

HEARTBEAT



BELITA RENN

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HEARTBEAT

BY

BELITA RENN

DEDICATION

*To Melissa, I don't think I would be doing this
if it wasn't for you encouraging me to keep
going.*

CHAPTER ONE

The rain was pounding down so hard Tammy could barely see the road twisting around the side of the mountain. Gripping the steering wheel in a strangle hold, she leaned forward to wipe at the inside of the window, hoping against reality that there was fog on the inside of the windshield. The car's defrost system was doing its job, so she was disappointed again. "So what is new? I must have a *Dump Here* billboard above my head." She had been a fool to take directions from a stranger without having a map to back up their claims. He had seemed knowledgeable and innocent enough at the time, but now that she had time to reconsider, he had looked at her long and hard before giving the directions. At the time, she had thought he was going over the information in his mind before speaking. Now she wondered if he hadn't sent her the wrong way on purpose.

"You are being paranoid again, Tammy. The guy had no reason to give you false information. Look, there isn't a car following you." Her gaze

moved to the rearview mirror. Only road—empty road—stretched behind her, no stalking car, no creepy villain. The car was practically crawling up the mountain road so she had plenty of time to look. “I could have walked and reached Dark Corner by now.” Switching back to the front view, a loud grinding sound above her car startled her, which caused her heart to jump. She was going to have an airplane land on her head. *Well isn't this great? I am going to die in pouring rain in a ball of flames!* Casting a quick glance out the window, she searched the sky for the plane. A loud thundering sound behind the car drew her gaze to the rearview mirror. Something fell behind the car. She didn't see it clearly because the window was fogged, but it looked like movement. Twisting to gaze over her shoulder, she eased her foot off the gas pedal. She was going so slow the car was rolling to a stop without the help of the accelerator. Something else fell past her rear window, along with rocks, limbs, a tree trunk, and dirt. *Holy Cripes!* The mountain was having a landslide. At least that is what it looked like to her. Twisting forward in the seat, she hit her foot on the gas pedal. The rear of the car fishtailed, the rear moving dangerously near the edge on the two-lane road that should have been only one lane. Snapping her foot away from the pedal allowed the car to stop skidding in the mud. A

large object hit the trunk of her car. Small objects bounced off the roof. A rock hit the windshield and caused her to gasp in fear. Easing her foot against the pedal, she accelerated and the car moved forward.

Pounding her palm against the wheel, she urged the car to hurry, slowly increasing pressure on the pedal. Turning around a sharp bend in the road, she appeared to have left the landslide behind. Now all she had to do was worry about the rest of the mountain falling down on top of her head. "You know I didn't mean it when I said I had a billboard that said *Dump Here* on my head. You didn't have to take me literally." She was speaking to the mountain, merely to hear the sound of a voice. Any voice was better than the silence in the car surrounded by the raging wind buffing against the side of the mountain and the pounding rain that was giving her a throbbing headache.

The road continued to climb and then finally she was on top of the mountain. A small service station appeared on her right. She pulled her car beneath the carport over the gas pumps and shifted into park. Lowering her face against the wheel, she waited for her heartbeat to slow while catching her breath. Feeling as though she was more calm and able to act without becoming hysterical, she shoved open the car door. The

gusting wind blew rain beneath the shelter, splattering it into her body. The wind tugged at the door, but she managed to keep hold on the inside handle to prevent the wind from wrenching it from her hand. Stepping out, she slammed the door. Holding her coat closed against the biting cold of the frosty air, she ran to the store entrance and pushed her way inside. Scanning the store, she found the counter with the cash register absent of human life.

"Hello?" she called out, absently raking a strand of hair from her face. The blonde tresses were so fine they were difficult to keep confined in a business knot atop her head. Knowing her hair was falling and that she must look a fright, she pulled the combs from her hair and allowed it to spill over her shoulders. Moving forward, she glanced down the aisles, looking for life. "Hello, anyone here?" Reaching the counter, she stood on tiptoes and leaned over to look behind on the floor, just in case. Pictures hanging on the wall depicted dead people lying on the floor behind the counter. "Thanks, just the image I need in my mind now," she spoke dryly to the absent clerk. Lowering her eyes, she scanned the floor, seeing only a desk chair. Relieved, she slumped onto the counter.

A wolf whistle grabbed her attention. She realized leaning over the counter made her skirt

hike up in the back and created a compromising view. Straightening and spinning at the same time, she faced the man coming down the aisle from the back. There must have been a hidden door she hadn't spotted.

He flashed a wide dazzling smile. "You going to rob me, sweetheart?" he questioned in a jovial tone as he sauntered forward.

There was a slight accent to his deep timbre, not enough to make it difficult to understand his words, but just enough to flavor and make it sound seductive. By looking at him, she wasn't able to place his origin. He had tanned skin—which helped little. He could be from a hundred different locations, including islands. Dressed in dark brown clothing, his blue eyes seemed unusually bright because of their light sky color. He had a lean body with wide shoulders, and brown hair with a silver shimmer. Those highlights could never be found in a bottle, and on him, they were breathtaking.

Warmth of a blush pinked her cheeks. He had caught her at the counter. It was an understandable question. Still, it embarrassed her that anyone would think she would steal from them. "Certainly not. I wasn't stealing. I stopped, merely to warn you there has been a landslide on the road—down the hill about a mile."

His smile hitched up a notch as though the information pleased him. As quick as a blink, his expression sobered. "You're coming from Deadwood?"

"Yes."

"Anyone hurt that you know of, by the slide?"

"No. There wasn't anyone on the road behind me. It fell right behind my car. Trees, rocks, dirt, everything came sliding into the road and chunks hitting my car."

"It must have shaken you up a bit. Would you like a drink to help settle your nerves?" He walked right up and into her comfort zone before stopping. Reaching out a casual hand, he raked a dangling tress behind her ear.

His nearness was disturbing her already shaking limbs and quaking nerves. Being tall forced her to look up at him towering a head higher than her five and a half feet. Smiling in invitation, he tilted his head adorably and gazed at her face with an expression of devotion. *Well look at this cookie all dipped in chocolate just for me.* He was licking good and she was ready to volunteer her tongue. She gazed at his strikingly handsome features, feeling compelled to lust for the unobtainable. Never had she seen a more alluring man.

His wide mouth twitched on the edges. "Miss, do you need a drink?"

"Not while I'm driving, thanks." Her gaze locked with his and she felt as though she were drowning in a fish bowl of lust. "The rain certainly makes this a fish bowl."

"I beg your pardon?"

She realized she completed a statement in her mind out loud. "Oh nothing...mostly complaining about the storm."

"It certainly is a bad one. If this place were inverted it would be as if we were swimming in a fish bowl. Of course, it could be worse. I was trapped up here during a snow for two weeks once. I ran out of condoms the first day. It was pure hell."

Tilt! Game over! This man was a stranger. Snapping to her senses, she stepped away from the counter and started walking toward the door. She had no time for sexual overtures. Now, if she had more time, she would definitely like to explore this area with him. He had a sexual appeal that reached out to her. "I wanted to let you know about the road."

Lifting his voice, he called after her, "I can offer you shelter from the storm, and a hot bed." Leaning against the counter, he was toying with an object in his hand when she glanced back.

If she wasn't mistaken, it was a condom. Where had it come from? His pocket? She was certain he hadn't had it in his hand when he walked from the

rear of the building. "I suppose you have plenty of condoms." She teased to see if he was accustomed to being this bold with women passing though.

"Yes." Dark with lust, his midnight gaze slipped down her body, stripping her and boldly stroking her desires. "A full stock."

She smiled. "Thank you. No. I have an important meeting. I must go."

"Beautiful women have important things to do." Shrugging a dismissive shoulder, he said it almost in a resigned tone, yet an underlying wistfulness brought a smile to her lips. It made her feel good that the attraction wasn't all one-sided. She liked thinking that she appealed to him also. "It was a foolish idea, but I felt I had to ask before the opportunity passed. No offense intended. Must be the storm affecting my hormones. The wildness of nature tends to agitate me and make me restless. I'm feeling charged up."

