

# Rational



Mannaz

# Animals

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McLary



RATIONAL ANIMALS  
MANNAZ—RUNE OF MAN

BY

K.A. M'LADY

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*To Tad – for everything pure, untouched and  
beautiful in the world--just like your forests.  
For your love.*

For the first time in nearly seventy years wolf song can be heard throughout the great valley of Yellowstone. But as the chill December winds gather, something dark, powerful and mystical stalks the valley and Toren Crushing has become its prey.

Renee Faroque is a Shaman's Granddaughter — a child of the great Crow Indians. She has learned great knowledge from her dream-walks with her ancestors. But has she learned enough to save herself and the beautiful stranger from the ancient evil that abides within?

Kin to the wolf & brother to man,  
Inside ~ Every man holds a darkness

~ Rational Animals ~

Toren Crushing spends his winters in the remote back county of Montana's Yellowstone National Forest studying the predators known as *Canis Lupus*—the great Gray Wolves. And, for the first time in nearly seventy years their song echoes throughout the great valley. Like any other winter, he follows the wolf trail deep into the timbre—watching and recording their behavior as they hunt, play and gather beneath the looming light of winter's chill, December moon.

But this winter is different—this winter, something dark and powerful stalks the valley. A creature as old and mythical as time itself—and Toren Crushing has become its prey.

Renee Faroque knows what it is to be different—what it means to dream-walk with her ancestors. All her life she has had this gift, but one vision will change her life forever. With only her skills as a Shaman's granddaughter she will walk the dark forest with the great Gray Wolf. It is a journey that only she, a Metis—a Landless One—a half-breed and relic of the great Crow Indians could possibly understand, or hope to survive.

She only prays that the handsome stranger she has rescued from the edges of death can hear her spirit guide the way—before the dark beast dwelling within the forest's shadows returns and he no longer understands her call.

*Mannaz*: Developed from the Proto-Germanic term for “man,” in the gender-neutral sense of “person, human being.”

Some etymologies make connection with mythology—as the first man, “the thinker”—it presumes that man is the one who thinks, which fits the definition of man given by René Descartes as a “rational animal,” indebted to Aristotle’s, which is also the basis for *Homo sapiens*.

Restricted use of man in the sense of “adult male” only began to occur in late Old English, around the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and the word formerly expressing male sex, *wer* had died out by AD 1300 (but survives in e.g. *were-wolf*, and *were-gild*).

*The Rune Mannaz*: The key word is “I.” The advice of the symbol is modesty and no superfluities. It recommends not attracting attention to one’s self artificially. To have certain flexibilities and skill. This is not the time for changes, but the time to wish for them. To strive for deep analysis and the changing of your own “I.”

*The Mannaz Opposite*: Represents an inner enemy. Your development has stumbled or will stumble upon an obstacle—someone or something trying to stand in your way or trying to harm you. It advises to analyze the circumstance and figure out the situation to turn it to you and see that the outside enemy is no more than just a reflection of the enemy inside. It is necessary to distinguish and think it over to win over him. More than likely, this enemy is the legacy of the past.



## CHAPTER 1

The snow, as it peaks off of the mountaintops, never ceases to amaze me. As I stepped out of my cabin during the predawn light and felt that first slap of endless cold rush through my lungs, I had little idea that this winter would be the beginning of my ultimate survival.

I stood on the front porch of the little cabin I called home every winter season, relishing the thin, crisp mountain air, wondering why man would ruin this level of sublime simplicity with such a mediocre thing as breathing. Especially when you knew what they really wanted to do was shed the layers of their useless life and tear through the canyon as fast as their feeble legs would take them—ripping and skirting every limb and fallen tree trunk just to feel the chill of life burning through their limbs like the jolting shock of birth.

Or maybe that was just me. Quite possibly it's





why I ended up in so much disastrous trouble—it's hard to say at this point in the game. So many things can change the outcome of a person's life—their plans, their hopes, their life-long dreams. One wrong move, one false step or feeble miscalculation and, if they're not watching for whatever darkness is creeping its way among the shadowed edges of the tree line or down some dark back alley, blam! Life as you know it is forever altered. Hell, we could all end up with a bullet in the belly if we're not careful. You just never know what fate will befall you.

As I looked out at the great white world around me, listening to the chorus of wolf-song that echoed off the timbre and bounced along the velvet whiteness and crystalline beauty of the newly fallen snow, I considered the possibilities of stripping my own life layers away and giving the forest a go.

That's when the iced cold blast of December settled deep into the pit of my lungs like a new found joy. I felt that inner peace slowly descend upon me as I inhaled a lung full of cold mountain air. You know—the kind of peace that one only finds in a place like Yellowstone. As that peace slowly enveloped me, I knew that I'd come home.

It was for this reason, this oneness of inner tranquility that the land seemed to give me, that I spent every winter deposited in the middle of

## *Rational Animals*



Yellowstone's glacial, forestry of majestic mountain beauty traipsing after creatures who, I was certain, wanted nothing more than for me to leave them the hell alone.

But at this point in the game it was impossible for me to grant them this one sacred wish. For one thing, it was my job, and in a way, I felt it was my duty. I owed it, in a sense, to their breed. I felt compelled to find the reason behind the madness of their behavior. The definition for their behavioral irrationality pushed some button inside my mind, forcing me to seek out such lofty answers. I had to know why these particular animals were behaving in such a mind blowing irrational state. I had to know why they had not obtained their own inner tranquility.

Why they split from the norms of their pack society and ran alone, against the grain of their nature. Against the very grain of the spirit of their beast.

In what was probably seventy years we finally heard the glorious howl of the great wolf echoing throughout Yellowstone's grandeur again. And it had taken some major work to get these creatures reintroduced successfully back into the wilds where they could once again grow and prosper. We accomplished much. We should have been proud.

But of course, not every study is perfect or goes



according to plan. There is always that one test case. That one specimen group. That one quirk in the system that does exactly what it should *not* be allowed to do in the course of life's order. For how else is it to survive according to the normal progression of the order of life otherwise. That was my question. That and so many more.

Oh yes, we had that specimen—two in fact. But I was here to study the primal pack of my concern. The one research project that was fast becoming my whole reason for existence, or the bane of my existence, I hadn't quite decided on which. The one study group that I called Nez Perce—Alphas M1.

During the winter of 1996 when we first started this whole reintroduction project it had been one deemed for greatness. We initially had success with our first test group—in normal circumstance we placed a dominant male wolf and a dominant female wolf in an acre acclimation pen with several young subordinate wolves. And, as the wolves were wont to do, the hierarchy was established within about twenty-four or so hours. The alphas mated and a new pack was formed. We then released them into three different acclimation areas and studied their progression in the wild.

But there was one case that did not follow the laws of man nor beast. One pack that established



their own rules and hierarchy. When the Nez Perce pack was released in the winter of 1996, the male wolves went in one direction and the females in another. That was my fourth year as a Biologist—it now seems like a lifetime ago. And, that is why today, you find me, Toren Crushing, stodgy mountain Biologist, here in Yellowstone for my fourteenth season, still tracking Nez Perce—Alphas M1.

Over time we've found that every pack seems to have a large population of mostly gray wolves, and the Nez Perce pack didn't seem any different. Until about a year after release. The alpha male, or at least the wolf we originally deemed as alpha, started changing in color. His gray fur grew pale by the end of that first winter and, by the next winter when we were able to track the pack down again, he had turned completely white and grown three times as large as the others.

There were times that the pack had a solid black amongst them, but it would come and go. Oh, the changes in coloring weren't what disturbed me, a black here and there was normal. Where it came from—that was another question.

