



Michele Bardsley

Chased by You

Changeling Press

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You can't escape bad memories, lonely nights, or the one who's hunting you...

On the advice of her old high school friend, FBI profiler and psychic Kate Simmons takes a sabbatical from her stressful job and rents a cabin at Miller's Lake. It's off season, so the resort town is mostly empty, with only a few retirees residing nearby. Her plan is to eat junk food, read romance novels, and enjoy the wintry beauty and quiet of the area. And if possible, to finally expunge the memories of the man who made her first submission to a Master beautiful as well as bittersweet.

Robert MacIntosh is a profiler of another kind -- a supernatural hunter who goes after killers that never make the FBI's Most Wanted. Six months ago, he seduced Kate for the wrong reasons. Her sweet submission has haunted his every waking thought - and so has the idea of sexually dominating her again... and again. Now, he has a second chance to show her that he's not such a bad guy. But first he has to protect her from the Wendigo, a relentless creature that craves human flesh.

Remember, campers: At Miller's Lake, nothing is what it seems...

Chapter 1

"Bigfoot sightings?" asked Kate Simmons with a laugh. "Oh, wow."

Twila Danport opened the door to the cozy cabin. "In winter, there's not much to do around here and the few full-time residents get bored. Your closest neighbors -- Hugh and Selma Henderson -- have been keeping my husband busy with their imaginative reports."

Twila's spouse was one of three full-time cops who policed Miller's Lake. Kate hadn't met Kyle yet, but Twila seemed genuinely happy with her marriage. Considering how down in the dumps Twila had been last summer after losing her job, her boyfriend, and her apartment, Kate was glad to see her high school chum had found joy.

"Where are these neighbors?" asked Kate.

Twila pointed off the small porch to the right. Through the tall pines and the descending darkness, Kate could just make the yellow glow of a porch light. She hoped the bored couple wouldn't traipse through the woods to visit. She didn't want to be rude, but the whole point of coming out to Miller's Lake was to avoid human beings. She didn't think she could work up enough politeness to carry on a conversation with well-meaning strangers.

"Don't worry," said Twila as she shoved open the door and gestured for Kate to cross the threshold. "Hugh and Selma are in their seventies. They're not going to risk breaking a hip to visit you."

Kate hurried out of the cold, dragging in her suitcase, purse, and laptop case. "I didn't realize I was being so obvious."

Twila laughed. "Don't worry about it. If the weatherman is right, the brewing storm will trap you here for a couple days. Does that cheer you up?"

"Immensely."

The cabin was basically one large room. The door opened into the living area, which consisted of an overstuffed brown couch and one end table. A single brass lamp with its tan shade looked ready for a garage sale. The couch faced a large, stone fireplace. A cheery fire already burned inside it.

"Kyle dropped by," said Twila. "He had to come up and take another report from the Henderson's. They wanted to show him footprints and broken tree limbs."

Kate put down her bags. "Anybody else see this Bigfoot?"

"Is that your investigator peeking out? You better tuck her back in. You're here to relax."

"Point taken. But it's not easy to turn it off."

As a profiler and a psychic, Kate had seen more than her share of human monsters. Hell, she'd been inside their heads, thinking their deranged thoughts. And the last one... he'd been the sickest bastard she'd ever tracked. Even after Billy Waters had been caught, she couldn't get his vileness out of her head or the stain of his evil off her soul. Twila was right -- she didn't need to worry about mythological creatures, too.

"Staying at Miller's Lake changed my life," said Twila, her gaze full of secrets. "Maybe you'll find what you're looking for here, too."

"I hope so." Kate walked past the couch into the kitchenette with its small stove, narrow refrigerator, and tiny metal sink. There was a little table and two chairs parked to the right.

"We stocked the fridge and you've got dry goods, too. There are dishes, glasses, silverware, and cookware. If you do get stuck here because of the storm, you'll have warmth and enough to eat to last a few days."

"Thanks, Twila. And thank your husband, too."

"I will." Twila walked toward the back of the cabin. "The bed is super comfortable. There are more blankets and pillows in the closet, and there's plenty of room to hang your clothes. Sorry about the lack of a dresser, but there are couple drawers in the nightstand."

Kate followed her friend to the four-poster bed, which was covered by a thick patchwork quilt. The four red pillows propped against the headboard were big and puffy. It looked like the perfect place to snuggle in with a cup of tea and the newest Nora Roberts novel.

"The bathroom's through there." Twila pointed to the door on the left. "You should have plenty of towels and it's stocked with the essentials -- toilet paper, shampoo, soap."

"It's marvelous. I really can't thank you and Kyle enough."

Twila hugged her. "If you need anything..."

"I'll call you. Promise."

After Twila left, Kate shed her coat and tossed it over the couch. Then she tugged off her hat and her gloves, placing them on the end table. She sat on the couch and stared at the fire.

As soon as Billy Waters was in custody, she'd put in for vacation. Simon -- boss, mentor, and former lover -- granted her two weeks without a single lecture or guilt trip. Maybe he'd glimpsed her bone-deep weariness or worse, he'd recognized that her mental walls were close to crumbling.

As a twenty-eight year old, Kate had accomplished a lot in her life.

She'd graduated college early through an accelerated learning program. At the FBI Academy, she did her seventeen weeks of New Agent Training then transferred to the Behavioral Science Unit. The head of the BSU program, Simon Conroy, had seen her as a talented investigator whom Lady Luck favored. Truthfully, her strong psychic abilities -- that no one knew about -- had given her the edge when it came to getting inside the heads of psychopaths and sociopaths. Simon had taken her to Las Vegas to solve the Stripper Strangler murders. She'd led him right to the killer's door.

And that was that.

She had spent the last four years tracking the worst of the worst criminals. It didn't take a psychologist to tell her that she was close to burn-out. Being inside the

mind of a serial killer was like bathing in blood. The stench of it filled your nostrils, the feel of it soaked your skin, and the taste of it made you nauseas.

Enough! Kate stood up and rubbed her arms, feeling chilled despite the heat emanating from the crackling fire. She'd take a shower, brew some tea, and tuck inside that lovely bed with a book and a cup of Earl Grey.

* * *

After her shower, Kate stood in the kitchenette filling the tea kettle. The only thing that haunted her more than her last case was the night she'd spent with Robert MacIntosh.