Her gaze was dragging her heart up her throat as his appeal pulled at her longings like a magnet. Wishing she could stay and make love to this sensual bundle of alluring looks and gestures, she knew if she didn't sell the client at this meeting, she would be losing a huge account. Possibly lose her job as well, as her boss would be furious. He was counting on her to deliver this account wrapped in ribbons.

Sighing, she resigned herself to living with the memory of his seductive allure. Pulling the door open, she paused for a moment to cast him a last lustful gaze. "If I had the time, you wouldn't have any condoms to sell. You would be hiding them from your customers." Blowing him a kiss, she stepped into a cold spray of water and wind.

"I'd like to find out how that kind of greed feels," he said softly.

The wind stilled at that instant and she heard his words.

Warmed by the conversation, her nervous fear had disappeared as she hurried to the car. Sliding onto the seat, she buckled the safety belt, started the engine and wipers, then shifted into gear. The conversation sifted and replayed through her mind. A lonely man seeking female companionship during a storm, there was nothing strange about the sexual overtures. Her behavior had been wrong. She should never have said that about making him hoard the condoms. It had just seemed natural, as he had made her feel beautiful and able to make men dance to her tune. She hadn't felt that way since she was a teenager.

These days, dressed in business suits, she hurried from one business meeting to the next. Dealing with men on equal footing had a price, and that had been to squash her sexuality. She had learned the hard way not to have affairs with the

men with which she had business dealings. As she never had time for social gatherings with friends, she secluded herself in her private life. There were no opportunities to meet men, therefore no dates, and worst, no sex life. Sighing, she started the car down the sloping hillside.

This was going to be worse than the climb up the hill. The vehicle speed wanted to climb, but her view was almost blinded by the pounding rain. Stopping the car, she shifted into first and then started again. This time, instead of touching the gas, she allowed the car to coast, tapping her brakes to keep the speed down. Her body full of tension, she kept her eyes and concentration on the winding road. Rounding a bend, she came to a level spot that was completely flooded by pouring water. A flooded stream had risen above the banks. Unable to see if there was a bridge or road that should be present, she set the brake and opened the door. Moving to the side of the road, she searched for a stick in the ditch.

Finding one that was about three feet long, she walked to the rushing water and thrust the stick into the stream, quickly connecting with the road beneath. Stepping into the rushing water, she gritted her teeth against the cold swirling around her ankles and thrust the stick into the puddle again. She eased forward, but then it occurred to her that she could be on a ledge. Quickly she

stepped back to the edge of the water and thrust the stick in all the way across the road. Breathing a sigh of relief, she stepped into the rushing torrent again and repeated the task. Only the last thrust never contacted the road. Easing forward again, she moved back across the road. There was a chance it was only the one spot and she could drive around it.

Rain was running over her face so quickly she didn't bother to wipe it away, however, she was forced to tuck her hair behind her ears. She wore it breast length, strictly for her own pleasure. At work it was always in a bun. At home she allowed it to swing around her body. It was one of her few concessions to feminine behavior. The stick disappeared repeatedly, until she was forced to admit there was no way across—the bridge, or road, had washed away.

Sloshing through the pouring water, she made her way back to the car. Jerking the door open, she plopped onto the seat. Closing the door, she laid her head back and cried. Tears of fatigue and frustration flowed from her eyes.

As if the world needs more water – I have to add my share. Mocking herself, she wiped her eyes, blew her nose, and decided it was time to take stock of her situation. She had a dry change of clothing in her suitcase. A happy thought as she was

shivering from the cold in her wet clothing. Only the suitcase was in the trunk.

Her thoughts returned to the man dressed in chocolate at the store. He had offered her a bed. She didn't object to the idea of sleeping with him, but she hadn't passed a house. Unless he lived in the back of the small store, there would be no bed. Chuckling, she thought of him making love to her against the shelves in the store. Of course, they could always empty out a shelf or two and make themselves a bed to sleep on. "A hard metal bed wasn't what I had in mind for the night."

She longed for a hot bath, warm fire and a bottle of wine to help her relax the tension in her muscles. Twisting, she glanced out the rear window. Should she back the car up the hill? Could she--it was a long way? It was also a long walk in the pouring rain dragging a suitcase. Even if it was only a small overnight bag and it had wheels, it was also cloth and would soon be soaking wet and heavy. Soon it would be dark was she going to back up the road or sleep in the car? Time was short she had to make a decision now. Putting the car into reverse, she began the slow tedious task of backing up the winding road. *Meeting no cars would be a big help.*

It was growing dark when she finally rounded the bend and spotted the small store. Tears of exhaustion filled her eyes. Wiping them away, she

backed into the parking lot and stopped the car. The store looked dark. If he had gone home, her backing ordeal had been for nothing. She climbed tired and slow from the vehicle. Splashing through the pooling water, she batted tears and rain from her eyes. *Stiffen you spine, woman. You can sleep in your car for one night.*

Reaching the entrance, she twisted the knob, but it didn't budge. Pounding her fist on the door, she called out, "Hello, are you in there?" Looking through the darkened windows, she saw no movement. Sighing, she knocked one last time and waited. Turning away, she gazed at her car from the protection of the shelter that covered from gas pumps to the doorway. She would pull her car beneath the shelter. At least it would give a little protection from the wind. Why hadn't she parked before the store and avoided another soaking? *Because I was too cold and wet to care.* Crossing the parking lot, she returned to her car and then drove beneath the shelter.

Stepping from the car, she moved to the trunk and tugged out her suitcase. Hurrying back to the front, she wondered if she could stand the cold long enough to change into dry clothing? Opening the rear door, she tossed her case onto the seat. Removing her coat, shivering as the wind rushed at her back, covered only in a thin linen blouse, she tossed it onto the floorboard. Kicking off her

shoes was no real hardship as her feet were frozen anyway. Her stockings and underpants followed the shoes onto the floorboard. They weren't much, but she hadn't expected to need clothing to keep warm. The dry clothing in the suitcase wasn't going to provide her with a lot of warmth, but it would be better than the wet things she had on.

Casting a glance down the road, she made certain no cars were coming, then remembered they couldn't make it past the landslide. Her dripping top had to go next, then her bra, followed by the skirt. Nude, she reached for the dry clothing in her suitcase. Her teeth were chattering from the cold, her body shaking hard and her fingers felt numb and clumsy. Leaning into the car, she picked up the bra and panties. As she straightened, strong arms lifted her from the ground. A startled squeal erupted from her throat.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"Freezing to death! I was trying to put on some dry clothes." She held her bra and panties up for him to see as he stomped around the car to the entrance of the store.

He wore a leather coat and it abraded her skin as her body shook with shivers beyond her control. He deposited her to stand on the cold tile floor. "Stay put, I will get your things," he ordered as he stomped out the door and slammed it closed against the biting wind.

Shaking all over, she leaned against the counter and slid her feet into her panties. She was tugging them around her ankles when he opened the door and stepped inside.

His gaze slid slowly up her nude form as though he had just realized she was naked. Her suitcase clamped to his body beneath his arm, he strode past her. "This way."

Forced to leave immediately, she had to snatch the panties off her feet and run after him. Hurrying along behind him, she hoped he had a heater in the back. Shoving her arms in her bra straps, she pushed it against her body, while holding the panties in her teeth. Trying to reach around and close the clasp, while trotting after his long strides was difficult. Finally, she managed to hook the bra in place.

Pushing open a hidden door that had small shelves containing condiments, he stepped through and continued walking. "Close the door, please," he instructed, glancing over his shoulder.