There are usually six to eight members in a normal pack size, but with Nez Perce the white would always be leader amongst them—larger, fiercer, and definitely more formidable. But since 1996 the size of the Nez Perce pack had grown



from eight to fourteen, and all of them male. All of them running from gray to silver to black in color. All of them but the one – the alpha male.

It almost seemed impossible for him to still be so fit and hardy and leading this pack after all these years. Even in his youth there seemed something rather strange about the young wolf and, as I think about it now, I should have had warning bells screaming in my head. But wolves were never observed in Yellowstone before. Let alone a pack that consisted of all males. I just wish now that I would have paid more attention to the warning signs. But I digress. I came to Yellowstone for another winter of study and that first morning of my stay was going to prove just how strange and uncertain my future was going to become.



## CHAPTER 2

“Toren, do you copy?” The voice crackling over the CB radio was garbled, drawly and a bit frantic as it broke my reverie from the morning’s scenic beauty. Taking in one last deep breath, I stepped back into my sparsely filled cabin and closed the door on the cold. “Go ahead Jacob.” I casually collapsed onto the wooden chair in front of the plain square farm table that served as my dinette and desk all in one.

The cabins we were provided were pretty small and filled with the bare minimum of necessities – a loveseat, a single bed off in the corner, a small television stand with an old thirteen inch on it, a wall sink with a small attached counter and one set of cupboards for food and dishes marked the kitchen. The bathroom was a nook with a stool and a standing shower used when the pipes weren’t frozen. There was a fireplace in the center of the main wall for warmth and a generator out



back. Thankfully there was enough wood in the wood pile that if you became snow bound at least you wouldn't freeze. You might starve to death, but you wouldn't freeze.

"We need you out at the West Entrance. We've, uh, got a body on the ground."

I couldn't help but crinkle my brow at that one. "So, call the Sheriff, Jake." I was unsure why he told me this news instead of getting Sheriff Holloway on the horn and dragging him out into the cold.

"Well, um...you see, Toren, I already did that. And seein how he said to call you and such cuz we got what looks like bloody wolf tracks all over and around the body and um..." The disbelief in Jacob's voice as it trailed off left me stunned. I sat there clutching my radio with my mouth hanging open. "Ah, Toren. Do you copy?"

*"What did you say?" He did not just say body downed by wolf.* My brain was already scrambling as I tried to grasp what he said. I repeated it a few times like a chant as if I said it enough it would make it more believable. It didn't seem to help. This could mean a whole lot of shit for our wolves if what he'd said was true.

"We need you out at..."

I cut him off before he repeated the mundane parts. Now was not the time for Jake to be long on small talk. "Yeah Jake, I heard that part. What did



you say about the wolf?" I don't think I was keeping the panic from my voice but at this point what the hell did I care. Fourteen years of hard work was not going down the shitter because Holloway was going to get trap happy and start randomly shooting my wolves.

"Look Toren, I don't know what the hell it is. It looks like wolf tracks traipsing through the bloody snow. It's a fucking mess, man. Could you just get your ass out here? The sheriff is starting to get that crease in his forehead again and if I have to stare at this shit much longer I'm gonna be hurlin' my guts out till Christmas."

"I'll be there in twenty Jake." I grabbed my coat. "Keep them cops the hell away from our wolves. You hear me?" I waited for a response but the line grew staticy. "Jake!"

"I hear ya Toren. Just hurry the fuck up."

I threw the mike on the table, grabbed my cowboy hat off the chair and made my way out to the snow coach assigned to me for the winter. Glad it was parked along side my cabin, I was thankful I filled it up before coming out to the cabin. In twenty-three inches of snow, this was going to be the longest twenty minute drive of my life. The snow coach is an oversized van with weird triangular chain-like tires that can cut through the snow like a snowmobile. Driving it makes getting around Yellowstone a whole lot





easier and, considering the amount of snow on the ground and the tremble in Jake's voice, I needed to get there as quickly as possible.

It was fifteen miles from the West Entrance of the park to my assigned cabin and I had a solid twenty minute drive in good weather. The road to the West Entrance had been cleared for driving and, as I was barreling down it, my stomach clenched with worry as to what I was about to encounter.

Wolves didn't normally attack people and they seldom scurried far from the valley. What the hell were they doing clear out by the West Entrance? Who the hell did they kill? Was it a tourist? Some Joe out for a hike in the snow or riding the trails? What would this mean to our current project and the wolves that were already set free? Would the Sheriff and his force want to hunt them down and kill them? Would Holloway want to kill all of them or just this particular beast?

God! My brain reeled with questions as I stepped on the gas. I barreled toward the West Entrance and considered how badly the guy might have been mauled. Must have been pretty bad to shake up Jake so badly.

Hell, Jake had seen some pretty gruesome shit in his life time—bear attacks, elk charges. I think his own horse was rammed by a moose or something, with him on it. The horse was killed



instantly and Jake ended up in traction for eight months. So if it was freaking him out... My thought process made me ill.

The number of cops languishing around the entrance of the park surprised the hell out me as I brought the snow coach to a steady halt in the line of oversized vehicles. Most of locals drove big ol' Yukon's with spiked chains on the tires, but there were a few old Chevy's amidst the polish.

I pulled the collar up on my coat so the fur trim was snug around my neck as I got out of the truck. The coat was one of those light brown suede things with the lambs wool linings—not sure what the hell it's called. Kate, that's my ex, she got it for me a few years back for a Christmas gift before we split. Said it would keep me warm up here in the mountains. Even made sure she sent me a matching pair of gloves last year for Christmas. Funny she sent them so many years later then the coat.

Kate always was trying to make me a fashion plate. Guess I just didn't go with her big city flare. She left me a few years back for some neurosurgeon named Gillis. Guess he's more G.Q. than I could ever hope to be and apparently right up her alley. Kate always was one for the lookers. She told me once that I was definitely a looker she just wasn't looking to keep her eyes out West. Whatever the hell that means. I'm sure it's all for



the best. The land and the wolves mean more to me than most anything. Kate never was one for wide open spaces. Liked her steel towers too much I guess.

The cold seemed to be keeping the smell of blood and bowels from ripping through the air and clinging to your sinuses, but whether man or beast, there is no mistaking death as it lingered in the frigid morning sunlight. Cautious, I made my way to the main throng of people loitering around in a semi-circle when I spotted the day-glow orange cap that Jake always managed to be wearing.

"Toren's here," I heard him say in his Arkansas twang and half the crowd turned as one to face me.

"Bout damn time too," the Sheriff muttered, his annoyance carried through the silence.

"Sheriff Holloway," I extended my hand in politeness. Sheriff Holloway was a solid foot shorter than me, standing five foot five inches tall, and weighing a solid two-forty. How he managed to keep from waddling as he maneuvered around with his rotund belly I have no idea. He reminded me of one of those Weebles I had as a kid.

"Your late Crushing," he growled.

It seems the good Sheriff had an inherent dislike of me. I'm not sure if it was because I represented everything he wasn't or if he was just



that crotchety. Maybe it was a little bit of both. I mean, I am tall, extremely athletic and the good Sheriff, well, isn't. I'm tanned, have good bone structure, supposedly nice eyes—they're blue—like the sky in the summer, so says my ex. Whereas Sheriff Holloway's face is more saggy jowls, pasty white skin and his eyes are so dirt brown they remind me of a muddy creek bed. My ex says I have good hair, but I think it's about too long now and needs a good cut, but I just haven't gotten around to it. It's a dusty blond and hangs about to my shoulders. The poor Sheriff has a few grayish strands combed over—well, at least as far as one can tell on the few occasions he takes his hat off.