Had it really been six months since she'd seen him?

Before the Billy Waters case, she'd been assigned to investigate an unusual series of murders in a small Californian town. All the victims had been drained of their blood. There was no forensic evidence, no witnesses, and no explanation for how the bodies were emptied of their fluids.

After another night of using her FBI training and her psychic skills with no results, she'd gone to the hotel bar to mope. Robert had flirted with her outrageously while he refilled her wine glass one too many times.

Then he'd escorted her to her hotel room and seduced her.

Hmm. He hadn't so much seduced as he had conquered her.

When he demanded that she kneel at his feet, she'd done it. He had sensed her need to submit, even though she had never done so before. Granted, her love life was as dry as the Sahara and what little sex she'd gotten had been mediocre at best. Not even Simon, a man she respected both professionally and personally, had been able to rev her engines. Their affair had been short-lived.

She hadn't had the time or energy to pursue the sexual lifestyle she craved. What Robert had shown her had stayed with her since that night. She fantasized about what he'd done to her; she fantasized about him.

As always, the moment she remembered his command to kneel at his feet, her pussy got wet. Gak! Kate put the kettle onto the burner, and opened the cabinet looking for a suitable snack. But such mundane tasks couldn't take her mind off Robert.

That night in the hotel room, she was still fully clothed when she sank to her knees. He warned her to not make eye contact, unless he gave her permission. He removed a pillowcase and rolled it lengthwise, then he used it to bind her hands behind her back.

Robert undressed. He removed each piece of clothing casually, as if he had all the time in the world. He ignored her; neither looking at her nor coming near her. His blatant dismissal had been designed to thin her patience while it increased the hot need pulsing through her.

By the time he stood before her, she hungered for the slightest look of approval or a mere word of recognition. He stepped so close, his toes brushed the tips of her knees. Then he demanded, "Suck my cock."

Giving a blow job on her knees without the help of her hands had been an interesting feat. But she had gotten him hard, had made his thick shaft tremble under the onslaught of her mouth.

She had made him want her.

And she'd been rewarded for her efforts.

He led her to the dresser and untied her hands. "Bend over and put your palms flat against the top."

Her hands pressed into the cheap wood. He pulled down her jeans and her cotton panties. She felt his condom-sheathed cock slide into her slick pussy and she nearly died from the sensations.

He fucked her, telling her unequivocally that she was not allowed to come. Being told not to find pleasure had the opposite effect. Bliss coiled tight and hard, threatening to send her over the edge with every rough stroke of his cock.

But she held on.

He came, his fingers biting into her hips and his cries of completion filling her ears. For a long moment, there was nothing but the harsh sounds of his panting and the low, needy whimpers she couldn't silence.

"Stand up."

She did as he asked. Her body was slick with sweat and quaking with need. His callused hands coasted over her belly, down her thighs, and around her ass.

Her weeping pussy was denied his touch.

"You are so beautiful, so responsive," he whispered. "So goddamned luscious."

His thumb brushed her clit and pleasure jack-knifed. Two fingers danced along her labia then dipped inside her cunt. She felt the erotic press of those digits on her g-spot.

Oh, God. He pushed her to the brink without giving his permission to go over. The thumb stroked her tortured clit and those two fingers worked her pussy mercilessly. She bit her lower lip, begging her own body not to give in.

"Come for me, Kate."

The orgasm was instantaneous. The pleasure was so intense that she lost her ability to breathe, to think. Her legs collapsed. Only he kept her upright as her body convulsed. His lips pressed against her neck and his hard body cradled hers as she rode the wave to fulfillment.

The whistle of the teakettle startled Kate out of the memory. She stood in the middle of the kitchen with a box of crackers in her hand. Goddamn it. How long would it be before she could forget Robert MacIntosh, the lying bastard?

Admittedly, he'd rocked her world. But all he'd really wanted was information about the murders. She'd found out later that he was a freelancer and not well-liked by any government or state agency. He was allowed to operate without interference because, as Simon had told her, "He's effective."

At what, she still didn't know.

Chapter 2

The loud roar jolted Kate from sleep. As she sat up, *Morrigan's Cross* rolled off her stomach and slid off the bed. The slap of the book against the hardwood floor startled her. She blinked sleepily and tried to orient herself.

What the hell had made that awful noise?

The lamp on the nightstand glowed brightly, but the fire had gone out. Reluctantly slipping out from the warm covers, she padded to the picture window next to the front door, which was the only window in the whole cabin. She flipped on the porch light then stared out in the darkness.

The promised blizzard had arrived.

All she could make out from the gray mass of swirling ice and snow was the spindly shapes of trees. Everything else, including the lake, was lost in the dark and in the storm.

Be careful what you wish for. Kate had wanted to be alone -- and it looked like Mother Nature was granting that wish in a big way. She'd only unpacked her pajamas and a terry cloth robe, which she'd draped on the bed. Shivering, she retrieved the robe and wrapped up in it.

Cords of wood were stacked next to the fireplace and there was also a pile of newspapers. A box of extra-long matches rested on the mantle. With all the tools at her disposal, Kate had a new fire going in no time.

She wished the window had curtains or blinds. Most people probably liked the view -- at least the one offered in the summer. Watching the blizzard encapsulate the cabin was like watching gravediggers bury her coffin.

Dismissing her morbid thoughts, Kate stretched out on the couch, feeling too lazy to rescue her book or even to make a new pot of tea. Instead, she stared at the fire and dozed.

Within minutes she fell into the sweet embrace of Morpheus.

As her body slept, Kate's spirit floated upward until her ethereal form melted through the ceiling. Hovering above the roof, she looked around. She couldn't feel the slap of ice and snow. She was warm, dry and safe. She drifted through the woods, content to roam in the darkness without concern or destination.

Sometimes, she went on these little spirit trips. It was never something she could do consciously. Her soul went off when it felt the need, leaving her body and mind to rest deeply.

The Hendersons' cabin came into view. She was tempted to dip inside and see what ol' Hugh and Selma were doing. Nah. Even in spirit form, she didn't want to intrude on their privacy.

Then she heard the loud, fearsome roar.

Her soul quivered.