Closing the door, she paused to lean against the wall and yank on her panties. At least now she didn't feel like a streaker flaunting her body. Crossing the storage room, he pushed open another hidden door and stepped through. Reaching the doorway, her gaze slipped past him into the long dark hallway. The other end of the hall wasn't visible. Apprehension gripped her

tight nerves. She knew nothing about this man. Did anyone know of this hidden location? Was it safe to go with him? Was she a total fool to trust him with her life? Sexual attraction was no guarantee that he wasn't a serial killer.

"Close the door," he said. "You are letting the cold air in." He spoke matter-of-factly.

Surely it meant he wasn't feeling violent. Could she trust her instincts just this once? Puffing out a breath, she stepped into the second hall and closed the door. Lights came on overhead. It was a normal white hallway without pictures or windows. Testing the door to see if it would open, she was relieved when the knob turned easily. The light blinked off. Gazing down the hall, she watched to see if he would turn to prevent her from leaving. He slowed, but didn't return and she breathed a sigh of relief.

Closing the door again, the light sprang on. The floor had an incline and she was moving downward. Following slowly, she watched him disappear around a turn. Reaching the turn, she stopped and peeked around the wall. A large living room with a blazing fire in the hearth, normal furniture, and decorations greeted her eyes. Stepping into the room, she hurried to the hearth. The furnishings were heavy and sturdy. The room was neat and clean. A rug covered the floor. The sofa was soft brocade with stripes of tan

and green. There were paintings of beautiful scenery on the walls, but no windows. Silence greeted her ears--total silence. The rain had stopped. Turning she scanned the room for the man with her case. He stepped into the room from a hall opposite the room and held out a heavy long bathrobe for her.

"Slip this on. I brought you the phone so you can call your family and let them know where you are stranded. You don't want to make them worry unnecessarily." She saw understanding in his gaze.

"The rain has stopped." Smiling, she advanced to accept the robe and phone. It would be warmer than her thin silk suit. Hitting the call button on the phone, she was relieved to receive a dial tone. She quickly punched in the number.

"No. We are underground. You cannot hear it. Only the rear of the kitchen extends from beneath the store and the side of the mountain. It provides an outcropping and gives us a backyard. There's a small road leading out and around to the road you came in on."

"Really, that is why you didn't hear me knock? What made you decide to come back to the store?" The phone was ringing in her ear. Her answering machine picked up. "Hi, Mom. The road is washed out. I am on Route Twelve at the small gas station on top of the mountain. The man that owns

it has a home underground beneath the store and I am staying with him.” She smiled as though listening to her mother. “He seems like a very nice man, Mom. He said the kitchen is outside the mountain so it isn’t totally underground. I will call you later with an update. Love you. Bye.” She switched off the phone. As long as someone knew where to look for her, she wasn’t going to worry. He had no way of knowing she had talked to her answering machine, and her roommate would receive the message when she returned home. Were she to disappear, the police knew where to look. That was enough for her to feel comfortable.

“I returned upstairs because a bell goes off when a car enters the shelter.”

Shoving her arms into the robe, she was pulling the lapels together when another man stepped into view. Shifting nervously, she moved closer to the fire. He was handsome in a different way. His features were bold, and on the large side, from his wide mouth and square jaw to his brow. His shoulders were large like a body builder.

“I’m Blake Floyd. This is my partner, Ken Lee,” her host continued.

She nodded to Mr. Lee. The name suited him as she realized he did have a hint of Oriental in his features. *Partner? Partner – as in wife or husband?* Had she intruded into their lives when he had only been flirting and didn’t mean a word of what

he had said? She forced a smile. "I am pleased to meet both of you. I'm Tammy Sinclair. Forgive my intrusion into your lives. The road is washed out, and as I told Mr. Floyd before, there is a landslide on the other side of the mountain." Shrugging, she shook from a cold shiver racking her body. There was nothing she could do about the situation. *Only, it is a shame.* For a few minutes, she had lived a dream of making love to handsome Mr. Floyd. "I will try not to disturb you any more than necessary," she assured them both.

"Is this the lady that was going to help you use up all of the condoms?" Ken asked Blake, a grin tugging at his mouth.

"Yes." Blake smiled.

"Sorry about that. I didn't know he was attached," she admitted wryly.

Both men stared at her for a moment, then Ken burst out laughing and slapped Blake on the shoulder. "We're business partners, not married."

Her gaze slid from his humorous expression to Blake's intense expression. Blake didn't look happy to have her as a guest. After the flirting, there had to be a reason. Biting her bottom lip, she wondered if it would be rude to ask if they were lovers? *Of course it would be. It is none of my business.*

"I'll talk to you later, Blake. Ms. Sinclair," nodding toward her, the big man turned and strode from the room.

"I don't wish to make problems for you. I will try to stay out of your way."

"Do you always strip before closed businesses?" Moving around a side chair, he settled on the seat and stretched his long legs before him, then crossed his ankles. His feet were bare.

"Of course not. I was wet and freezing. I knew the store was closed and no cars would be coming--the road is out in both directions. How was I to know you were living behind, or beneath, the store? I did knock first."

"Where did you think I had gone? You knew the roads were out."

"How do I know? Through the woods to your home, I suppose."

"Hmm. Would you like something to eat or drink?"

"Yes, if it is not too much bother."

"And if it is?" he queried wryly, his dark eyebrows lifting.

"I will do without, naturally." *Is he deliberately trying to embarrass me?* His question had certainly made her feel defensive.

Sighing, he rose from the seat. "I will prepare you a tray. Stay close to the fire and get warm."

"Thank you. I can sleep on the sofa and keep the fire going. I really don't mind." It would make her feel less of a burden if she could do something to help him.

"If that is your wish." Turning, he left the room. "Whatever makes you comfortable," he mocked as he walked away.

Perhaps she should sleep in the car after all. He wasn't pleased at all with her presence. She didn't believe he was upset and distant because she had stripped in his parking lot. The only reason she could think of was that Ken Lee was his lover. Perhaps he was closet gay and didn't like people to know he had a male lover--that could be why he flirted. "Shoot," she pouted, hitting her knee with her fist. "Why do all the really handsome guys I meet turn out to be gay?"

"I don't know. Perhaps you don't get out enough?" He stood in the doorway with a decanter in one hand and two glasses in the other. "I brought some wine. It should help ward off a cold. Be back with the food in a jiff." Setting the glasses and decanter on the end table, he turned and departed.

"What a mess." Pouring wine into one of the cut crystal glasses, she inserted a finger and let the wine splash over it into the glass. Popping the finger into her mouth, she tested the flavor of the wine. "A dessert wine...yum." Lifting the glass,

she took a sip and let it roll around on her tongue. The pleasure of the flavor washed through her muscles. A glass of this would go a long way toward making her feel relaxed. In this tense atmosphere, she needed a little outside assistance.

Blake returned with the tray and set it on the hearth before her. "Eat up. Your body needs fuel to burn so it can warm you."

"Does it happen a lot--the landslides, and the bridge going out?" Removing a silver dome, she uncovered a plate with ham, cheese, biscuits, and a mixture of vegetables.

"No, thank goodness."

"I really am sorry to impose on you like this."

"It's not a problem. Don't get me wrong. I don't object to you being here."

He may be saying he didn't care, but he certainly didn't appear pleased.

"I don't enjoy being stranded any more than anyone else. I sympathize with your problem. I apologize for acting rude and for flirting. I don't want you to fear that I am going to attack you at any second."

"I am not frightened of you, Blake. And I enjoyed the flirts. I just feel awkward to be thrust upon you like this."

"There being two of us doesn't help, right? If you will excuse me, I have something to do while

you eat." Moving to the hall that led to the back of his home, he disappeared.

Eating, she watched the flickering flames and longed for what might have been. When he returned, he dropped her purse on the sofa and then went straight through to the side door and disappeared. Soon he returned with an armload of bedding and two large pillows. Placing the load on the sofa, he cast a friendly smile. "That should do it. Do you want anything else?"

"I would like to take a bath, if that's okay."

