself and wrapping up the case. Now for Keonne.

\* \* \*

Del was annoyed to find Keonne wasn't at the motor lodge. It wasn't like she expected him to be sitting around waiting for her return, but it would have been nice. Del cleaned up and put on a fresh change of clothes. Part of her wanted to meet him wearing something scanty and sexy, but her professional side argued they were still on the case and she had to do the 'responsible thing' and wait. So in jeans and a casual pullover, Del organized her thoughts and rehearsed her explanation of what she was including in her report.

It was all perfectly simple and would look concise on paper. She couldn't have asked for anything more.

A knock on the door brought butterflies to her stomach. She was a grown woman, for heaven's sake, why was she so nervous about seeing Keonne?

She knew the answer. She'd fantasized about him, dreamed of having his body pressed to hers, having him inside her, taking her breath away at every opportunity. And he'd admitted to having the same sort of feelings toward her.

Del swallowed once and opened the door. Keonne looked as handsome and sexy as ever. With all the diplomatic finesse of a hooker, Del grabbed his arm and yanked him in the room.

Her professional side protested, but her hormones won out, and Del plastered herself against him, pulling his head down to hers.

Keonne didn't protest. Instead their lips tussled for possession of each other's mouths. Keonne had hold of Del's pullover and yanked it over her head, his hands molding her breasts hungrily. The nipples hardened instantly, pebbling against his fingertips. Del moaned half in pleasure and half in anticipation.

She cupped his cock through his jeans, rubbing her hands against its length.

The bed seemed a mile away as they kicked off shoes and articles of clothing. In a last moment of lucidity, Keonne reached for Del's lacy underwear, feeling the wet material as he rolled them down.

Del wasn't sure what had halted their frenetic foreplay but Keonne was gazing at her dark bush almost reverently.

"Are you sure, Del?" He breathed her aroma. "This is the greatest gift a woman can offer a man. Her body."

His finger traced the edges of her cunt, slid to the center and was rewarded as her liquid coated him thickly.

Del's knees began to shake. "Oh, I'm beyond sure. I want you on me and in me, lying beside me until we fall asleep so exhausted from lovemaking... so tired you can't even slide your cock out of me. We'll sleep intertwined and wake up to do it all again."

Keonne's finger was doing things to her she'd only dreamed about. He stroked her clit until Del tingled from within.

He fell to his knees in front of her, his tongue replacing his finger. A stroke was all it took for Del to release a flood of juices. He clasped her butt and buried his face against her, devouring every drop of liquid.

Del couldn't stand any longer and Keonne lowered her sagging form to the carpet. Trying to even her shallow breathing, Del ran her hands down Keonne's tawny body, groping for his cock.

It was warm silk, striking against her hand, already seeking her warm cunt. Del felt it nudge against her entrance and guided it home. The first thrust was tentative, the second sure. From then on, it was a mix of thrusting and churning, until skin slapped against skin, juices mixed with sweat and breathing became raspy.

Keonne's cock moved in and out Del's slickness with a rhythm easy to follow. Del rode against him, feeling the friction hit her clit until she groaned and spiraled. Her cunt contracted, her spine flexed, and every muscle in her body tightened in an orgasm that made her toes curl in ecstasy. Del screamed a primitive yowl that made Keonne stop for a minute and regard her with amusement.

She didn't apologize as she squirmed beneath him and found Keonne's balls, giving them a gentle squeeze that made him groan in appreciation. He stiffened as his cock responded and jerked inside her. With a loud cry that dwarfed her own, Keonne came with gusto, his semen flooding into Del. For the first time in her life Del felt tears gather and begin to flow as Keonne looked into her eyes tenderly.

"You okay?"

"Yes." Del sniffed. "I'm just sentimental, I guess. Who knew?"

Keonne kept his thigh thrown over hers as he rolled to his side. "You look beautiful when you cry."

"Liar." Del wiped at the tears.

"Let me." Keonne's thumb wiped the moisture off her cheek.

When they both were quietly lying still Del began, "I have to talk to you about

the case.”

Keonne jerked upright, grabbing her wrist and pulling Del to her feet. “Later. I’m not finished making love to my partner.”

Del found herself pushed on the bed.

“Spread yourself for me.” Keonne looked magnificent, his cock already growing erect, his balls a dusky hue, hanging distended and swollen. “On second thought, turn over.”

Del caught her breath. She flopped over and Keonne quickly grasped her around the waist, raising her to her knees. “Keonne, I’ve only dreamed about this but never...”