Sensations were for the body. The spirit didn't feel cold or hunger. It didn't need eyesight or hearing. It viewed the larger picture more easily than when confined to a body with its prejudices and fears. The soul tuned in to the vibrations of life and nature. And it knew the dull throb of death.

A ball of light rose from the cabin. Kate stared at it. The light saw her and rolled forward. *Please! Have you seen my husband?*

The spirit hadn't shaken off the vestiges of fright or the stench of violence. Selma Henderson was confused and terrified. And like most life forces wrenched from their bodies unexpectedly, she didn't seem to know what to do or where to go.

I'll go find him, sent Kate. *You must stay here.*

Kate fought dread as she descended into the cabin. Had she the sense of smell, the rusty scent of blood and the sickening stench of death would've overwhelmed her.

Despite her experience with crime scenes, she had yet to harden her heart or to deaden her senses. Viewing the murdered remains of human beings still made her weep.

The elderly couple had been viciously attacked -- ripped apart by the tall, gaunt creature that knelt in the middle of the carnage and feasted. Its gray skin hung in tatters off blackened bones. Its eyes were desiccated and its mouth deformed. Blood dripped from every wall, coated the floor, and bathed the awful beast. She was glad to be spared the ugly sounds of his sharp teeth digging into the flesh of its victims.

Hugh's soul clung to the upper half of its body. He was dead, but he couldn't accept it.

Let go, she sent. Follow me.

I won't leave Selma.

She's waiting for you.

Hugh's soul released the mortal flesh and followed Kate through the ceiling. The Light waited for them. Its golden glow offered peace and comfort. She watched the two souls twine together as they ascended.

* * *

When Kate awoke, she couldn't catch her breath.

Shit, shit, shit!

She rolled off the couch and hurried to her suitcases. Throwing on underclothes, jeans, sweater, thick socks, and boots, she prayed that she'd only had a premonition. Even though the heavy thud in her belly told her it was too late, she wouldn't give up hope. She shoved on her coat and pulled up its hood. She pushed her shaking hands into fitted gloves then, last minute, decided to take her Glock. She loaded it, double-checked the safety, and then stuck it in her coat pocket.

Pulling her cell phone off the charger, she speed-dialed Twila's home number. The call didn't go through; the tiny screen informed her there was no signal.

Shitpissfuck!

Tossing the useless phone onto the couch, she flung open the door. The biting wind and freezing snow battered her. She shut the door and hurried off the porch. She sank to her knees. Damn. The snow was already a foot deep.

As she slogged her way toward the Hendersons' cabin, she was relieved to see the glow of their porch light. She entered the thickest part of the forest that stood between her cabin and the Hendersons' and trudged onward, her gaze never leaving that tiny yellow light.

Her jeans got soaked and snow wiggled into her boots and made her socks squishy. She was panting heavily, her heart racing as sweat dotted her brow. Vaguely she recalled that sweating in freezing weather was a bad sign. She was overexerting herself and she could get hypothermia if she didn't get into a warm environment and out of her wet things.

She reached the top of the slope and looked down at the cabin. She leaned against the nearest tree and tried to even out her breathing. Other than the porch light, the cabin was dark. If the Hendersons were still alive, they were asleep.

Nothing looked disturbed in the front of the cabin. All the same, Kate was reluctant to approach it. Her heart pounded for an entirely different reason as she struggled down the snow-filled bank. Exertion had given way to fear.

The foreboding worsened as she stepped onto the porch. She pounded on the door with her gloved hand. "Hello? Mr. and Mrs. Henderson? It's Kate -- your neighbor up the hill."

No one answered. All she heard was the whistling wind and the slash of ice. She took off her glove and knocked, scraping her knuckles on the frozen, rough wood. "Hello? Are you okay? Hugh? Selma!"

She tucked her freezing fingers back into the warm glove and tried the knob.

The door opened. Even before she stepped over the threshold, the stench of death wafted out to greet her. Her gorge rose, but she pushed away the nausea.

The lights were out, but she didn't need to see the scene to know what had happened. Whatever that awful thing was, it had killed the elderly couple. Her spirit journey hadn't been premonition. She had been called to help them find the Light.

She backed out and pulled the door shut.

She'd been a damned fool to venture out into the storm. She had no phone or radio. Hell, she didn't even have a flashlight. *Stupid, Kate. You've been trained better than this!*

As soon as she traversed the slight ridge, she took out her Glock. She couldn't see shit in the cursed snow and it seemed her coat was snagged on every tree or bush she passed. If anything other than a goddamned snowflake moved within her range of sight, she was fucking shooting it. She gripped the Glock, pointing it toward the ground as she hurried toward her cabin.

The wind howled so fiercely, she felt chilled to her bones.

As she stumbled out of the tree line, she realized the wind hadn't made the terrifying noise. She whirled around, backing toward the cabin as she aimed at the gaunt gray figure stalking her.

"Stop!" she screamed. The storm carried her voice away, but it didn't matter. The creature wasn't interested in obeying the quivering commands of FBI agents.

It leapt at her and she fired the gun. She was a good shot and the first three bullets plowed straight into its flaking, gray chest.

The damned thing reared back, screeching, but the bullets barely slowed its forward movement. Her Glock had fifteen bullets. She expended six more, this time aiming for its head.

It reared back, falling to its knees and scrabbling at its skull.

Sweat dripped into her eyes. She pulled the trigger again and again and again. It screamed, more pissed off than hurt. *This thing isn't going to die.* Whatever the hell it was, it was supernatural. And evil -- more evil than any human she'd ever locked up.

Kate emptied the rest of the clip into it. She didn't wait to see if it would get back up.

The cabin was her safest location, though the creature could gain entrance easily enough. She'd brought enough bullets to shoot a dozen Bigfoots and she'd empty every one of them into the creature if necessary. She whirled around, intending to run as fast as her tired legs would allow --

-- and slammed into the solid chest of a man wrapped in winter camouflage gear.

"Run!" he shouted.

Kate hauled ass into her cabin. He followed her, slamming the door and locking it.

"That's not going to do much good," she said, going to the end of the couch and pushing on it.

"It's all we got, sweetheart." His face was muffled by the white ski mask that covered his face. His eyes were hidden behind goggles. He grabbed the other end of the sofa and they aligned it against the door. "That window's a big problem."