My ancestors are Scandinavian, German, Celtic and Danish. I guess I'm a bit of a mutt as far as the bloodlines go. I've got that burly baring of most barbarians. I've found, over time, that most men are completely offended by it. They assume you're either a bad ass and want to try to kick your ass or you're a pretty boy and gay. Then of course there is the doctorate to go along with it. Brains and brawn. It just annoys the hell outta most men. I'm not really sure what Ted's—never call him Theodore—ancestors are, but I'm fairly certain by the way that I always find him glaring at me that they hated mine.

"So what have you got Sheriff?" I purposely



ignored the hateful glare and disdain that rolled off him as he waddled towards me in the snow.

“Looks to me like one of your damn wolves mistook my tourist for its winter meal if you ask me, but since you’re the one with the degree in this shit, I guess that’s why I’m asking you, Crushing.” He motioned and we made our way over to where they roped off the body.

The pale pink tinge of snow was the first indication that what I was about to see was going to be bad. The slushy crimson crystals of the snow freezing into a burst of red death was the second and it gave me little warning that the meaty remains I was forced to see were supposed to represent a human being. The scene just went from subtly worrisome to graphically horrid and you didn’t even have time to finish a blink.

My breath stilled in my lungs as I looked on in shocked horror at the eviscerated remains of what was once a man. My eyes and brain seemed to be in a war as to what each of them saw. My brain tried to process and make sense of what lay before me while my eyes tried to blink it all away. I stood and stared at the bloody remains and tried to absorb the scene with a scientific mind, hoping it would help me, knowing in my gut that this one was going to linger like the worst kind of nightmare and that my life would never be the same.



I could feel the gag mechanism kicking in and I swallowed hard to hold it back. There was no way this side of hell that I was going to lose it in front of Holloway. That, I'm sure would just make his whole damn day. And we both knew I wasn't about to give in to letting him have a good day. If he wanted to be an ass because I was better looking or somewhat smarter in some areas than he was then he really needed to get a life.

As I looked around at what was left of the body, trying to breathe and think, another knot the size of Texas stuck in my throat. I swallowed it down, but it sort of just lodged in my gut. I did my damndest to just ignore it and function. It was a little hard with the meaty remains of a human lying frozen before me in the cold morning sun. I picked up on some of the signs Jake mentioned when he first radioed me while I forced myself to look around at the scene.

The body did in fact have what looked like wolf tracks bounding up to it, the stride long, if the distance between each print was any indication, but something about them seemed a little off, their size being bigger somehow. It was a little hard to tell this far off from them and I needed to measure to be sure, but from where I stood I could tell they were much bigger than a normal sized wolf's. Then there was the body itself. It was torn to shreds, like something had clawed its way inside



of it. A normal wolf just does not kill like that.

"So Crushing?" Sheriff Holloway was saying, the fat of his lip protruding to twice its size from the chew he had crammed in his face.

"What?" I blinked and slowly faced him, a million thoughts scrambling through my brain. One of which being, *why the hell is his face so fat?* I shook my head to clear it. There was something so weird about all of this. If I could just measure those prints for myself.

"Was it one of your wolves?"

I stared at Holloway for a good ten seconds. There were so many things I wanted to say. So many questions I wanted to ask. Regardless of his attitude towards me Holloway was a cop first. He'd do his job and do it right, like as not. I hope. "I'd have your coroner check those wounds first, Sheriff. As far as I can tell from here it looks like something clawed its way into your victim. Wolves don't do that. Just because you found wolf prints in the area doesn't mean a wolf killed this guy. A wolf may scavenge for a meal if they're hungry enough, but wolves don't claw their victims to death. They certainly don't tear into their victims with their claws first."

"How do you know they were clawed into?" He didn't bothering to look at me.

"Your coroner can confirm this for you, but check the entry wounds. Laceration would be



found on killing points—throat, stomach. The wounds at the entry tear downward like a swipe. A wolf is more like a dog, Holloway, they may worry the bone or toss you around, but if they're going to dig into you, it's going to be a chomp. You'd find upper and lower points of entry. Ask your coroner, they'll only be an upper on this guy, and the rest is just shredding. Dogs don't do that kind of shit, Sheriff."

The huff of annoyance was initially his only reply as he looked out into the forest beyond. Then he cleared his throat. "Alright Crushing, but if anymore of this shit happens again I'm holding you responsible. The Mayor can call and yell at you."

"What do you mean any more of this shit?" The knot tightened in the pit of my stomach. "What the hell are you talking about Holloway? How many tourists have already been killed?"

"We've found six people mauled or mutilated in the past three months and five reports of missing persons on top of that since March." He did everything possible to avoid eye contact with me.

"And you're just now getting someone from the research team involved? You're just now having someone trained and educated in field biology advise you? Why the hell didn't you ask one of the other researchers for help?" I was practically





screaming as I pulled off my hat and twisted the brim in my hands.

"I didn't think they'd be honest with me," he replied, his voice low as he finally looked up at me.

"Jesus, Holloway." I put my hat back on my head. "Alright, fine. You want truth. Then let's have truth between us. It's damn strange that those tracks are all but chasing your victim this far from the edge of the forest line. It's even stranger the placement of those tracks."

"What do you mean placement?"

"For one thing, those prints are fucking huge. I've seen a lot of wolf prints in my life and those—" I pointed to the stream of them leading up to the body—"those prints are three times the size of a normal wolf."

"What else do you see Crushing?" He took a pad of paper from his parka pocket and sprawled down some notes. We walked the perimeter of the scene as I pointed out things that just didn't fit my wolves—a single wolf, the claw marks on the victim, the prints and the fact that they just disappeared. They were there one minute and suddenly they just vanished. They didn't even pick up on the other side of the road. Both of us were pretty certain no one would pick up a blood soaked wolf and give him a ride into town.

Then we were right back to the way the victim

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died. Torn to shreds like he was mauled by a bear, but there weren't any bear tracks. This just didn't make any sense whatsoever. Blood and bone, that's all that was left in the snow.



## CHAPTER 3

I spent about an hour too long standing out in the cold with the Sheriff and, by then, I had enough. I gave him everything I could think of, a few things I wasn't sure were even possible and even a few bits of useless information just to be sure I covered every angle. All of which he told me he was grateful for. For someone who had such a history of hating me it made me wonder what the hell he was up to. Or did these deaths shake him that badly? Maybe they did. They sure as shit were going to leave their mark on my psyche.

By ten I found myself on the road into town. I was already out, so I figured I might as well be about getting set up for my lengthy winter stay. I had an arm long list of rations to buy anyway then I needed to get back to cabin and set up before dark if I was going to record some of the wolf-song at night.



I was clipping along in my snow coach making a mental list of everything I needed to get at the local market—‘Runnin with the Devil’ playing on the radio as I began to settle in for the hour and a half drive, when I rounded a turn and instantly started slamming on the brakes. The wheel began to crank left as the back end jerked right. I spewed a few choice words as I whipped the steering wheel around and prayed I didn’t end up in a ditch. When I finally straightened out and came to a stop, both ass end and front end making their way in the right directions, the biggest damn shock white wolf I ever saw sat in the middle of the road staring at me.

I swear if the damn thing could have smirked it’d have done so as it sat there, it’s piercing ice blue eyes sharply intent on my every move.

My heart raced from the damn thing startling me and the rig spinning out of control, but as I sat there, white knuckled and clutching the steering wheel, the sun cresting past the tips of the snow covered trees and my heart about to burst from my rib cage, I could only stare, transfixed, into its pale hypnotic eyes. Something strange passed between us. The forest seemed to pause, listen and wait. I swear my pulse hammered as my heart gave a little twist. Uncertainty and trepidation filled the pit of my stomach.