"Certainly. First door on your left when you enter this back hall." He straightened, gazing at her as though he had something more to say. "Well, if you don't want anything else, I will leave you to it." His tone was suggestive. Almost as though he was hoping she would say she wanted him between the sheets.

If it weren't for Ken, she could believe that he wanted her. Biting her bottom lip, she considered asking if Ken was his lover. The chemistry between them was strong. She had never wanted to rub her body against a man like a cat and purr before, but she felt that way with Blake. She felt certain he could make her purr. She opened her mouth to ask.

"Just leave the tray on the table in the kitchen, if you would. It is the second door on the right." Tossing up a hand, he strolled from the room.

Watching him walk away, she knew it was probably for the best. Ken was probably waiting for him patiently while Blake took care of their unwelcome guest. However, if he wasn't with Ken, she didn't know if one day would be enough to satisfy her longing for him. Suddenly, she felt very lonely. The loneliness of her life seemed to close in on her. She couldn't expect Blake to remain and keep her company, but she wished he had.

Blake was an attractive man, and he had a man. She was an attractive woman--why couldn't she have a man that she wanted? *It's your own fault, and you know it.* Yes, she knew she allowed her work to consume her free time, but that didn't make her happy about the situation. She thought of how he had looked when she first saw him in the store. Striding down the aisle toward her, his body appeared to be harnessed power. His eyes had been warm and inviting and his voice was seductive. Just thinking about it made her insides clench with longing to possess him. Sighing, she shifted her gaze to the empty doorway. Her life was full of empty doorways. Just once, she would love to look up and find her man gazing at her with tenderness. *Her man*, what a wonderful thought. A few years ago it wouldn't have bothered her that there was no special man in her life. Even a year ago, she hadn't been bothered.

Sure, there had been occasional men, but no relationship with any meaning.

All men didn't think of relationships as disposable. Blake wouldn't. It certainly had been the opinion of the men she had dated. It suited her at the time, but now she was merely disappointed with them. It hadn't bothered her that they had walked away. In most cases it was time for them to go as far as she was concerned. Her family and the few friends that she had kept in touch with had families of their own. They didn't have a lot of free time, and it had always suited her that they didn't need a lot from her. Although happy for them, she watched her friends and parents now and felt a little jealous of their contented marriages. Did she want a relationship with a man with whom she could grow old and comfortable?

Sure, I would love to have a man like Blake, but could I have a healthy relationship? Doubt was yet another reason for her to bury herself in work. If she was busy, she had no time to think about herself. If she couldn't do it right, it was better to continue dreaming about men like Blake and having disposable relationships. After eating, she carried the tray to the kitchen and then washed the dishes. No way did she expect him to wash her dirty dishes. A look out a back window to the dark beyond and she saw rain hitting against the glass.

Finding the bathroom across the hall, she filled the tub with streaming, hot water. It was heaven to sink into the cradling warmth after tromping around in the cold rainwater. Blowing up an inflatable pillow she found beside the tub, she filled it until it was nice and soft, before placing it under her head. She pinned her hair on top of her head with bobby pins she had in her purse. Relaxing against the pillow, she closed her eyes and allowed the soothing waters to work its magic on her tired muscles.

"That looks wonderful." Blake's deep voice was vibrant with sensual undertones.

He had found her standing naked before his store so there was no reason for him to think he was intruding on her privacy. She would have preferred to be found dripping wet instead of naked but the fates had chosen to wait until she removed her wet things before he found her. It was doubtful he thought of her as a saintly sort. More than likely, he thought she was on the wild side and perhaps a little mad.

Hesitating before she opened her eyelids, she drank in the thrill of knowing he was in the room with her, watching her in the relaxing waters. Her body was concealed beneath the bubbles, so she could take a moment for the fantasy that he wanted to be her lover. That he didn't think she was insane for changing clothes in the street. Of

course, since he hadn't felt guilt over walking into the bath while she was occupying it, he probably thought she was without morals. She would be happy to play the part for a night.

Opening her eyes, she gazed straight into Blake's midnight gaze. Arms crossed over his chest, he was leaning against the doorframe and looking very delectable. She hadn't felt there was a need to lock the door as her host was otherwise inclined. After watching Jack the Ripper a hundred times over the years, you would think she would have been afraid in a stranger's home, but she hadn't been the least nervous since calling home, and still wasn't. In fact, she wished he would make a pass. What was noticeable was that he wasn't acting unhappy about her presence now. Was he interested in her as a friend or a lover?

"I haven't taken a bubble bath in so long I can't even remember the last time. You certainly appear to be enjoying it."

His deep rumble vibrated and stimulated her nervous system. She felt like purring just from the sound of his voice. She could really enjoy a man like Blake. However, it appeared he was more interested in the bubble bath than his guest. Was he asking for an invitation? "Um, I am. This is what I have longed for since I stepped into that cold rain and got soaked."

"I am glad you risked getting wet to check the bridge. You could have been killed had you driven into that water. It makes me furious that I let you drive away without warning you to be careful at the bridges. If you had gotten killed, I would have blamed myself. I am sorry you are missing your meeting, and that you are forced to stay here with me. But I would rather you be here than at the bottom of the river."

"I haven't even thought of the meeting. I will need to use your phone again."

"Out of order. I tried to use it a minute ago. Of course, you are welcome to keep trying. The power is out, too, which is why the store lights were off. I usually leave them on. I have a generator down here to power the house."

"I will try to reach them in the morning. The business is probably closed now anyway."

"I'm glad you were able to reach your family before the phone went out."

"Actually, I had to leave a message on the machine for my roommate, her nickname is Mom. She will pass on the information."

He nodded his gaze on the bubbles covering her. "Um, that looks so wonderful. I wish I could join you."

Why not invite him? He can always decline. I can always pretend I am bathing with a female friend,

unless he makes a move. "Sure come on in. I am certain we can manage. It is a big tub."

He shucked the shirt before her sentence was complete.

Dark hair adorned his broad chest and down the center of his stomach. She looked away as he removed his pants. Of course, she was tempted to peek, but she would die of shame if he caught her. Moving to the end of the tub where she sat, he nudged her forward with a hand on her shoulder. Once she bent forward, he stepped in behind her. She could well imagine his scrotum hanging above her head and felt heat emanating from him as his soft flesh slid down her back. Worried about him being so close, she suggested, "Wouldn't you be more comfortable at the other end?"

"No, this way is best to do a double in this tub." Sitting behind her, he stretched long hair-dusted legs on the outer sides of her body. His long arms slid beneath her arms and circled her body, his hands brushing against her breasts. She leaned back to avoid them and found her back pressed against his chest. *Is he trying to find out how far this wild woman is willing to go? I will be glad to show him.*

"That's the way. Lean back and I will bathe you."

"Bathe me?" she queried in a soft tone. Was he going to torture her? Apparently he was. His

hands started moving over her body, stroking the bubbles against her, crushing them against her breasts and shoulders. Biting her lips, she fought her natural reaction to his hands on her body. *Think of him as a woman.* She thought she was winning, until he squeezed her nipple and rolled it. Moaning deep in her throat, she arched against his chest.

Embarrassed, she turned her face to his throat. Now he knew she had no moral objections where he was concerned. Also, he knew it didn't matter if he was in a relationship or not. She made it easy for him to believe she was a woman of loose morals. *They may be lenient, but not that lax. I'm not as sexually liberated as I allowed him to believe. The man probably thinks I will spread my legs for anyone.* It was humiliating that she had proved he had no reason to be honorable to her. "I'm sorry, but it has been a long time for me." He wouldn't believe her, but she needed to say it anyway.

"I shall be happy to satisfy your immediate need now."

"Oh, I don't think that would be a good idea."

"As you wish," he conceded in a tone that said he didn't think she had made the right decision.

Had she passed up her chance with him? She wished she could see his face, read his expression. He continued stroking and exciting her body. Lifting her breasts as though judging their weight,

he squeezed them gently. Perhaps, he was discovering what a woman's body was like for the first time.