"I don't have anything to cover it. Maybe we could rip off the closet and bathroom doors and nailed them across."

"Glass and wood won't stop him." He looked out the window. "He's gone, but we won't be safe until morning, which is still four hours away. Sheesh, sweetheart. You really pissed him off. How many rounds did you shoot?"

"Fifteen." She took off gloves and rubbed her chilled hands together. God, she was cold. Her whole body shivered and her teeth chattered. As she shucked off her coat and boots, she studied him. His entire body was encased in white and gray camouflage -- even his snowboots were white. She noticed the duffel bag slung over his shoulder.

"You were hunting that thing?"

"Wendigo." He pushed back the hood and removed the goggles. The white ski mask came off, revealing the short black hair, chiseled good looks, and twinkling green eyes of Robert MacIntosh.

"Son-of-a-bitch."

"Now, my darlin' Kate, don't get your panties in a twist."

"You've lost both the privilege and the ability to twist my panties."

"Ach. What a liar you are."

Kate wanted to punch his smug expression. "I see you still think that fake Scottish accent is charming."

"You found it so once, lass. And it isn't fake, just a wee bit exaggerated." He grinned impishly and she tried to pretend she wasn't enamored by his dimples.

She sat on the couch and tugged off her socks. She couldn't stop trembling and it seemed the fire in the hearth had lost all its heat.

"That murder case in Grass Valley still open?" he asked.

"Yeah, but the murders stopped. So far, the killer hasn't popped up anywhere else."

"He won't. I staked the bastard."

Kate stared at him. "You what?"

"He was a vampire. Stake through the heart does the trick every time." He took off his coat and studied her. "You're shaking so hard, I can hear your teeth rattle. C'mon, get outta those clothes."

"Yeah, I've heard that one before."

He laughed. "Every time I get near you, I want to take your clothes off. C'mon, darlin', get naked. I'll run you a warm bath."

* * *

After ten minutes of soaking in the tepid water, Kate felt better. She wasn't completely relaxed because Robert, the man who'd betrayed her, prowled the cabin, and the Wendigo, a creature that shouldn't freaking exist, roamed the woods. It could attack before dawn and she knew that only Robert's knowledge and skills stood between her and that horrifying thing.

The bathroom door swung open and Robert swaggered inside. He tugged a towel from the shelf and unfolded it. "Soup's on, darlin'."

"Are you the soup?"

His lips hitched into a naughty smile. "I recall a night when you enjoyed slurping on me."

"Why you lying, thieving rat bast --"

"Aw, you've hurt my feelings." He shook the towel in invitation, but she stayed in the tub and glared at him. He chuckled. "I have plans for you, Kate."

"Oh, really?" The words were issued between clenched teeth.

"Yes. I will feed you, put you into comfy jammies, and tuck you into bed."

Disappointment tempered her suspicion. Deep down, past the hurt incurred by his previous actions, she felt the dark stir of passion. "That's all?"

"Did you have something you wanted to add to my itinerary?" The amusement faded from his eyes, replaced with the glowing embers of lust.

Her nipples hardened as desire bloomed fully within her. He was asking her to tell him what she wanted. She realized he would go the whole evening without touching her, without invoking the memories of their night together. Or, she could allow him into her bed. She could submit to him.

Kate realized that being with Robert had affected her more deeply than she wanted to admit. He had awakened her sexuality, but he had also wormed his way into her heart. She cared about him.

God! How was it possible to care about a man who had fucked her only to gain access to her hotel room? After she'd fallen asleep, he hacked her laptop and had stolen her hard-copy files. Then he had disappeared and never tried to contact her.

"I'm just a piece of ass to you," she said, her voice weighted with sorrow. "You don't give a flying fuck about me."

His expression went blank.

She stood up and yanked the towel out of his hands. "Please excuse me, Robert. I need to get dressed."

Chapter 3

I'm an asshole. Robert stood watch at the window, holding the AK-47. The winter storm had fizzled, though lazy snowflakes still drifted from the black sky. He'd turned off the porch light. Wendigos had terrible eyesight, but their other senses were well-honed. The creature would return -- the only question was when.

Wendigos were cursed souls, greedy men who had feasted, if not literally then figuratively, on other men. They craved human flesh and they always felt gnawing hunger no matter how much they fed.

He almost wished the ugly bastard would appear so that he'd have something to do other than think about his moronic behavior.

In the kitchenette, Kate washed their dishes.

Earlier, he'd sat at the tiny table to dine on his soup and grilled cheese. She claimed the couch, reading a book while eating the simple meal. She looked so cute in her pink pajamas. Underneath the oversized top, he'd watched the seductive sway of her breasts. The turgid points of her nipples revealed that she was either cold or she was thinking about him. Maybe she was just thinking about what he was capable of doing to her. She was polite when spoken to, but didn't try to fill up the silence. She didn't try to make him feel better, either.

He deserved her rancor.

She was right. That night, the one he regretted more than any other, he'd used his charm to get into her pants and, more to the point, to get into her room. After she'd fallen asleep, he'd ravaged her files as thoroughly as he'd ravaged her.

There hadn't been a day that had gone by that he hadn't thought about the delectable Kate Simmons. She'd left an imprint -- the kind of stain that didn't wash away, the kind of memory that refused to be banished.

He wanted her. Even now, as he looked out into the snow-filled darkness and tried to keep his mind on business, his ears were tuned to her movements. He heard the patter of her socked feet on the hardwood floor. She stopped just behind him.

"Do you want to take shifts?" she asked softly.

He turned to face her and nearly lost his ability to breathe. She looked so small and vulnerable. He knew from her FBI record that she was five feet, six inches tall, one-hundred and eighteen pounds, and noted as having brown hair and brown eyes. But he knew that her hair wasn't a single color. Interspersed in the cocoa strands were glints of auburn and gold. Her eyes were flecked with green. They were too dark to be called hazel, but all the same her eye color was more complex than *brown*.

Plain adjectives didn't do her justice.

"Robert?"

"I'm sorry I left you in that hotel room. I wanted more than anything to wake up next to you. But I had a job to do and before you, that's all I had. The job."

Her eyes went wide at his confession. *You're an idiot, Robert*. Why hadn't he realized before now that she needed his apology, his penance? He owed her all those things and more.