“Shhh. Relax. Feel me against you. You’ll stretch for my entrance and when I’m deep within you, we’ll move together.”

Del felt him against her anus, nudging the tender skin apart. It opened willingly enough, until he pressed the larger part of his cock’s head against the rim.

There was a moment when Del started to protest. It was going to be painful. She could feel it already, a burning gathering force, spreading. But Keonne must have anticipated her discomfort as he reached around Del and stroked her pussy, pressing her clit rhythmically. His finger slid against her, using the friction to build Del’s response. She began to ride the finger as it became two and as she pushed back, her sphincter relaxed against Keonne’s cock. He entered her, pressing deep within, filling her until she gasped.

The fingers inside her cunt rubbed as the cock in her ass thrust. Del began to shudder with the nerve impulses that quaked through her body. She cried out as Keonne pushed his cock harder, deeper, hitting nerve endings Del never knew existed. She came with a violent shudder and would have collapsed on her stomach if Keonne hadn’t withdrawn his fingers, and using both hands, positioned her to keep thrusting. Del cried out again as Keonne came, his cum hot and soothing to her no longer virgin ass.

As he pulled out of her, Del’s muscles collapsed and she fell onto the bed, totally spent.

Keonne shoved himself off the bed and disappeared into the bathroom. Del heard the shower turn on and couldn't believe he was just going to clean up, like it was just another roll in the sheets to him.

A movement at the bathroom door caught her languid gaze. "Come on, lazy bones. I'll wash your back and you can wash mine."

Del couldn't move. Her muscles were liquid putty. Her eyes closed briefly, and the next moment, she was lifted and carried into the bathroom. There the tender mercies stopped as she was thrust under the shower spigot.

"You bastard!" Her euphoria was gone. "Give a girl a moment to recuperate, you savage."

Keonne laughed, pressing wet lips to hers and silencing her protests. His hands, on either side of her on the shower wall, effectively imprisoned her. But Del was no one's victim. She clung to Keonne and raised her leg to hook it over his ass. Keonne was forced to hike her up allowing her to wrap both legs around him.

His wet body made a tricky target, but Keonne was all for her sliding onto his cock, working it sensuously inside her.

He groaned as Del felt his balls draw tight and a torrent of jism shot deep inside her. Del knew her man's reactions already and kept pumping until Keonne slackened inside her. "Say mercy," she breathed against his lips.

"Mercy, mercy me," he whispered as she contracted against him again. His lips swooped down on hers, kissing her lightly. Del savored the moment, knowing beneath that display of tenderness lurked a raw passion that could drive the breath from her body and leave her clinging for more. She returned his kiss, running her tongue over his lips. She felt him smile beneath her mouth.

"You are magnificent, Detective Delia Barnes."

His breath became hers as she answered, "You ain't seen nothing yet."

\* \* \*

Later they lay in bed, half-lucid, half asleep. Del ran her fingers through Keonne's rumpled hair, not quite dry from the shower. They'd lathered up and made a

game of washing each other until Keonne slid his finger inside Del and found her clit, stroking her into another frenzy. Now neither could contemplate the future. Only the present was important.

Del tried to bring them back down to earth. "I did some investigating on the south shore."

Keonne groaned. "Business already? Well, I did some investigating here in town as well. It seems most of these folks do believe something is in the lake."

Del tried to be patient. "Sure the local folks will say that. Do you know what a legend means in the way of tourism to a town like Elsmere? Think Nessie and Loch Ness."

"I know what I experienced, Del."

"Okay, Keonne. Here are the facts. I can get these on paper and they are irrefutable. The north shore has a history of warm water currents. There are places in the crater where warm springs bubble up. Likewise, geologists surveying for the developers on the north shore found that the lake bed contained eddies that cause a steep current and undertow. I think we can guess why the developers didn't make the report well known. The land prices on the north shore would plummet."

Keonne did not look impressed. "That doesn't explain the half of it."

"I'm just getting started. The lab analysis of the lake water shows nitrates in the water. The amount is negligible, but because of the warm current the victims absorbed these nitrates in amounts large enough to cause both respiratory problems and arousal."

"No way."

"Nitrates have been used for treating male impotence but their side effects affect the heart. It's a recipe for disaster when mixed with alcohol and exertion like water sports and swimming."

"But Scranton wasn't in the lake and Brenda Yates saw..."