Leaning forward, his shoulder pressed against her shoulder, nudging her to lean to the side. He thrust his hand between her thighs and rubbed her female lips.

Panting, she closed her eyes and prayed he didn't plan to wash her there with the detail to the task he had performed on her breasts. His finger slipped between her labia and rubbed slowly up and down.

Again she was unable to control the rumble of pleasure in her throat as his thumb stroked across her clit and his fingertips massaged the tender pink flesh that was ready to burst her mind into flames.

"I cannot force you to go to bed like this, Tammy. You are ready to explode. It would be unforgivable. I am not that terrible a host."

"Don't let it bother you. You aren't obligated in any way."

Shifting his body, he lifted her onto his thigh.

"What are you doing?" Startled, she grasped his shoulder for support.

Lifting her arm around his neck, he settled it on the far shoulder. His head came forward and his tongue licked her nipple. Gasping, her body

jerked as he rubbed against her clit, then thrust two fingers into her slick sheath.

"God you are so wet. My cock would slide right in you now." His words caused longing to rip through her insides.

"I'm embarrassed to be this needy." Swallowing the husky note of desire in her voice, she tried to clear her throat. But she couldn't have stopped him if Ken had walked into the room. A deep groan of appreciation rose from her chest. He sucked her nipple into his mouth and gave it several deep tugs with his tongue. Her hips rolled on his thigh with the deep thrusts of his fingers. She moaned deep, her mind trapped on the threshold of climax.

"Do you want my cock in you, Tammy?"

"Oh yes, please." Anything--he could do anything to her at this moment--and she wouldn't care as long as he would give her the climax his body had inspired. She whimpered with need when he removed his hand from between her thighs.

"Get up on your knees. I want to take you that way. Hold the end of the tub."

It was a struggle changing positions, with his help she managed. She knew she shouldn't be encouraging him to be unfaithful to Ken, but what if they didn't have that kind of a relationship?

Coming up behind her on his knees, his shaft slid into her slickness.

"A perfect fit. A perfect friction," he encouraged with a sound of satisfaction.

"I don't think I am going to last more than a heartbeat," she gasped, as he thrust deep with a powerful stroke and then withdrew with slow deliberation.

"I have a feeling you can manage more than one." He thrust hard, rubbing against that shattering spot that she could not reach satisfactorily without a man. His scrotum slapped between her thighs, against her exposed clitoris. Biting her arm, she screeched, as softly as possible, considering the overwhelming emotions that burst through her body.

He slammed into her hard, combating with her driving pelvis with equalizing force.

"Oh Saints above!"

"No, baby, that's me," he murmured against her ear.

Panting for breath, she held on tight and rode the waves of aftershocks and a second climax before he thrust deep and stayed, spewing his seed into her body.

Gasping for breath, she chuckled. "We forgot the condom."

"Hum, I'm afraid I was so deep in passion I could think of nothing more than burrowing deep

in your hot juices, and feeling your muscles clamp around me." Moaning softly, he laid his head against her hair. "I am sorry, if my seed plants." He frowned for a moment and then shrugged. "It is too late to cry over it now. I'll use one next time we meet for a heartbeat moment. You are going to sleep with me, aren't you?"

"What would Ken think?"

"Who cares? He is gone for the night anyway." Leaning against her ear, he growled softly and nipped her ear. "I'm glad you took the mountain road. I would have taken you straight to bed when you arrived if you had stayed voluntarily. I was worried about making a move since you were forced to stay. I couldn't stay away. I figured you could always tell me to leave. Now it is my turn to be bathed."

Chuckling, she turned into his arms. "One bath coming up."

"Really? Me, too." He rubbed his still hard erection against her belly. "Up and ready for round two."

CHAPTER TWO

Bathing him with the slow caressing moves he had used on her, she teased his body by avoiding the protruding shaft. It bobbed each time she drew near, filling her with satisfaction. Although she was curious, she didn't want to talk about Ken. Reminding him that he was cheating on his lover wouldn't be conducive to an enjoyable night. From what he had said, Blake wanted this to be a night of passion. In the morning, if she was forced to pretend the night had never happened, for his sake, she would make certain she was distant. She wanted this night!

His erection bobbed as she washed his scrotum. Blake growled at her like an animal giving fair warning that she was entering dangerous territory. Smiling, she studied him beneath hooded eyelids. "I think someone is growing interested in playing wolf to my red riding hood."

"Indeed, I want that red hood riding my shaft."

"I noticed your accent. Where are you from?" Her fingers raked through the curls at the base of his engorged flesh while she watched his shaft and avoided touching it.

"Here," he all but growled the word.

"Where were your parents from?" Cupping her fingers, she held them near his mushroom head without touching. His shaft waved, seeking her touch. It was a challenge to avoid the shifting erection.

"Spain and Canada, now stop teasing me, woman, before I completely lose control."

Chuckling, she dropped her hand away and rose. "I am beginning to prune." Grasping the safety bar, she stepped onto the cool tile floor. "Your home is amazing. I would never have believed an underground home could have the appearance of a penthouse."

Water splashing around him, Blake rose from the tub and stepped out. Her hand closed around a towel as he scooped her up into his arms and carried her from the room. Laying her head on his shoulder, she admired his strength as he strode down the hall. Kicking open a partially closed door, he moved into the room with the grace of a practiced Casanova.

"You have done this before."

"Never has anyone broken my control before." Tossing her onto the king size bed, he followed her onto the mattress.

"What were you trying to control?"

"I have never walked in on a guest before, for starters. Then you drive me crazy by teasing me beyond endurance." Grasping her arms, he drew them above her head and held them easily within one large fist, claiming her mouth with the determination and passion of a man out of control. His legs dropped onto the bed between her thighs, he spread his legs wide, forcing her legs to part. "Tell me you want me," he demanded, his voice harsh with desire.

"I do want you."

Wet heat from his hard torso lay down upon her body. Swiftly positioned, he shoved into her entrance. Her body flexed against him in a spasm of pleasure as he pushed his thick rod deep into her body.

"Hum, I do believe you are bigger." Her body moved up with urgency to meet his thrusts. His size was hindering her body's reaction to his penetration.

"I am?" Frowning for a moment, then he smiled and licked up her jaw and moved to lap her earlobe.

Her body shuddered in response. Panting for breath, she ground her pelvis against his hard

torso. She stroked him with her breasts. "Christ, I can't get enough. Don't grow anymore, okay. I want to enjoy this."

An easy smile spread his lips. "Only when I blow my load."

She whimpered. "Do you think you can wait until after I leave to explode?"

He burst into laughter, which he quickly stifled. "No, I don't believe I am willing to do that. Don't worry, I'll fit."

"I know you fit--I'd make you fit--I just don't know if there is room for a full load."

Claiming her mouth in a deep impassioned kiss, he silenced her silliness. Almost instantly, she exploded and screamed into his mouth, her nails digging into his back, her body bucking. She grabbed a pillow and slapped it over her face as soon as he moved away. Finally, she was able to stop screaming, but she couldn't relax. Her body continued to be beyond her control as she rode the waves of passion. She gazed into his eyes blazing with dark passion that held deep satisfaction.

"I gather you were being silly to distract yourself."

"Yes," she managed to pant.

"It didn't work," he pointed out smugly.

"No."

"And the pillow was to stop anyone from hearing and bursting my ears?"

"Yes. You are distracting yourself now." Swallowing with difficulty, as she was gasping breaths down her throat, she wasn't having an easy time talking.

"You haven't finished."

"Are you kidding? After that explosion, I probably will be satisfied for weeks."

He chuckled and claimed her mouth. "I certainly hope not." Gripping her shoulders firmly, his back arched.