"I couldn't stop thinking about you. There's been no other woman since you Kate. No one could compare. I've hunted some really evil beings -- demons, zombies, vengeful spirits. I don't fear those things. But I was scared to death of how you made me feel. I wanted to call you a million times, but I didn't want to hear you tell me to jump off the nearest bridge."

He could practically see her putting together all the pieces. He knew the moment she realized he hadn't tracked the Wendigo to this location -- he'd tracked *her*.

"You came here for me." Her eyes were wide and her expression one of amazement.

"Yeah. I finally work up the nerve to contact you and I find out you're on vacation." He patted the AK-47. "It's just my luck that a Wendigo found you first."

She shook her head. "You were dressed for hunting. And that satchel with all your weapons..."

"The satchel doesn't have weapons in it." He leaned the assault rifle next to the door. "I always carry my favorite guns and a few knives. My wardrobe isn't extensive, either, mostly what I need to track monsters."

"You really came for me?"

He saw how badly she wanted to believe it. Maybe she had feelings for him, too. *Please, God, don't let me screw this up.*

"I swear, Kate. I planned to come to beg your forgiveness. I want another chance. I want... you."

She searched his gaze, no doubt looking for duplicity. He was an excellent liar, but for once, he was telling the truth. He let his emotions show so that she would understand he meant every word.

"Will the Wendigo come back tonight?"

"I don't know," he said. "It can only go out at night, so we won't be safe until dawn."

"How do you kill it?"

"Sever its head. You have to burn the body and scatter the ashes on sacred ground -- usually a cemetery."

"You have an interesting job."

"So do you. You track human monsters."

"Yeah, but I don't get to mete out justice. Due process and all that shit." Her gaze strayed to the window. "It's out there, waiting."

"And we're in here, waiting."

"We have better ways to spend the time." Desire heated her gaze. "What's in the satchel?"

"Would you like me to show you?"

Her answer was swift: she dropped to her knees, her gaze on the floor.

His heart turned over in his chest. Jesus H. Christ. He stared at the crown of her head and tried to restart his lungs. He needed to get it together, but the knot in his throat stalled his ability to speak.

Her submission would be so sweet.

"You are beautiful," he said. "I want to worship you."

Her shoulders quivered under the onslaught of his words. His cock was already hard, protesting its confinement in his camouflage pants. He rubbed the ridge of his shaft, thinking of all the ways he wanted to use it on her.

"Stand up. Take off your clothes. Then go to the bed and lay on your stomach." As she rose to her feet, he took her chin into his hand. "Look at me, Kate."

Her eyes were already glazed with desire. His balls tightened. God, she was so incredibly responsive. His raging lust for her was going to kill him.

"What I do, I do for our pleasure, but if you get scared, say 'snow,' and I'll stop. Do you understand?"

She nodded. Her tongue wetted her lower lip. He leaned down and swiped his own tongue across her mouth. He tasted the mint of her toothpaste. "Go."

Naked, Kate lay against the quilt and awaited Robert. Her hard nipples poked into the soft material. Her skin prickled in the cold air. But she would be warm soon enough.

She heard him approach the bed and then she heard the *thunk* of the mysterious satchel as it was dropped on the floor.

"Show me your ass."

She got on her knees and poked her rear into the air. She almost launched off the bed when she felt his finger probe her anus.

"Relax," he murmured. She made a conscious effort to do as he asked. He patted one buttock. "Very good."

A few seconds later, she felt something else invade her bottom. The cold squirt of lubricant filled her ass.

Her heart raced. She'd never had anal sex. As much as she wanted Robert and his domination, she wasn't sure she was ready for what he wanted to do to her. He inserted his finger again and stretched her opening. It wasn't exactly painful, it just felt odd.

Then he put in another finger.

She sucked in a startled breath. Now, *that* was discomfiting. The lubricant made the pressure tolerable, but she was worried. If two fingers made her flinch, what would a cock feel like?

"You're doing great, darlin'. Your ass is so beautiful. I've been dreaming about playing with you like this." He continued to stretch her until she could comfortably take both fingers. "Perfect. I'm going to insert a butt plug. It's for beginning anal play. You can take it all for me, can't you?"

"Y-yes."

He removed his fingers. She heard the squirt of the lubricant again and realized he must be rubbing the gel onto the plug. Her stomach squeezed in anticipation edged with dread. All she had to do was say "snow" and it would end.

You can take it all for me, can't you?

She wanted to do it, for him and for herself. She wanted Robert and what he could give her. New experiences were sometimes scary, but she knew he would make it all about her pleasure.

He parted her buttocks and fitted the head of the plug into her anus. The covers fisted in her nervous hands.

"Push back as I push in."

She did as he commanded. The first part of the plug slid in without too much trouble, but the flared base caused her to whimper. "It kinda burns."

"It's all the way in now. How are you?"

"Weirded out."

He laughed. "I'm proud of you, Kate. You've pleased me."

Joy pulsed through her, joining the heat swirling in her core. Her body already felt sensitized, but she knew Robert was only getting started.

She heard the water running in the bathroom and realized he was washing his hands. Moments later, he returned. His chilly hands rubbed her ass. Her canal had adjusted to the fullness of the butt plug. She wondered what it would feel like to have Robert's cock penetrate her pussy while her ass was stuffed with the plug.

Oh, God.

"I want you to stretch your arms above your head."

She complied instantly. Robert rounded the bed and squatted down. "Look at me, Kate. See these? They're leather cuffs. Fleece lines the insides, so they won't irritate your lovely skin."

He put one on each wrist, tightening the leather wraps. He picked up the short chain that connected them. "The middle link will break if you yank your wrists apart with enough force. It's a safety feature. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"And finally..." He showed her the black leather mask designed to cover only her eyes. "It's furry on the inside and, like the cuffs, designed for comfort. I'm going to put it on now."

He tucked the strap over her head. She closed her eyes as the mask was fitted against her face. The fur was soft, but having her vision taken away made her feel wary. She was completely vulnerable to Robert and his every sexual whim. That both titillated and terrified her.

"You can trust me," he said. "But if you don't think you can, then let's end the game now."

"No, Master. I can handle it."

"Good."