"Brenda was scared. Her boyfriend had almost raped her. You saw her denial of what was obvious. Dexter fell in the water and Brenda's mind went into shock. What

she thought she saw and what happened are forever tainted in her imagination. As for Scranton, he was in an enclosed boathouse. The warm water and nitrates in an enclosed environment can cause dizziness. Scranton passed out. Nitrates used to be used to treat asthma. But too much and... you get the picture. More irrefutable evidence."

"But his body, all the bodies were depleted of seminal fluid."

"Ah, that's the part Mother Nature had no part in but mankind did. The lake has alum powder dumped in it to control the manganese and make the water drinkable. That needs work, given the taste of the lake water being filtered in the tap. The point is, alum is a drying agent. They used to use it for pickling and drying fruit. If swallowed it would cause dehydration, and the victims swallowed enough to drown. In Scranton's case, the humid boathouse was a magnificent dehydrator. You see the picture? The combination of these chemicals is a recipe for disaster. But that's for the lawyers to fight out with the developers and who's to blame for what."

Keonne rolled over and faced her. "You're forgetting about my proof, the white piece of the 'Water Witch's' shroud and the stuff wrapped around Scranton's boat propeller."

"Now that's your imagination." Del tried not to look too smug. "There's a manufacturer on the south shore who has the neatest new material to block the sun's UV rays but still allow tanning. It's called SunMesh and it bears a striking resemblance to the material you found. A while back someone broke in and stole a bolt of the stuff. It's one of a kind and totally patented. My guess is the thief got spooked and dumped the bolt into the lake. I'll bet it turns up in bits and scraps for many years."

Keonne looked appreciative as he ran a finger down one of Del's breasts. "You have it all figured out, don't you?"

"I do. And it looks a hell of a lot better on a report than the legend of the 'Water Witch'."

Keonne flicked her nipple gently. "So you won't mind if I mosey on down to the lake this afternoon and take a leisurely swim off the north shore?"

Del groped behind her to the nightstand by the bed. Quick as a flash she rolled



on top of Keonne and brought his hand up above his head. She wasted no time in slipping a handcuff over his wrist and snapping it securely around the newel post of the bedstead.

"Not a chance in hell, mister. Now that I found you, I'm not taking any chances. Wasn't it you who said, 'If you love someone, the spark shouldn't go out'? Consider this your fire drill. You're mine and I have no intention of sharing you with some water bitch or any other thing in that lake."

"Yes, ma'am!" Keonne grinned. He looked serious for a moment. "I'm an 'all or nothing' kind of guy, Del. This thing between us is for real."

"It's for real," Del confirmed as she slid over Keonne's cock and teased it with her pubic hair into a stiff rod. "I say we file our report and leave it to the officials to sort out the legalities of the lake pollution. The north shore will be closed and all will be well. Now fuck me until either the bedstead breaks or I find the blasted key!"

Keonne chuckled then groaned as Del impaled herself on him and began undulating slowly, rocking back and forth. "Let's see a 'Water Witch' top this."

\* \* \*

The hue and cry over the lake was as expected. Arguments ensued over exactly what was causing the water chemicals to leach at such a high concentration. The developers took a stance it wasn't their fault and the city claimed their technique for water purification was the acceptable norm. Until the courts could decide who the responsible party was, Elsmere Lake would be considered taboo to tourists. But at least the city stopped adding the alum to the lake and it was no longer used as a source of potable water.

Del took comfort her report had brought things to a head and the rumors of the Water Witch were dispelled in a cut and dried document prepared by a bio-hazard company who confirmed Del's findings. Divers investigating the lake found nothing unusual and even Keonne had to be satisfied.

And life went on in Elsmere much as it had for the last hundred years... one day at a time.

To the casual eye the lake looked placid and serene. From somewhere in the reeds of the north shore a loon cried out in the dark, the mournful sound echoing over the lake.

The moonlight bathed the north shore in an eerie glow. Large signs warned against entering the polluted waters, and impromptu fencing sealed the edict. From far out the current changed. Something pale and white sinuously wound its way through the water, like a predator heading for a new territory.

The loon cried out again and something answered in a high-pitched cackle before disappearing under the lake depths. With the instincts born of old the white shape headed to a new hunting ground... the south shore.

**THE END**

## **Ciarra Sims**

Ciarra Sims is one of the quiet ones you have to watch out for. She lives a plain and simple life in Southern California with her pets, and tries to stay out of trouble. Her writing may be comedic or scary, depending on her mood... or it may sway toward a Regency or even a western... whatever tickles her fancy at the time. Ciarra's writing philosophy is: "Not to fall into a rut. Keep the reader and yourself wondering, 'What's next?' "