She would have sworn had anyone asked, he howled. It was a deep animalistic sound of a moan, groan, and keening mingled together. *It was a growling howl.* Collapsing onto her body, his shaft pulsed within her sheath. At first, she was surprised when he didn't roll immediately away, but when his throbbing member continued to snap and salute inside her body, she was glad he didn't.

"You don't mind if I enjoy this, do you?" he queried, breathless.

"No." Sighing, she laid her cheek against his chest. "Actually, I feel each pulse and wiggle. It's wonderful."

"I am glad you approve."

His fingertips stroked up and down her spine. A good ten minutes passed while she enjoyed every pulse of his aching shaft before he eased back slightly and rolled. His arms still gripping

her shoulders, he rolled her with him, moving her onto his stomach.

"Um, you have a strong heartbeat. Do you exercise?"

"All the time. Does a soft city woman exercise?" The tips of his fingers skated over her hip and a cheek.

"I run."

Squeezing her butt cheek, he growled. "Yes, you do. It is one of my favorite forms of exercise, second to sex. We have a lot in common. We should take the time to become better acquainted."

"Before we do what? Go to bed? Share a bath? I think we are better acquainted than most people are on the day they meet."

"I hope you are not implying that I have rushed things. I would have you know. I have to know a woman very well before she is allowed to spend the night with me." Sliding his hands down her thigh, he curled his fingers between her thighs and tugged her legs wide.

"How well? Give me an example of what you would need to know."

Lifting his hips, he began pumping his embedded shaft deeper into her sheath. "I definitely need to know if she has small ears. I mean long ears would never do, they might stretch even longer over time with me suckling on

them. The only thing I am more strict about is meeting my mother and that is up there with a marriage proposal and having babies."

Tammy grinned. "So when do I meet your mother?"

Sighing dramatically, he lifted his eyes to the ceiling. "We're having lunch with her tomorrow."

"You don't think I will be gone by then?"

"Huh! Like that is going to happen in a day. The road is out, remember?"

"Oh. Then should I be worried about a marriage proposal and babies?" she teased.

"Definitely. You should be considering the babies."

"Ha, ha, oh... no condom again." Her eyes tightened. "Did you lie when you said you had a full stock?"

"I swear I had a full stock."

"Had? You said you *had*? Oh, you used them that quick? Duh! How dumb. Sorry I brought it up."

"No, I haven't used any. You are the only person I have bedded. Ken is delivering them while he is out. I am not the only one that gets aroused during storms."

"He is walking around the mountain delivering condoms?" Frowning, she pushed up, only for him to bring her back down by her awkward position. "Will you let me up?"

"Why the devil do you want to get up?"

Flattening her lips, she stared at him with a stubborn expression.

"Fine, allow me to help." Sliding his wrists under her knees, he sat up. He lifted her into a sitting position with her legs dangling over his arms. Her spread pelvis supported her weight on his shaft.

"I cannot get up from this position." Stretching out with her ankles, she tried to press his arms downward to reach the bed with her feet. Instead, he leaned forward, placing his chin on her shoulder and slipped his arms around her back. Her legs slid to his elbows. She was in a ridiculous position.

"You know I just may keep you in this position until mother comes looking for us. I think it would shock her into her grave."

"What a terrible thing to say about your mother."

"I was exaggerating." He smiled. "I love my mother."

Wrapping her arms around his neck, she kissed his lips. "I need to use the bathroom, Blake. I don't think I can last until you have shocked your mother."

His lips pouted.

She chuckled. "Now I know exactly what your children would look like when pouting."

"I hope it was an agreeable sight."

"Adorable. Now may I get up?"

"You had only to ask." He dropped his hands to his lap. He massaged her butt cheeks as she slid from his body and then from the bed. "I'm glad you think our children will look adorable. I can imagine how adorable a miniature version of you would be."

"You should be careful saying a thing like that. A girl could take you seriously. I know you think it is safe to say such things to me because you think that if I am bedding practically a stranger, I do this all the time. But I don't have a lot of one night stands."

Leaving the room, she hurried to the bathroom then washed up before returning to his bed. "How are you going to your mother's house? Does she live close by? Do you plan to walk?" she asked, sitting on the edge of the mattress watching him. She felt close to him. She didn't normally feel close to men she dated. He had a blatant sexuality that was certain, but there was an innocence that appealed to her, kind of like the lonely little boy in him was calling out to her for attention.

"Motorcycle. You can ride in front. I recommend a skirt and no underpants so you can ride on my cock."

She teased, not taking the conversation seriously, "That could be embarrassing if your mother happens to be outside when we arrive."

"She won't be, but if it will make you feel comfortable, I will stop when we are near so you can extricate yourself from my body. Deal?"

"Deal." Chuckling, she positioned her back against the headboard. "What else must you know before I can spend the night here?" She patted the bed.

"Let me see, I must know the color of your pubis hair, if you have any. I must know if you have long toenails and if your fingernails are pointed." He ticked the items off on his fingers. "If you have a job with an adequate salary to support me. How well you can suck my cock and, the color of your nipples."

"How about if I am married, or have children?"

"They are not a requirement, but if you have them, you can bring them along. We'll stick them in the guest bedroom."

"How generous of you," she teasingly mocked.

He nodded. "I am a generous fellow when satisfied." Smiling, he patted the mattress beside him. "Come over here and be sociable."

"I thought I *was* being sociable," she objected. Still she smiled and moved to his side.

His strong arms wrapped her in a soft cage and he kissed her forehead. "I do believe you have

passed all the requirements for spending the night with me."

"You don't know how relieved I am."

"Tell me about your family."

Lying on his side, he caressed her stomach with gentle fingertips. "My mother lives about twenty minutes from me, probably ten from here. She devoted her life to raising my brother Ted and me. She worked two jobs most of my life, but she spent her off days with us, taking us to the zoo and park and amusement parks. My father ran off when we were small. I was three—I think and Ted was one. Ted is living in New York. He is an assistant publisher for a small publishing house. My mom was a tailor at a company that makes men's suits, now she stays busying working as a receptionist. She is a very loving woman. Ted and I are close—if you consider phone conversations. We seldom see each other these days."

"You take after your mother. I can tell you have a lot of love to give to your own family. Why haven't you married?"

She sighed. "I give too much time to my work. The men I have dated didn't feel like I was worthy of investing their time to discover if I would change for a family. To be fair, I wasn't interested in learning either."

"You will. You may always be dedicated to your work and there is nothing wrong with that,

but you will always find time for your family. I'll bet you spend the holidays with your mother."

"I do." She grinned. "I don't visit like I should, but I make an effort on holidays.

"I am close to my family also. We see each other every week, but we don't always celebrate holidays together. My parents are both living. My father was at work so he is stranded below until the road is repaired. He will, no doubt, be the first to arrive when it is repaired. I hope he was able to call mother and let her know he is safe before the phones went down."

They talked for a short time about what they considered would make a perfect life. Surprisingly, they seemed to have a lot in common. He seemed to be a perfect match for her. Deep down, she began longing for a man just like him. She had finally found her ideal mate and he appeared to be taken. If it turned out that he wasn't attached to Ken, she thought she might pursue him. She was trying to think of a polite way of asking about his association with Ken when Blake started drifting off. She wished him good sleep, and closed her eyes to rest.

When she awoke the room was pitch black and a soft head of a steel rod was prodding her crack from behind. Blake was panting from heavy arousal. Smiling, she wiggled her hips backward

toward him. She certainly liked his intense desire for her. It made her feel beautiful. "You must have had a hot dream," she murmured in a languid tone.

Licking her neck, he thrust toward her. The soft head entered her protective female lips and nudged against her clit. The long hot licks of his tongue up her neck were as exciting as the knowledge that she aroused him. His tongue ran up the back of her ear and she groaned.

The sound of submission seemed to be the signal he had been waiting to hear. Blake pulled from her body, turning her onto her back. Lifting her ankles to his shoulders, they slid down his arms as he lowered between her legs. Holding her legs wide, he lavished her with long wet licks from sphincter to clit. Easily aroused by such intense attention, she was soon begging him to enter her. His long tongue entered her sheath in searching thrusts. Whimpering, she wiggled against him, wanting, needing more from him.