Then, suddenly the wolf stood up, his spine



regal stiff, the curve of his back sleek and strong. His muzzle was titled in a manner of pride and poised as though the forest should bow before him—as though I, too, should bow before him. And I knew as I sat there and tried to breathe around my racing heart beat that here stood my elusive alpha male of the Nez Perce pack.

In shocked wonder, a chill snaked up my spine. I looked into his cold, calculating eyes and knew he knew me. That he knew my scent, my essence, hell, probably even my name. He had my number. From this moment on wherever I was and whenever he wanted to he could find me. And there wasn't a damn thing I could do about it. I blinked as an eerie feeling enveloped me. The cold wash of anxiety running through my veins as I looked back at the road, flooded with fear for the first time in my life. My wolf was gone.

"What the shit?" I gripped the wheel even tighter. I sat there for several minutes afraid to move. When my fingers tingled with pain, I let go of the wheel and took my hat off. "Fucking Holloway. This is your God damn fault." I needed to blame someone for the insane feeling that raced through my guts—might as well be him.

Slowly I pulled the rig back onto the road and crept back down it at an even pace, my heart still in my throat. I carefully scanned both sides of the roadway looking for the wolf. There wasn't any



sign of him anywhere, or any tracks as far as I could see. Frankly, right then, there was no way in hell I was getting out of that snow coach to go searching for him anyway. Not without a rifle. Six fucking people mutilated for cripes sakes. What the hell was Holloway thinking?

By the time I made into town it felt like I had an ulcer the size of the Grand Canyon swallowing my guts up. I made my way to the Green Street Market Square, the main strip of town with the Police Station, Wal-Mart and Lowes Hardware all on the main strip. Everything needed on one street so even if the roadways are blocked by snow I wouldn't have to worry about making my way to town in the snow coach.

I decided to hit the Wal-Mart and stock up. I figured it'd be quick as I wanted to get the hell out of Dodge and get back to my cabin. Fucking wolf had me shaking up that badly. I managed to make it through the store in about an hour and without incident, but on my way out my nerves were still frazzled.

My cart was stocked to overflowing and I just wasn't paying attention. I was barreling my way through the slush pile on my way out to my rig when a wheel hit a rut. The bags went flying and, as I jerked the damn cart to get it loose, I crashed into some poor Indian girl, rammed right into her, knocking her clean off her feet.



I felt like a total jackass as I tried to reach for her, my bags and the wobbling cart amidst my apologies. She got to her feet on her own despite my requests to help make sure she was alright. All I caught of her was a glimpse of a brief, beautiful smile—one that was sure to haunt my dreams—and her wet, retreating backside as she made her way into the store.

Too bad, too, it was a nice backside. This just did not appear to be my day. I definitely needed to go back to my cabin and stay there for the rest of it. Maybe tomorrow would be a better one. Well, one could hope anyway.

I loaded up the snow coach and high tailed it back to Yellowstone, visions of bloody remains, rabid wolves and mysterious Indian girls with lush smiling lips and sweet bottoms swirling around in my head—I really need to get out more. As I was bringing in the last of my supplies that weird prickly feeling of being watched rushed over me and, when I stood at my door and looked out into the cold white world beyond, two ice blue eyes watched me from the tree line.

I ran inside to get my rifle, but by the time I made it back to the porch there was nothing in the trees except the lingering wind. The echo of wolf-song skittered along my jacked-up nerves. Welcome back to Yellowstone, Toren. I wonder what tomorrow will bring me?



## CHAPTER 4

When I was a little girl my Grandfather called me *She-lish-ga* or Chick-a-de for the morning chick that sings after a night of long dreams. He would always ask me of my journeys and tell me to sing for him. Sing of our ancestors and the Spirits in the Sky.

Tonight I smelled the lingering sweetness of honeysuckle and the rich pungent aroma of pine smoke clinging to every breath I inhaled as it swirled through my mind, loitering like a childhood secret that only my Grandfather and I shared. I knew in the dusty waste land between sleep and dreams that I'd left the warmth of my bed and the peace of my dreams far behind.

My sight was soon filled with the morning mist and the smoke of my grandfather's pipe—peppermint and tobacco enveloped me as I opened my eyes to the world beyond. I waited for





what he had to show me.

"Wake child," I heard him say in the voice that reminded me of water upon rocks and dark earth, rich like red clay.

"I am here Grandfather." I'd take his proffered hand and we'd begin a journey deep into the forest. I'd have no idea where he was taking me, but I was never afraid—for I'd been here before. Not at this place in the forest, but here in the spirit realm on another journey with the honor of my Grandfather as my guide.

Since I was a little girl I had these visions. I'd wake in the night at the hand of an ancestor and we'd walk the great valley. Sometimes they'd tell me our history as the sun burned off the moon and the earth came alive with life. Other times we simply just walked through the foliage, the moon as our guide. Whatever the case, they always had something to show me and I'd leave their realm much wiser than when I entered.

I'd learned many things on my journeys—the proper herbs for festering wounds, or the leaves for sour stomach, what a person's spirit animal was and how to call a guardian. I learned the proper way to hunt a deer and how to track a bear. There was much my ancestors taught me and I still had so much to learn.

Tonight I was filled with uncertainty, and was unsure of the course of events that would follow



for the first time in my life. I had walked little with my grandfather in this realm—unless he had something of importance to show me. The thought tightened my stomach with worry.

“Here is where the dark spirit runs like a freed beast with devilry in his heart.” My Grandfather spread his arm before him to show the white earth beyond. “He is old like the mountains and wise like the Great Mother Earth. Too long has his darkness ruled this valley. Too long had he fed on the innocence of man.”

“There was a time, long ago,” he stated as he brought me to a downed tree trunk overlooking the snow covered valley below, “when he came and claimed our brother. Turned him, maddened him. Made him Yellow Wolf. Hemene Moxmox he was called among the Crow, and he warred with the white man, and warred with himself—and still the Yellow Wolf died.”

“We thought that the dark one died with him, but now, now we know it is the land that holds the Wyakin Powers and that the Wolf he has returned. He comes like a thief in the night—he is Heinmot Hihhih—White Lightning, and he seeks another to carry his pack, another to rule and bring suffering to Nez Perce.”

“But I say no!” He pounded his fist in his hand. “No more will we be the Metis—the Landless Ones. No more will our lands bleed and our



people suffer.”

To fight the beast and win you must first run with the beast. You Renee, my Chick-a-de, you have the power to stop this. You have the visions of your forefathers to guide you through this darkness. You hold the power to tame the dark one. He was the first and you will make sure he is the last.”

The way my Grandfather’s eyes held mine, hope, certainty and pride glowing in their dark orbs, I could be nothing more than convinced myself.

I awoke that morning with my blankets twisted around my limbs. Sweat covered my body despite the snow that I saw falling just beyond my bedroom window. My throat was as dry as sandpaper and, by the time I finally unwrapped myself from my shroud of blankets and found my way to the kitchen, the knot in my stomach caused by my dream seemed to expand in bounds. The deep howl of wolf cry echoed just beyond my cabin door. Briefly, I wondered where that cowboy was, now that I needed a big strong man.

I could still picture his bright blue eyes, the way his blond hair just brushed his collar, even the gentleness in the strong hand he extended to me. Just thinking about him gave me a delicious chill. A chill more stirring than wolf-song.

## *Rational Animals*



\* \* \* \*

I set out the next morning amidst a haze of fresh falling snow and fourteen degree temps—the world around me like a beautiful charismatic elfin wonderland from a child’s secret wish. The woods seemed to render a hush over life, still and seemingly useless as it settled amidst the newly fallen snow. The trees themselves wore each crisp white flake against their bark like hand knit sweaters filled with diamonds as the squirrels scurried about their spindly limbs chattering their morning complaints about the cold.