Tiny "fingers" tickled her buttocks. She swallowed her giggle as they stroked her flesh. Her ass was ridiculously sensitive.

"I'm using a deer flogger." Robert dragged the falls along her buttocks. Up and down. Up and down. Up and down. "It's for low sensation play. Ever felt one before?"

"No, Master."

The straps disappeared.

Wham! The tails smacked her flesh. All the air left her lungs and her heart started to pound.

As he expertly snapped the flogger on each buttock, pleasure-pain built in her pussy. She pressed her aching mound against the quilt. Her clit throbbed deliciously.

The leather falls drizzled down her thighs. Her heart tripled its beat. The flogger kissed her back, trailing up her spine to feather over her shoulders. The tails swept down her skin again.

Then they were gone.

Kate's whole body hummed with need. Seconds ticked by. Muscle by muscle, she relaxed.

Wham! Wham! Wham!

Robert flogged her faster and harder until she lost her breath and her body quaked at the rapturous assault.

She moaned.

He alternated between flogging her ass and her thighs. Each thud brought her indescribable sensations. Pleasure. Pain. Desire. Fear.

She felt apart from herself. The sensation reminded her of how she felt when her spirit went on its journeys. She wasn't sure when she realized that Robert had stopped flogging her. One moment, she was floating and the next she was very much aware of how marvelously sore her flesh felt.

Her body cried out for completion.

"I want you to stand," he demanded gruffly.

Doing so was no easy task, especially when she couldn't see, her wrists were bound, and her ass was stuffed. Even so, she managed to scoot off the bed and plant her

feet on the hardwood floor. Robert wrapped an arm around her waist and helped her to stand fully.

Her whole body quaked. She had never felt this way before -- never wanted something, no, someone so badly. God in heaven. She craved him. His touch. His words. His approval.

“Turn around and spread your legs.”

She did exactly as she was told.

His hands snaked around her thighs. Then his mouth pressed against her vulva. Oh, God.

Then his wicked tongue tortured her. Sucked away the evidence of her desire. Teased her clit.

His wicked tongue darted in and out of her, the strokes rough and fast.

Bliss coiled tight and hot. Just as an orgasm threatened to overwhelm her, Robert pulled away.

She bit her lip to keep from crying out.

Robert inserted two fingers into her pussy then started licking her clit again. The thrust of his fingers matched the thrusts of his tongue.

Just as she would've tipped over the edge again, Robert withdrew his fingers and stopped the lovely tongue lashing. Sweat dripped between her breasts and her whole body felt on fire. She wanted relief, but at the same time, the denial of her pleasure only stoked her higher.

Robert kissed each of her hips and licked her belly. His tongue dipped into her navel and sucked out the moisture pearled in the tiny concave.

Without sight, every touch was exponentially increased. He was so good at torturing her.

She loved it.

“I’m going to fuck you,” he said in a low voice. His breath rolled over her left hip as he scraped his teeth across her flesh.

Her heart stuttered as he stood up. He left for a brief moment. When he returned, he wasted no time fitting his cock against her slick cunt. He'd already sheathed himself with a condom.

He grabbed her waist and lifted her. Damn, he was strong -- and so confident. She'd bet money he was genuinely courageous, that unlike her, he didn't quake and want to cry when faced with monsters.

As he slid his cock inside her, she wrapped her legs around his waist and placed her shackled wrists over his head. Her arms clenched his shoulders. Then she felt his hand coast over her ass and touch the anal plug.

It started to vibrate.

Oh, God. She sucked in a steady breath. She bit her lower lip, trying to keep her silence. She wanted to be obedient. She wanted the pleasure he promised.

"Ride my cock," he demanded as he rammed into her.

She tightened her grip around his waist and neck and used what leverage she had to meet his thrusts.

Her tender breasts rubbed against his lightly furred chest, her distended nipples getting electric thrills with every raw movement.

Robert worked his cock in and out of her pussy. The friction on her clit and the vibrating plug in her ass brought her too close to orgasm.

"Master..." The word was a plea.

"You've been such a good girl," he said. "I want you to come, darlin'. Come on my cock."

Her bliss erupted instantly.

His groan intertwined with her low cries, and then he pressed deeply inside her, his hands digging into her as he came. Unbelievably, she went over the edge again, her whole body aflame as she rode a second wave into bliss.

Chapter 4

Kate awoke in absolute darkness. For a panicked moment, she thought she was blind, but then realized the fire in the cabin had gone out.

It's always darkest before the dawn.

So, it was close to sunrise. The silence was eerie and creeped her out. She couldn't help but think of the Wendigo. Was it outside? Or had they wounded it enough that it had gone to its shelter to heal its wounds?

She sensed Robert next to her in the bed. The man didn't snore. Was he close to perfect or what?

Her arms were stretched above her head, but not uncomfortably. Robert had removed all the toys from her -- all but the wrist cuffs. He'd screwed a hook into the wall and added a chain that fastened onto the cuffs.

A warm male hand slid over her breast. Kate smiled as Robert rolled on top of her and lavished attention on her breasts.

He sucked her nipple into the warm cave of his mouth, flicking the aching tip with his tongue. She wrapped her legs around his and pushed her slickening cunt against his hard length. He tormented her other breast as one of his hands drifted down her side.

His movements were lazy, each touch and kiss designed to stoke the fires slowly. She writhed under him, pressed his body where she could since she was denied touching him with her hands.

It scared Kate to think that she could live like this forever. That she could be Robert's lover and his partner and never, ever tire of it.

But she couldn't begin to hope that he would want permanency. That he would want *her* forever.

She pushed away the thoughts and enjoyed Robert's gentle conquering of her body. By the time his cock slid inside her, she was more than ready for his final subjugation.

He slid his arms under her shoulders and increased his rhythm. She wrapped her legs around his waist and met every thrust.

Robert adjusted his angle and pounded into her harder and faster. She felt electrified. The sweet tendrils of orgasm coiled tightly.

"Kate," he whispered hotly in her ear. "My sweet, darlin' Kate."

Hearing her name on his lips sent over the sparkling edge. She arched against him, crying out, as she spun higher into the glossy bliss.

Moments later, he joined her.

Even as she reveled in the aftermath of their lovemaking, Kate sensed something was wrong. The darkness was not so much outside, but all around them. She suddenly felt as though she couldn't breathe.