Finally, he rose between her thighs, his thumb settled on her clit and something large entered her sheath. The large head of his shaft pushed against her sphincter.

"I don't think there is room," she gasped as the item in her vagina began vibrating. A wet finger covered her clit and started rubbing as his finger pushed into her canal. She cried out in shock,

pleasure and discomfort. Blake growled and shifted his body. His cock was presented to her lips.

"You dog," she teased before she started licking.

Blake growled and replaced his finger on her clit with his tongue. In a short time, she shattered and he sprayed his seed onto her breasts.

The next time she awoke, it was with spread legs and Blake was licking her thoroughly. "I swear you are the most aroused man I have ever met."

"Hmm?" Blake said on the pillow at her side, the bed shifted. "What was that?"

"Who is licking my clit?" She started kicking and someone growled. "Blake!"

Blake jumped from the bed and ran across the room. Once there, he switched the light on.

She gazed down and kicked at the large animal-like man holding her legs wide and licking her. Screaming, she kicked all the harder and tried to scramble off the bed, but it held her with its large fur-covered hands.

Blake lunged at the creature and they rolled to the floor.

He was the most wonderful man on earth for protecting her, but what if he lost? Scrambling from the bed, she stood against the far wall, her

eyes scanning the room for a weapon. Her gaze settled on several items that she rejected as being ineffective on such a huge animal. Jerking her gaze back to the man protecting her and the beast, she bit her lip. *Please don't let him die trying to save me.* They struggled for several minutes, then Blake was sent hurling across the room. Covering her mouth, she was too frightened to scream as the beast rose up on its hind legs and started across the room.

Blake crashed into a chair and fell to the floor. The man-creature ran from the room.

"Are you all right?" She ran on trembling legs to Blake's side.

Pulling himself up from the floor, he grumbled. "I'm sorry. I must have left the door open. Are you all right?"

"I am if you and I made love earlier?"

"You know we did." He chuckled.

"In the dark?"

"Yes, that was me." Squeezing her to his side, he escorted her back to the bed. "You sit. I will make certain it is out of the house and the place is locked up."

He returned a short time later and crawled onto the bed. "All secure. I don't think it meant to harm you. It was probably aroused by the scent of your juices."

"But it was an animal—they don't attack women. What kind of an animal was it? It looked like some kind of mutation beast."

"It's a wolf—a dead wolf if it comes sniffing around you again." Gathering her into his arms, he held her close for a few moments. "Would you like me to give you a bath?"

She nodded.

Lifting her with his powerful arms, Blake carried her to the bathing room.

She discovered she very much enjoyed him pampering her. Blake bathed her and towed her dry before carrying her back to the bed. He treated her as though she were a treasured princess. However, she couldn't relax until Blake locked the bedroom door.

Ken returned while they were eating breakfast.

"Good morning, Ken. You missed quite a bit of excitement last night. A wolf slipped inside the side door and attacked Tammy, sexually. I will kill it if it happens again."

Heat burned Tammy's cheeks. "Did you need to tell him that part?" It hadn't really looked like a wolf to her, but she had been upset at the time. *But it had moved on two legs...*

"Really? What did it do to her?" Ken seemed to look at her with new appreciation.

"That doesn't matter," she said before Blake could give the details.

"She was asleep and when she woke, he was lavaging her clit." Blake supplied in spite of her attempt to prevent it.

"Oh, God." Dropping her head, she propped her elbows on the lace tablecloth and held her forehead in her palms. "You didn't have to tell him." Were they using her for cheap thrills? Could it have been Ken in costume? After all, she didn't really know Blake. Was she being foolish to trust him?

"Really? How did it get in?" Ken bit his lip as though struggling with his expression.

She didn't blame him. If it hadn't happened to her, she would probably have also laughed, especially if she were in on the prank. She hated to think that after what she thought was their honest conversation last night, that Blake would be involved in such a prank.

Blake stared at Ken with a hard gaze. "I apparently left the door off the latch when you left to do the deliveries. It won't happen again."

"Certainly not. We will make certain you are protected while you are our guest, Tammy. How did you manage to chase the fellow off?"

"We fought." Blake grumbled.

Whatever it is—is real. "The women on the mountain need to be warned. Ken, that will be

your task," Tammy injected as the startling thought struck her mind of how she would have felt if she had been alone. *It could have been a woman that was alone last night.* She was lucky that she had Blake to fight for her. She couldn't help feeling that Blake and Ken were acting a little mysterious about the situation. How was she to trust Blake with these doubts rambling in her mind? *Had they known about the beast?*

"Be glad to spread the warning, right after breakfast." Ken sat in a chair and reached for a piece of toast. "You gonna call the police, Tammy?"

Was he worried about getting caught? "No, I hadn't planned, too. Do you think I should?"

"I don't think that will be necessary. After all, the creature insulted you. He didn't hurt you. Besides, the road is out so, the sheriff cannot reach us," Blake stated.

A shudder ran through her body. It would have been totally humiliating, telling the sheriff the details. It was worse to think the thing was real and her stranded here. How like a horror show the situation was. In fact, it was very similar to a horror. A small group stranded on a mountain with a creature. "I ask that you don't tell anyone what the wolf did to me. But you must tell them it is a mutant. It looked more human than wolf."

"Mutant? You think some man slept with a wolf and this thing is the result?" Blake sounded horrified by the thought.

"I doubt that happened. Indeed, it wasn't a normal wolf at all. It was as big as a man, walked on hind legs and didn't have much of a snout at all. The fur was very thin, too." She described what Blake hadn't seen.

"You mean it was a werewolf?" Frowning, Ken chewed.

"What? There is no such thing. Werewolves are only fantasy."

"You have traveled the world to discover this?" Ken mocked her conviction.

"Well no, of course I haven't, but common sense--"

"There are many unexplained things on the earth—you should know that at your age." He sounded as though he were talking to a wayward child. "Think of Bigfoot. In another country, he might have been called a werewolf."

"You think Bigfoot and Werewolves are the same—and that they are *real*?" she queried disdainfully. At the moment, he made her feel like an ignorant child, but she wasn't. She was a logical adult and had common sense. *And there are no werewolves!* It bothered her that what he said about Bigfoot made sense. Could they be the same creature? Could they be real?

Ken continued to look at her with kind understanding.

Blast it! He made her feel guilty for being logical about the thing that had attacked her. She shook her head. "Alright, let's assume it was a werewolf. What do we do now?"

Silence filled the room as they looked from one to the other. Clearing his throat, Blake leaned his arm on the table. "First, we warn the ladies we have a wolf on the prowl."

The corners of Ken's mouth twitched up and down as he struggled not to grin. He either thought it was funny that the animal had molested her, or it was a hoax. Clearing his throat, he lowered his head. "I am happy that you weren't bitten, Blake. I would hate to have a..." He stretched his chin up as though his collar was strangling him. "Odd beast living with me."

"Yes, it could be dangerous for one of us." Arching his dark eyebrows, Blake mocked Ken.

"Listen, if this is a prank—just say so. And we will let the whole subject drop."

"Do you really think we would pull such a cruel prank?" Ken demanded. "What kind of monsters do you think we are?"

Blake stepped between them. "Hey, she has a right to be a little on edge. It was a definite shock and Tammy is obviously more rattled than I had imagined."

It pleased her that Blake would defend her against his partner. Perhaps she shouldn't make a wedge between them. After everything was repaired, she would be gone and they would still be here facing their problems together.

"Blake, it is alright. You don't need to protect me from his sarcasm. I don't want to be the cause of conflict. I am only interested in protecting the lives of the people on the mountain."

Ken waved a shushing hand. "Don't worry about the people on the mountain. We will make certain that everyone knows about the werewolf. You only need to worry about staying here and being safe until you can leave."