Compliments of their location beacons I set out on snowmobile to track down my elusive all male pack. We tagged them with implanted GPS sensors when we first brought them to Yellowstone. The chip is kind of like the ones you put in your dog or cat.

From the last point of location they were eight miles from my cabin near the rim of Cougar Creek. If I wanted to catch them before they went beyond the lake and into the timbre I needed to hurry.

Grabbing my backpack, rifle, and some other necessities, I went to the snowmobile. I made the decision the night before to call Holloway and tell him I’d be going out in the morning to locate my pack. I wanted to see how far deep into the forest



they were and if they could possibly be behind his mutilations.

"You're a damn fool, Crushing!" he bellowed into the receiver. "What the hell makes you think you can track down these wolves on your own and not become just another victim in all this shit? Do you have any idea how dangerous this is? You could very well have some rabid dog on the loose set on killing humans. And what? You're going to go chase one down like some damned super hero."

I could literally feel the heat and venom seep through the phone line as his tirade wore on. Holloway had no idea what we put into this project and no idea what was really at stake. It wasn't just one wolf I was worried about. It was the fate of all of them.

Besides, if it was just one wolf that was rabid then he needed put down before the whole pack was infected. Before all of them became flesh eaters. Before all of them decided to turn on humanity and start hunting us down one at a time, thinning out our population like cows gone to slaughter, like we did to them for a millennium.

"I'm not trying to play some damned super-hero, Sheriff." I knew my clipped words insulted.

"Aren't you? So help me Crushing, if anything happens to you out there in this great white world it's going to be my ass. And so help me, if it



becomes my ass—you're going to rue the day we ever met!"

The slamming of the phone onto the receiver and dead air was the only other reply I got as I stood there fuming. What the hell is his goddamned problem now? First it's, you better do something, Crushing. Now it's, don't you dare get your ass in any trouble, Crushing! Make up your fucking mind, Ted! You either want this handled or you don't.

Too pissed off to figure out Holloway, I started cramming some last minute shit in my backpack. The man was an enigma. A short, round little fucking enigma who was going to give me a damn ulcer. At lease someone would know where I was going and why. And it's not like it was really going to be his ass anyway. He asked me to check in to this shit—so I was checking into it. It is my fucking job! And they are my fucking wolves. If I want to traipse around in the great white world like I do every other fucking winter then so be it!

I decided to leave a detailed description of my travel plan on my table next to my radio just in case. I may be pig headed but I'm not a total idiot. I headed for the door, praying as I went that I knew what the hell I was doing and that I wasn't about to become wolf chow.

The onslaught of cold and wind as it barreled through my snowmobile suite surprised the hell



out me. Despite the semi-warm temperature—and yes, fourteen is warm for this time of year—the wind was gusting through the open fields at what had to be at least forty miles an hour, which dipped the temps even further.

All through my ride, bobbing and weaving in and out of the tree lines to avoid downed limbs, deep gullies and the occasional frozen stream, I couldn't shake the feeling I was followed. I kept slowing the snowmobile to check the trail behind me—to scan the field, hoping beyond hope it might be my Indian girl out for a secret rendezvous, but there was never anything there.

My fingers felt like ice, either because of or in spite of the warmth of my gloves and the death grip I had on the throttle. I wasn't sure which. About an hour into the ride I swore I glimpsed something keeping an even pace with me at the far edge of my vision, just beyond the timbre. Something white, large, with piercing ice blue eyes as cold as the arctic north.

My heart skipped an entire three beats as I caught the edge of shoulder, muzzle and the distinct echo of a howl. Every hair on my body stood at attention, my arms jerked the steering of the snowmobile a hard left.

In the distance beyond the rise of the next hill I saw the frozen edges of Cougar Creek and with it



the Nez Perce pack. Fourteen in all. All of them running from grey and black in color like dirty snow. As the white wolf's howl ripped up my spine, they turned as one and answered the call of their alpha.

"Son of bitch! What the hell the have I done?" My anger at my stupidity slammed through my body as fear and disbelief rifled through my mind. Panic lodged in my belly as I turned my head and caught the feral look of triumph in the white beast's eyes. Across the expanse of the snowy field I swore I heard its whisper.

*And who is now the hunted, great professor?*

I sat there clutching the throttle, knees tight against the seat as the shushing of snow being overturned by a mass of thundering bodies pounding through the snow rang like a death knell in my ears.

*Run professor. Run,* he seemed to say.

The voice was deep, aged and filled with taunting, but it was right. I needed to get the hell out of there. Now. Glancing back over my shoulder I realized that they were about a hundred yards and closing fast. I cranked the wheel and opened the throttle as far as it would go. Snow churned beneath the tracks in my wake.

I had no idea how fast this thing could top out at and whether or not the wolves could catch me on it, but I definitely didn't wait around and find





out. My heart hammered in my chest so hard I feared it might burst out of me. I could breathe, but was afraid to. All the while the wolves barked and yipped behind me in the distance, toying with me.

I zigged and zagged in and out of trees, up and down along gullies trying to lose them, praying to God they would get tired of the chase. Hoping to God I wouldn't run out of gas. All the while knowing that they were still behind me the entire time.

I skirted a downed elm tree just beyond a small frozen creek about a half mile from Cougar Creek when the howls suddenly stopped. I kept on the throttle, too afraid to even hope that I'd lost them, or that they'd just gave up. My pulse raced so hard I could hear it hammering in the back of my skull.

About ten minutes later, no sign or sound of the wolves lingered anywhere behind me. I pulled the snowmobile up along side the outcropping of a cluster of downed trees—their branches and bark stained heavily from old lightning scars.

I sat there for a minute and relearned how to breathe. When I didn't catch any sight of the wolves I took off my helmet, loosened the opening of my suit and inhaled the first deep breath I'd taken since my morning began.

*Such a fool you are professor.*

## *Rational Animals*



The voice was back and I was suddenly choking on the clean mountain air.



## CHAPTER 5

I never understood how lonely it was to die, but as I lay there in the cold, wet snow, my throat torn open to the cool light of the winter sky, while claws ripped into my belly as this...this thing that I thought was one of my wolves, tore me to shreds, I realized I never really fully appreciated my life.

*Such sentimental fools, you humans,* the creature said, my blood coating its lips and teeth.

I lay there subtly growing numb in bounds, darkness creeping its way around the edges of my sight, my breathing growing shallower as the light of the world flickered then faded. In my ears the creature laughed as it hovered above me.

I struggled to open my eyes. Death called me as my blood spilled out onto the crisp white snow. Looking up, I could just make out the face of a man shimmering amidst the white glow of the wolf's face above me—two halves of the same



whole. Man and beast combined. Laughing. Relishing my death.

It was surreal and mystical and horrible as I lay there and felt the dark sludge of death fill my soul as I tried desperately to cling to my own body. Yet, somehow through the fog of my death, I felt the hilt of the blade I'd absently tucked at my waist—a last thought as I left my cabin what seemed like a lifetime before. It became my last dying thought to ram it straight through the heart of this white deviled beast.

There came a guttural howl fading into a screeching moan that brought my eyes open that one last time. I was already too far gone—walking the great walk in the land of the dead. Unable to comprehend what was taking place, my eyes locked onto what appeared to be the sparkling image of the wolf merged with that of a man as he hovered above me—shimmering and glistening like mystical snow.