"Robert!"

To give him credit, he understood what she couldn't voice. He rolled off her and onto the floor. She couldn't see, it was so black in the cabin.

Kate coughed, trying to draw air into her lungs. God, it was horrible. Hate and hunger and vengeance. She felt every emotion, every movement of the --

The Wendigo crashed through the picture window.

Terror seized her. She finally managed a deep breath, which she used to scream. She heard the Wendigo screech. Its bony feet scrabbled on the floor as it ran toward the bed.

Where the hell was Robert?

Panic had her twisting on the bed. She yanked and yanked on the wrist cuffs, but they didn't give away. So much for the fucking safety feature!

She saw the tiny flare of light before her ears registered the pistol's report. In that brief flash, she saw the tattered face of the Wendigo. He was nearly to the bed. Robert, naked and magnificent, fired directly into the creature's face until his gun was emptied.

The Wendigo screeched and moaned, scratching at its face. Kate heard the metallic ring of bullets falling off of its skull onto the floor.

"Robert!"

"Get off the bed, Kate. Run!"

"I can't," she cried. "The cuffs won't break."

Kate felt the Wendigo's anger. It rolled over her in waves. It wanted nothing more than to rend off her flesh and feast on her innards.

She heard the sickening crunch of fists meeting flesh, snapping bone. Robert was probably trying to get out another gun. Her own gun was in the nightstand with two boxes of ammo. But she had to get free of the chains before she could help her lover.

Robert's thick cry of pain jolted her. Goddamn it! She jerked viciously on the cuffs and the chain between the cuffs snapped. She rolled off the bed and onto the floor. Where was Robert's AK-47? Why the hell wasn't he using it?

As the sounds of fighting continued, Kate considered her options.

If she turned on a light, the Wendigo would find her for sure. She needed the darkness as cover. And she needed to keep quiet, too. She reached into the nightstand drawer and drew out her gun. She wouldn't be able to sight the creature if she couldn't see it. She didn't want to risk hitting Robert.

"Kate?" he yelled. "Are you free?"

"Yes."

"Then run, damn it. Get out of here."

She heard the vicious connection of fist against flesh. She flinched. Who'd gotten in that punch? The low groan was human. Shit. The Wendigo was winning.

Fuck it. She was turning on the light and shooting that bastard.

Heart pounding and palms sweaty, Kate stood and snapped on the lamp.

The Wendigo had Robert by the throat and it was squeezing the life out of him. It was enjoying the pain it inflicted. Robert struggled against the pressure crushing his neck, but she could see it was a losing battle.

"Hey!" she screamed at the monster. "Let him go!"

The Wendigo's hollow eyes tracked her. Its grin was stained with old blood. It held Robert higher as if it knew she wouldn't shoot through her lover to get to it. Or maybe it was simply showing her its newest entrée.

She dropped to the floor, rolled onto her stomach and shot at the Wendigo's knees. The bullets shot through the ragged patellas. Like a felled tree, the beast crashed to the floor, its awful wail both pain and fury.

It released Robert. He flopped onto his side and clutched his throat. Kate reloaded the gun, watching the creature try to get up. One of its legs had been severed and the other hung loosely from the shattered kneecap.

As Robert got to his feet and staggered backward, she darted around him and pointed her gun at the Wendigo. It smelled terrible -- like rust and mold and death. Her arms shook and she had to blink sweat out of her eyes.

It rolled on its back trying uselessly to rise to its feet. Robert had been right. The Wendigo was hunger personified. It was desperate and ceaseless. It would never stop killing. It had no conscience. It had no soul.

Kate aimed at its neck and shot fifteen rounds into it.

The Wendigo jerked violently as its head was severed. The putrefied skull rolled away. Moments later, the decayed corpse stopped twitching.

She kept the empty gun trained on the dead thing. *God, God, oh God.* Her insides quivered and her stomach squeezed.

"Kate," whispered Robert behind her.

The 9mm fell from her nerveless fingers as she turned into his embrace. Her whole body shook.

"You did good, darlin'," he said in a croaky voice. "That was the sexiest damned thing I ever saw."

It was so outrageous to think that her, naked and terrified, shooting a cannibalistic creature was *sexy*, she laughed.

* * *

Robert dressed and dragged the body outside. He'd stowed the creepy skull into some sort of special bag for disposal. Tucked in a clean pair of jammies and her warm robe, she looked out the picture window.

Hours ago, the sun dawned, its rosy light glittering on the white snow.

Near the edge of the lake, Robert had built a pyre and tossed the body onto it. The flames had done their job. Now, he was shoveling the ashes of wood and Wendigo into a barrel. He would take that barrel to the nearest cemetery and scatter its contents. She wasn't sure what would happen to the head. Really, she didn't care.

As Robert walked toward the cabin, waving to her, she wondered if he would run away again. Yeah, he'd tracked her down -- or so, he said -- but that didn't mean he wanted her or a relationship.

He stamped off snow and ash on the porch then came inside. He took off his coat and gloves. "I'll help you clean up before I go."

"You're leaving already?"

He grinned. "Are you going to miss me, Kate?"

For a moment, she held on to her pride. Why tell him how she felt? Why give him any reason to hurt her? But the answer was simple. "Yes," she admitted. "I will miss you."

"I'll miss you, too." He broke eye contact first, looking around the disheveled cabin. "You have cleaning supplies?"

"Don't worry about it," she said. "I need something to do that doesn't include killing creatures of legend or..." *Submitting to handsome heartbreakers.* She cleared her throat and turned away.

Restless, she wandered into the kitchen and poured water into the tea kettle.

Robert said nothing else. Instead, he gathered up his belongings. Before the water had even boiled, he had finished packing his truck.

"Kate..."

She swallowed the knot in her throat. "Please, don't. Just go."

He leaned his forehead against hers. "I will think of you every day. You've changed my world. You've changed me."

Tears gathered in her eyes. She nodded. Her smile broke, but she refused to give in to her grief. His last kiss was a mere brushing of his lips across hers.

Then he was gone.

Kate fixed her tea and allowed herself to cry. After she cleaned up the cabin, she would try to get hold of Twila. Her peace of mind had been destroyed. There was no getting away from the monsters in the world. They always found her.

She'd go back to work, go back to the life that was no life, and she would --

The door to the cabin crashed open and startled her so badly, she dropped the mug. The liquid splashed out as the ceramic hit the floor and shattered.

Robert stormed across the cabin and swept her into his arms.

"What are --"

His lips claimed hers and swallowed the rest of her question. She felt utterly possessed by him. She melted into his embrace, accepted the rough assault of his kiss. Her heart jackknifed and started a wild beat.

Robert dragged down her pajama bottoms and she kicked them away. He turned her around and pushed her against the small counter space between the sink and the stove. She knocked the sugar bowl, tea box, and spoon off -- all of which tumbled to the floor. Her palms flattened against the laminate. She struggled for breath and her whole body trembled in anticipation.

Behind her, she sensed Robert fumbling with his jeans. Then his cock was sliding between her thighs and angling into her welcoming pussy.

One of his hands anchored on her hip, holding her firmly while he fucked her. The other hand reached for her breast, twisting her nipple until the pain melded with her pleasure.

The fingers persecuting her breast relinquished their hold. That calloused, warm hand slid over her stomach and claimed her pussy. He stroked her clit roughly, bringing her very close to peak.

"Kate," he said, his voice low and hoarse. "I love you."

Oh, God. She plummeted into an intense orgasm, her weeping cunt clutching at his ramming cock.

"I'm coming in your sweet pussy." He groaned, stiffened, and ejaculated.

Kate nearly passed out. What the hell was happening?

He leaned forward, resting his head between her shoulder blades. They stood in the kitchen, panting and sweating for what seemed like an hour.

Finally, he released her and Kate turned around.

His head tilted as he considered her. "You can sense them, can't you?"

"I'm psychic," she admitted softly. "Why do you think I'm so good at finding the bastards?" She blew out a breath. "You love me?"

"Damn right. I don't want to live another day without you. I want you by my side, fighting with me. Making love to me. Would you want to give up the FBI and come track monsters?"

In his gaze, she saw his vulnerability, his love. How could she have missed those emotions? Some psychic she was.

"Darlin'? What do you say?"

Kate smiled. "I love you, too."

Chapter 5

Three months later...

At the breakfast table, Twila handed the postcard to her husband. "Kate got married!"

"That's wonderful." Kyle looked it over. The front was a shot of the Las Vegas Strip. On the back were the words: "I married my soulmate. You were right. Miller's Lake changed my life. Love, Kate."

"Short and sweet." He pushed away his emptied plate and added sugar to his coffee. "It's too bad the Hendersons were so isolated. Are you sure Kate didn't hear anything? See anyone?"

"Honey, she was an FBI profiler. She's not only observant, she's smart. If she knew anything, she would've told you."

Kyle looked thoughtful. "She's a freelancer now. Did you say her husband was a private investigator?"

"Yes, but I really don't know much about him." Twila smiled. "I only know that he makes Kate as happy as you make me."

Kyle reached across the table and grasped her hand. "You're my dream girl, baby."

"Well, no matter how weird things get around Miller's Lake," she promised, "At least, I'll always be your girl."

* * *

Deaths of Elderly Couple at Miller's Lake Still Unsolved

By Elizabeth Newsome

Three months ago, Hugh and Selma Henderson, 78 and 77 respectively, were brutally murdered in their cabin at Miller's Lake. The killer, or killers, dismembered the bodies and, according to police reports, appeared to have eaten some of their flesh.

Hugh, a retired car salesman, and Selma, a housewife, had life insurance policies totaling more than quarter of a million dollars. However, money doesn't seem to be a motive for the killings.

There are no suspects on this odd and disturbing case.

"We're doing all that we can," said Officer Kyle Danport. "Hugh and Selma were good people and deserved to live out their retirement years in peace. We will find their killer."

The police have had little to go on. A snow storm that occurred on the night of the murders wiped out vital clues. Despite the continued efforts of the local authorities, no one has been charged with the crimes.

The couple had reported several sightings of Bigfoot. Strangely enough, footprints were found inside the cabin that matched cast impressions taken by Officer Danport on the same day the Hendersons met their grisly fate.

According to our expert, the footprints are of a person, or creature, more than seven feet tall. Several Bigfoot sightings occurred in and around Miller's Lake before the Hendersons were killed. Since their deaths, no other Bigfoot reports have been filed.

The Hendersons' murders are only the second incident of unnatural deaths at Miller's Lake. More than fifty years ago, a triple homicide occurred.

Not long after, residents began to report a ghostly bride floating across the lake. Tales about the Bride were consistent up until a year ago -- when two bodies related to the five-decade-old crime were discovered.

With its ghosts, Bigfoot sightings, and murderous history, it seems Miller's Lake is neither peaceful nor idyllic. However, locals insist that the small resort community is still a wonderful place to visit.

Officer Danport said, "We want to assure everyone that the safety of all residents and visitors to Miller's Lake is our number one priority."

**Now available from Changeling Press, the first book in
Michele Bardsley's Miller's Lake series:**

Haunted By You

Sometimes, you must face the ghosts of your past...

Twila Montgomery spent the best summer of her teenage years at Miller's Lake. So when her life goes to crap, she decides it's the perfect place for emotional convalescence.

She never forgot the night she saw the ghostly Bride drift across the lake -- or the reason she'd been inside the rickety old row boat: Kyle Danport. She figures the seventeen-year-old boy who'd been her first real crush is long gone. And she hopes the ghost is gone, too.

But neither the Bride nor Kyle ever left Miller's Lake. And both seem to want something from her... the Bride, to solve a fifty-year-old mystery and Kyle, to finish what they'd started on that starlit night a decade ago...

Remember campers: At Miller's Lake, nothing is what it seems...

Michele Bardsley

Multi-published in several genres, award-winning author Michele Bardsley spends her days creating fictional worlds because, let's face it, reality sucks. A prime example is that no one has yet to figure out how to make calorie-free chocolate. What's up with THAT? Michele lives in Florida where she is held hostage by her two children, her husband, and four cats. Occasionally they remember to feed her, but mostly she's forced to nibble on copy paper while eking out her next story. The manacles make it difficult to type, but she manages. Email her at michelebardsley@yahoo.com or visit her website at www.MicheleBardsley.com