Protruding from his heart, the hilt of my blade, thick with crimson as his blood seeped in running rivulets from his wound to mine. He cried out to God or ancestors long since dead. The sound deafening, filled with angst and defeat. Then, like the very winds that blow off the northern face of the Rockies, his essence scattered like the dust of diamonds.

It was the last thing I remember before the



darkness pulled me under. That, and the hollowed cries of his pack echoing their loss beneath the rising of the moon's bright glow.

\* \* \* \*

I don't recall what had called me to the creek that night, but there seemed a force in the forest that spurred me on the moment the sun fell beyond the pines. It was as if I could hear my Grandfather calling me—his voice whispering which direction to turn, telling me where to travel. Through the cold and the wind I felt his hand in mine, leading me onward through the night.

I set out at dusk, my snowmobile with its cart attachment that I usually used for hauling wood, trailing behind. I didn't know for certain what I would be returning with, but I knew it would be needed. I had grabbed my medicine bag on my way out the door—an afterthought, herbs for cleansing, bandages for binding. Something sparked in my gut and warned me that there wasn't much time.

Nearing Cougar Creek I cleared the last hillock. My eyes were still adjusting to the coming darkness and I barely made out the black void amidst the white world that settled all around me. My stomach clenched with worry as I tried to make out what it was that lay before me. I heard



the wolf-song for some time—melancholic and remorseful as it echoed through the timbre, calling out to all that would listen as though they too cried out for help. I knew that whatever was out here was dying and if I didn't hurry, it would not survive much longer.

The light of the moon guided, the beating hum of my forefathers led the way. I rounded the next fallen tree trunk and my heart ceased. The deep red of bloodied snow filled the entire scope of my vision. The stain of death suddenly becoming a man.

"Great Mother." I shifted the snowmobile into neutral and rolled it to a stop. My eyes blinked in rapid succession as I took it all in. There wasn't any time to worry or think about what I was about to do or who this man even was. The fear in my gut could wait. Had to wait. He needed me—now. Before the wolves up on the rise came back to finish their job.

"Be still." He groaned when I tried to remove the remains of his snowmobile suit. It was cut to tatters and no longer of use. I had little choice but to cut it the remainder of the way from the top of his body if I wished to staunch his wounds well enough to get them wrapped and get him from this cold.

The groaning told me he yet lived, but with so much blood I didn't see how. Where there was



breath there was always hope. Let it be so, Great Mother, I prayed as I pulled yarrow and various other herbs from my bag to fill his wounds. I would pack them as best I could and, once I had him off the land, would better be able to get them cleaned, repacked and sutured properly.

From there, if the fever didn't take him, he'd have to survive the great journey—and only the spirits beyond knew if that were possible. Right now, I had to get him out of here.

Hefting him as best I could, I slid him on to a blanket, wrapped him like a swaddled babe then drug the blanket up the ramp of the trailer. He was a very large man and the going was difficult, even for one with great determination. With each step I took, I felt the strength of my ancestors lend their will and their force to my own. I covered him with three more blankets, strapped him in as best I could and turned my snowmobile for home.

It was the longest ride of my existence. As I made my way past the line of timbre I could just make out the features of the wolves, their muzzles turned skywards, the glow of their eyes peeking through the darkness, each one seeming to bow as though some sort of salute.



## CHAPTER 6

In the light of the fireplace flames, his flesh, where the wolf had not torn it asunder, was the perfect bronze of an autumn sky as it dusted the golden grassland of the valley just before the coming snows. As beautiful as I remembered it, but much softer than in my dreams. Each arm defined with well worked muscles, his legs long and lean like runners, but his throat and chest where the wolf had attacked were nothing more than raw mangled wounds, each one torn through to the meat below, each one still welling with the richness of blood.

The wounds needed to be stitched, but the thought of piercing his flesh and causing him any more pain gave me serious pause. I knew however it needed to be done. So, with a trembling hand, I took the needle and thread I boiled in herbs and carefully stitched small stitches. I forced my fingers still as I bound his flesh. When the tedious





task was complete, I wrapped each wound with more healing herbs and carefully wound him in bandages. The rest was up to him.

The night progressed slowly. As he lay wrapped in the warmth of my bedding, it was soon apparent that the fever came and with it, the chilled onslaught of darkened dreams. Each groan he made was filled with terror. Each shudder brought worry of reopening his wounds.

I heard the voices of my ancestors calling out to me, telling me it was time to take my greatest journey. My Grandfather called me, whispered in my ear. I knew I had no choice, but to enter his dreamlands. No choice, but to call him back to the land of the living or this wounded stranger would perish.

The night lay heavy beyond the walls of my small cabin. Wind whispered along the meadows and through the timbre. Wolf-song called out. Chills rushed down my spine. With a heavy, worried heart I stood in the center of my room and watched as this strange and beautiful man fought the devils of the fever—his brow heavy with perspiration, his body wracked with chills as he moaned something about a great white darkness. It made me wonder where his dream-walk would lead us and if we were both strong enough to come out of it alive.

I knew I had the strength of my forefathers to



guide me for I was Crow and a Shaman's Granddaughter. I had been on this journey before. But I was drawn to this man like no other. Something in his spirit called to me, stirred my senses. And what of him? Was he strong enough? Would he be able to fight his dream demons? Would he even remember me from a chance encounter? Would fate's fortuity be enough for me to bring him home?

Taking a deep breath to find my center, I shed the remainder of my clothes, crawled in along side his chilled, feverish and shivering body, wrapped myself around him to give him my warmth and strength then closed my eyes. Whether we were ready or not, his dreams beckoned and it was time to begin.

We ran heavy and hard, fast along the timbre as snow churned beneath our feet. I felt the chill of the winter winds pump endlessly through my lungs as fear and adrenaline burned through my limbs. Fire and ice sliced a path to my soul.

All around the darkness called out in the howl of the wolf, seeming to say, *I am coming. You have no where to hide.*

The snow capped trees quivered and quaked with the thunder of our passing. The earth hummed as each step brought us further into the deep white world beyond. Then we stumbled and fell into the arctic chill of the snow. Cold swept



through limbs. Blackness called.

I was fully merged in the world of his dreamland and felt as though I were smothering in the darkness of his fear. I needed to separate myself from him, to free myself from his mind and stand alone if I wished to walk him and me out of the darkness that had become his reality.

I clawed my way from his realm of darkness. It was like digging myself from a drift of snow that had buried me alive. The darkness complete, a void quite possibly like the creation of birth. A spark of light filled me as I dug my way to the top. Adrenaline rushed through my limbs as air forced its way in lungs too tight to be my own until I finally I burst into my own self as though a surge of lightning.

I stood on the peak of a hill, the crisp whiteness of the earth a deep contrast to the dark night all around me. My body felt on fire as I relearned to breathe on my own, each inhalation a tight ache in lungs to tight to hold it. My eyes slowly adjusted to the sparkling snow, the shadowed forest and the fullness of the moon in the black draped sky above.

As the first inklings of being watched washed over and through me, my heart raced. I knew my stranger was with me—in some other form than man for I felt his hunger and his hatred pulsed against my spine as he watched me from the night



beyond. The thing that startled me most was the carnal desires of the man, nefarious and wild just below the surface.

Despite the vast array of emotions I was sensing, I prayed that what I was about to do was right and called out to the darkness, "I will not hurt you." No response came from the shadows.

I turned around in a circle so that I could take in my surroundings. "I am Renee Faroque, my people have walked the hills and the valleys of this land since the Great Mother granted it to our people. I am Crow and I come in peace."

Still no response as the woodlands seemed to take my words, hold them in their hand and seemingly brush them away. "Show yourself to me so I can help you. Let me help to guide you on your way."

\* \* \* \*

Toren, for the first time since his nightmare began, felt the girl's words tumble through him, calm him, fill him with light. Since the darkness had taken him he had been endlessly fighting the great white wolf and the wolf was winning.

Fear made him run blindly through night attempting to flee the beast. But the beast was swift, his jaws snapping, his body fleet and his laughter haunting as it echoed in his ears. Endless



laughter as he spewed his vileness. *You can not escape me. You and I are one. One man, one wolf, one killer.*

Toren screamed, but the laughter continued. And so he ran. Ran through the darkness, his body on fire, the wolf chasing. Laughter and fear led him on. Then suddenly this woman appeared on the rise. Her voice stilled the chaos for but a moment. Called out to the madness of his mind. Stilled the hate. Soothed the anger. Calmed the darkness that devoured his soul.

"Show yourself to me." She said. "Let me help you."

"What makes you think you are capable of aiding a monster?"

\* \* \* \*

The question came from the darkness and Renee held her breath as she gathered her thoughts to focus a response and find the voice's owner. "Tell me your name. Let me aid you." I knew that if he gave me his name we would be one step closer to bringing him back.

Toren struggled to remember. The cold and wind filled him. The earth called him. He wanted nothing more than to run. The beast inside wanted him to run, but it also wanted to tear the throat from the girl. It wanted to feel her life blood as it



filled its jowls. The thought repulsed Toren so much it brought him screaming from the edge of the timbre, crawling on his knees through the snow.

“Great Mother.” I sighted him just off to my right at the edges of the pine dressed in the same tattered snow suit and once again covered in blood. Running, without thought to my own protection, I made my way through the knee deep snow until I reached him. When I sat in the snow and pulled him into my lap, he clutched onto my arms. Shock blue eyes locked with mine.

He groaned. “Help me!”

“Tell me your name.” I brushed the length of soft blond hair from his brow—a brow furrowed with confusion as he fought to remember. I sat silently as images flashed across the doorway of his eyes.

“Toren,” he croaked his voice rough with memory. “My name is Toren Crushing.”

“Good, Toren. The first step. Do you remember how you came to be in the woodlands?”

“I...the wolves. The wolves brought me. I...I don’t know. I don’t remember,” he ground out between clenched teeth. He clung to my arms as though I was a life preserver and letting go would cause me to disappear.

“Think Toren. What do you do with the wolves? Try to remember who you are, what you



did before the cold and the woodlands called to you."

He stared up at me for several moments, silent while he fought the darkness and struggled to remember his life and his sense of self before he came to be here. "I...I study them," he said in a rush, as though if he didn't get the words out they wouldn't be true. "And you. I saw you. I wanted you," he said, need, worry and conviction filled his voice. The he reached up, clutched my face in his hand and pulled me down to the heat of his lips.

The kiss was filled with longing and hunger. Tasted of fear, desire and the disturbing mix of irrational madness. My senses reeled, knocked me off kilter and stirred my blood as nothing ever did before.

Need, burning and unchecked want washed through me. He wound his hands in my hair, pressed my body taut against the hard plains of his rock hard body. The inferno of lust blazed between us as he rolled me beneath him. Every press of his lips hungry, every nip of his teeth searing my flesh with delicious need.

When he tore open my coat the spike of cold December air rushed my flesh and it only made me more manic for his body to lie closer. He answered my unspoken demands with the warmth of his wandering fingers as they sought



flesh to remember. My worries and fears melted under the heated moans of hunger and desire.

His strong fingers reached the flat expanse of my belly, clutching, raking and I froze mid-kiss a small pain before he moved onwards, upwards towards my breast. The kiss changed, more heated, needier, hungrier as his lips swept down the soft flesh of my neck. I was burning alive with desire, lost in the warmth of his kisses – why I was there forgotten as his agile fingers cupped my breast and whirled the taut peak.

When his fingers became more demanding, his lips on my neck more forceful, my moans of desire faded away. “Toren.” I clutched his shoulders. Still he continued. The caresses became groping, the kisses nips tasting of flesh. When his teeth clenched onto my neck and I felt the first hint of nails dig into flesh I shoved him in earnest.

“Toren! Stop, Toren. You’re hurting me. Stop.” I shoved against him with all my might, forcing my arm between us at his throat and pushed against it knowing the pressure would slow his supply of air. My heart was about to burst, desire once again replaced by fear as he lifted his head and I thrust him off me into the snow. Seeing that his eyes were not his own.

“What am I becoming?” he sobbed. “Please. Please help me.”

My heart broke in that moment. I knew I could





do nothing else but try. Gathering him in my arms once more I said, "It's ok, Toren, I'm here. I'll help you." I'm certain it was his kiss of gratitude that sealed my fate. Forcing myself to break free of this carnal madness I ended the gentle kiss, trying to bring the situation back under control.

"Alright, Toren. You study the wolves. Do you remember why they brought you here?" His eyes flashed with horror then and his body quaked – not from the cold or the kiss, no, these things didn't affect him. No, this was from fear.

"The white one," he growled his fingers digging into my arms where he still clung to me. "He's a killer," he told me his voice filled with shocked horror. "He tricked me. He...he's killing me." He sat up in a rush, turning on all fours before me.

I watched shocked, stunned as Toren's entire body glistened like sparkling snow. In a haze like so much moon glow I could only sit in amazed wonder as his human body shimmered with a ripple of light then somehow just fell away. In its place stood a great white wolf.

The rolling growl was the first thing that alerted me Toren Crushing wasn't entirely at home in the body of the wolf. Steel grey eyes to match the moon flashed with contained violence and I knew if I moved I was dead.

*Do you think to save me now?* I was even more



shocked by the sardonic intelligence behind the words than the fact he spoke in the form of the wolf. It took me several seconds to work my way past the knot in my throat and find my voice. Nothing in my ancestral dream-walks had ever shown me this. "If you are still Toren Crushing then yes, I intend to save you." Fear spiked through me and I was scared beyond words, but I knew I had to save him. Somehow.

If he could have smirked at me I think he'd have done so. *What makes you think I won't just tear your throat out and leave you here to die?*

"Because Toren, the human in Toren, won't allow you to do it." I was certain in this knowledge even as the words rolled from my mouth. I didn't even know Toren, but there was something in his human eyes that told me his spirit was pure. That he would never allow harm to come to me or any other human being. That he was the kind of man that would stand against the darkness inside of him and triumph.

The beast laughed and it rolled down my flesh like a dark stain. All of the hairs rose on my body. *So certain you are of your human and his faculties. Such fools. I am the Great White One of this forest. I have lived and hunted this land for a millennium in one form or another—a host of humans—and me their guide. What makes you think that this one has the power over my spirit?*



"Because this human's spirit is stronger," I said with certainty. "And he, unlike those who have gone before, has a millennium of Shaman's as his guide." With the strength of my own spirit filling me and the hands of my forefathers leading me I stood before the Great White Wolf and did as no one had probably ever done before. I faced his darkness.

"My name is Renee Faroque, I am Crow, and my people have walked this great valley since the Great Mother granted it to our people. It is with the knowledge and the power of the great Crow nation that I claim this land and the spirit you have taken. It is with the knowledge and the power of my forefathers that I call Toren Crushing."

My breath froze in my lungs, my spine stiffened with fear, but I shoved that fear deep inside. I called on all of the power of my ancestors, praying like a crazy Shaman that their knowledge and power would come to me, begging the Great Mother to aid me in this quest.

Subtly, the darkness shifted. Like the grey haze that had filled his mind, Toren heard the whisper of her voice call out to him. It came like a breeze across the valley – soft and smooth.

Angered, the wolf growled deep and dark. Slashing and ripping pain through his skull, each slice meant to harm and hinder his return to the



world of light.

A spark of hope soared as I watched the wolf's eyes fill with uncertainty. "I call you Toren Crushing. You are human and your wolves need you."

The great white before me laughed at my choice of words. *He is wolf and he is man. He is killer, and yes, his wolves need him. They need him to lead. To show them to the next kill.*

"No, Toren. Don't listen to him." I stepped forward. "You are a man. If it is true you and this wolf are one then you can control him. Not the other way around. It is your spirit that guides you. Only you can show them how to be proper wolves. How to hunt like real wolves are meant to hunt. Not to kill man. Not to be killers of men. Fight him, Toren. This is but your dream, Toren. You rule here. Wake and you will have won. You just have to wake up."

The words, like a vague whisper of the wind floated to him through the dark haze of anger. The wolf's annoyance crashed through his mind, his hatred and fury beating along his spine. The wolf wanted to rush her, to tear her to threads. There was no way Toren could allow him to do it.

*Kill her, Toren. It would be so easy. She is weak. We are the hunters of these woods. We are the great ones. She is nothing. It would be nothing to take her life.*

"No!" Toren roared. He would never allow it to



happen. It was his will alone that held him still. His force that kept the wolf from attacking. If Toren the man could choose not to attack her, then maybe...

The swimming of uncertainty rushed back and forth in Toren's mind like scattered chaos as he fought the rage of the beast. The great wolf growled and slashed through his mind. Toren screamed, but held his ground. The wolf thrashed and slammed against him and still he did not allow it to move one step towards the girl. The beast snapped its teeth, jaws salivating, and Toren's own growl of fierce perseverance burst from the jowls of the wolf.

"Fight him, Toren," I pleaded as my own pulse rushed with worry. "Wake up. Wake up and return to the land of man." Suddenly, he rushed me, knocked me to the ground, his jaw mere inches from my throat. I heard the thunder of my heart slam in my ears, my chest tightened as my breath left me in a rush of spiked adrenaline and fear. My life flashed before me. "Please, Toren," I begged.



## CHAPTER 7

The world was a white, gray haze wrapped in crystallized diamonds. I blinked back the chill and shook the snow from my fur. I breathed in the lush, deep scent of fear and knew a sense of freedom and power I never knew before.

Licking my lips, past the points of protruding canines, I tasted the lushness of anxiety as it spilled into the crisp winter air. Her fear was magical and tantalizing and it made something in my gut tight with worry.

“Please, Toren. Please wake up.” Her words brought my head around, sparked a memory and a gnashing that ground my teeth together.

What the hell was happening to me? I blinked and the haze cleared. A vision of a memory flashed—a crowded store, toppling groceries, the site of lean legs sauntering a wet retreat. Desire, regret—human emotions. Hunger. Fear. These also human yet primal. Two sides of the same coin



flipping inside me—endlessly. Wordless and violent.

I took a step forward and she visibly trembled, her face flush with trepidation, but the scent of her—panic, anger, her body's lingering fear all mixed with the underlying hint of woman, called to me. The beast roared with the desire to strike, to tear, jaws to snap and rip at her throat until the snow ran red with her blood. But the man—the side that lingered with sanity, clung to the sight of beauty and tenderness before me.

Without warning the beast caught a flash of fear in her eyes and triumphantly, his hatred poured through me, burning and acrid. My mind spasmed and the desire, the need to kill, filled me all over again. I heard myself scream as though in a tunnel of madness, the laughter of the wolf blocking my plight. His will overshadowing mine while his need circumvented my desire to survive.

Blackness and peril filled my veins with the heavy burden of defeat as I felt my body lunge forward. I heard the howl of victory as the great white's madness rushed through me, electric and sharp, slashing in my mind like a flame extinguishing hope.

Awash in a hell of dejected misery, I screamed at the injustice. My voice gruff with animalistic tendencies, I cowered at the darkness that could only be described as a primal urge to kill and



wondered how I ever thought to survive.

*Such pathetic fools.* The ghost of a whisper lingered though my mind amidst the girl's screams. It had to be her who screamed for I now felt her body pressed beneath us—me and the great white terror that I became.

The glorious scent of fear so rich and aromatic it pained my stomach as the wolf brought his muzzle in for a hefty snort. My conscience continuing to scream “No! No!” The wolf in me licked a line up her neck and the salty tang sent our taste buds salivating.

He was going to win and there was nothing I could do about it. Nothing left in me with which to fight. He, who had killed countless, including me, was going to win. He was now going to succeed at completely taking me over. He would kill this girl while we slept the dreams of fools and mystics and if I ever woke to see the lush pines of my valley I would never be Toren Crushing again.

*Say goodbye, Professor.* The last words echoed in my mind—spiteful, distant, hollow and hateful. Our neck flexed and jaws turned to strike. Her scream ripped through the valley, through my mind like a plea to the heaven.

Pain, sudden, gut-wrenching, mind-blowing pain tore through my limbs as I struggled to fight him. Fought the wolf and myself to keep from tearing out her throat. The sounds of screams





mixed with voracious growls erupted in the night. My struggle to fight so immense I wasn't sure where the girl's screams ended and mine began.

The wolf, now frantic and savage shrieked, *No! I am the White Wolf. I am Heinmot Hihhih. You have not this kind of power.*

Amidst searing pain my back bowed, ribs shifted. In the darkness of my mind, like a shadow searching I heard the bellows of the wolf, howling his own wounded song. As a burning rush of heat poured through my body, my flesh exploded from my fur and, in a blinding haze, realization hit me—he was no longer the White Wolf, the great White Lightning—I was.

"Say goodbye, Yellow Wolf. Your reign ends here," I whispered just before collapsing on my angelic Indian Princess.



## CHAPTER 8

I watched her sink below the surface of the water then rise just as quickly. The cocoa cream of her skin glistened with the light of the creek in the early morning sun. The sight of her wet, naked and fresh in the early Spring air brought my body hard with yearning. I stood in the shadows of the timbre watching, wanting.

“Toren! Are you coming or not?”

She knew I was here, she just didn’t know where. It was a game we played over and over since I recovered. I would stalk her—in one form or the other—and she would let me. When I found her...well, let me just say I would know delights I never knew as a mortal man.

“Toren! I know you’re out there. Don’t you want to come for a swim with me?” Her voice was low and seductive.

I believe that is how she saved me, my Indian Princess. Slowly calling out to me through a



dream filled darkened forest. Seductively whispering all the right words.

It had been a very long winter. One I thought for certain that I would never see again. Most of it had been filled with unanswered questions—for many of us. To say the Sheriff is pissed is an understatement. There are many things that it's better good ol' Ted doesn't know.

For now, at least, I know who and what I am, and what it is I now become. There is much to say for a man's sensibilities and his will to survive, and even more for the woman he desires. In the end, we're all still animals. Even the rational ones.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

K.A. M'Lady lives in the burbs of Chicago with her husband, three children, and a rotten beagle who should have been named — Aughtabe — Aughtabe a dog... but we named him Spike instead. She's gone to school to be a Business Assistant, a Criminal Investigator, and an Insurance Agent but she's more at home lost in the pages of mythology and myth, fiction, the worlds of possibilities and all the dark creatures of the night that the night can possibly hold. And she's happily dragging her husband right along with her — though he questions her sanity at times. You can find more of her mayhem on her website — [www.geocities.com/mladyfair12](http://www.geocities.com/mladyfair12). Or drop her a line — [mladyfair12@yahoo.com](mailto:mladyfair12@yahoo.com) — sometimes she does come out of the Darkness to answer her email.