"Thank you." She swallowed, dropping her head. She felt as though it were all her fault. As though the beast had rode in on her bumper. Heaving a sigh, she relaxed the tension in her chest. "What are we going to do—if I am going to be hiding here in the house?"

"You won't be hiding," Ken assured.

"You're right. We are having lunch with my mother, remember?" Blake said. "Ken, jump on that bike after you finish eating and go around to the north and west side of the mountain. I will go south and east. We should be back in plenty of time for luncheon."

"Do you think the silver bullet thing is real?" Tammy asked with curiosity.

Turning to face her, the two handsome men stared. It was unnerving to have two as striking as these staring as though she had lost her mind.

Blake broke the silence. "I doubt anyone has any. Silver is not common for bullets, but I will ask."

Ken nodded, "Bullets are made of lead and no one on this mountain does any reloading. We don't have any survivalist living here. Forget trying to bag a trophy. He is probably just traveling through. If we stay safe, he should be gone in a few days."

"But isn't that just making it someone else's problem?"

"Yeah, maybe someone with the ability to make silver bullets."

"Oh."

"But innocent people could die."

Ken shook his head. "From what I heard, this fellow is a lover not a killer."

Crossing her arms over her breasts, Tammy leaned against the back of her chair. Inhaling a deep breath, she released it slowly. "You're right. Until it has harmed someone, it wouldn't be fair to attempt to kill it."

"Now you're thinking like a smart person—the kind I like to know," Ken praised. Slapping his hand against the tabletop, he pushed himself up and strolled across the room. "Blood thirsty

women give me the shivers. I'll just freshen up, then be on my way."

Turning her head, she followed him from the room with her gaze. Leaning toward Blake, she covered his hand lying on the table. "Blake, do you think it is safe to go out there alone? Perhaps you should stay together."

"I'll see what he has to say." Rising from the chair, he followed Ken from the room.

The table full of empty plates and left over food lay before her. Smiling, she rose from the table and began clearing. Small things like dirty dishes were what kept a person sane during a crisis.

Filling the sink with hot water, she shoved her hands into some huge cleaning gloves and began stacking the dishes into the sink. The men returned and Blake walked over and grasped her shoulders. He laid his head against her hair, his warm mint fresh breath fanned her eyes.

"We're leaving now. Keep safe." Pressing a kiss on her neck before he straightened away, she felt a flush of heat warming her skin. Nervously, she glanced around to see Ken watching them with a speculative expression. "Stay inside until we return." Striding to the door, he glanced back before stepping through the doorway.

"Something going on between you two?" Ken startled her, speaking directly behind her.

"No, of course not. Blake was just being friendly."

Grasping her chin, Ken moved in front of her, his soft features filling her view. Leaning forward, he pressed his lips to her mouth. Releasing her, he smiled. "Then you won't mind, if I am friendly also."

"No, of course not. I would like to be your friend."

He gazed at her from beneath hooded eyelids. Ken was suspicious and was attempting to trick her into giving Blake away. Well, she had promised herself last night that she wouldn't betray him and had meant it. Lowering his head again, he slid a warm hand down her back and pressed her against his chest. Covering her mouth, his tongue penetrated and caressed her tongue. He was as skilled in the art of seduction as Blake. His hot hand covered her breast and stroked over her hardening nipple. Being unable to resist his advances left her open to sensations she didn't want. "No," she moaned, softly pulling backward away from his hand. "Perhaps not that friendly."

He slowly drew away, but his deft fingers were still teasing and pleasuring the nerves in her nipple. She panted between parted lips, waiting for him to move away. Sliding his gaze down her face, he lingered on her parted mouth, then his

gaze traveled down to her nipple between his hot fingers. "I'll see you later then."

Dropping her head when she felt a tug on her nipple, she was amazed to discover her blouse was open and he was actually holding her naked nipple—the protective shield of her clothing brushed aside. *When and how had he done that?* He gave her nipple a final squeeze, lowering his head. He held it up to his lips. Tammy gasped a startled breath. Would he really do something so bold without a by your leave? Yes!

He sucked her turgid nipple into his mouth and suckled it deep, tugging on it strongly. His hand at her back held her body up to him. Her head rolled back and eyes closed, she grasped the back of his brown hair and tugged on his head. *This is going to end now.* The kitchen door rattled. Opening her eyes, she looked straight into Blake's blazing gaze.

"We need to go, Ken." His deep voice cut through the silence like a knife. It had all happened fast, but it seemed to last a long time.

Releasing her nipple, Ken pulled away, smacking his lips. Running his tongue over his lips, he turned to face his partner. "Just tasting our new playmate. We are going to keep her, aren't we? She said she wants to be our friend."

"That will be up to Tammy." Shoving the door open, he jerked his thumb in the direction of the open space beyond the doorway. "We have things

to do at present and they don't include warming the bedding."

Ken sauntered toward the doorway. "I don't see why you should have all the fun. She isn't complaining. Afraid I might be better in the crotch than you?"

"No." Blake shoved Ken on the shoulder, pushing him on out the door. He tugged the door behind their bodies.

Closing her blouse over her exposed breast—as she should have done when Blake entered—she hurried to the door. Parting the curtains, she peeked out at the men, her heart pounding in her chest. The last thing she had wanted was to come between them. Now they were probably going to be arguing and snapping at each other. They were standing in the center of the back lawn, which was surrounded by a fence of waist-high brush. Trees rose up beyond like centennials.

The men faced each other, hands on hips, about four feet apart.

"Oh no." Tugging the door open, she rushed onto the back porch. A chill hit her feet and she remembered she was barefoot. Looking down at her cold feet against the wet planks on the porch, she groaned. Scanning down the steps and across the grass, she decided that she would risk it. She hurried across the porch, down the steps, calling out, "What do you think you are doing?" The soft

squishy grass was beneath her toes, pushing up between as she hurried across the lawn. Stopping a few paces away from the men, she was panting. "What," pausing she swallowed. "Are you doing?"

"She is already sleeping with me," Blake informed Ken.

"Well, perhaps she wants me between the sheets. Afraid of a little competition?"

"No, of course not," Blake snapped.

"Isn't that my decision?" she injected into their conversation. They ignored her.

"You should be afraid. I am a good lover," Ken sounded too stern.

"Wait a minute guys." Again she tried to claim their attention.

"It doesn't matter what kind of a lover you are-- the lady is with me," Blake retorted.

"She wants to be with me. So you can eat that huge ego you are carting around."

"Fellows?"

"Ego? You think this is about my ego? I am simply not stepping aside for you to take my place."

"Can't we work this so that we can all be happy?" She blurted before thinking of what she was saying.

They both snapped their heads in her direction.

Uh-oh! She had their attention now. "I mean, you know, we can work this out."

"You mean we could share?" Blake clarified, glancing over at Ken.

Ken looked at his companion. "Threesome sounds good to me."

"That wasn't what I had —"

"We'll discuss this later," Blake told Ken. Turning in opposite directions, the guys strode quickly away before she could complete the sentence.

They aren't listening. "That's good," she yelled. "Go off and cool down and we will discuss this later." Swinging her arms nervously at her sides, she felt her face crumpling. *What a mess, and it's all my fault.* She wasn't adventurous. She didn't experiment. A thrill of excitement raced through her sex. Recognizing it as an aftershock from Blake's lovemaking, she groaned over the loss. First, he finds her nude, then she bathes and sleeps with him and then he catches his partner suckling her breast. She had never tried a threesome, nor did she want to. "It wasn't what I had meant. I'm not even certain Ken could arouse me if I wasn't already aroused by Blake."

She heard the bikes roar to life, their tires momentarily spinning and sliding on the leaves as they rode away in different directions. Swinging a fisted hand against her open palm, she heard them

disappear. Could she keep them from becoming enemies until the road was cleared? "One woman and two men." Could she do it? Could she keep them both happy?

"Sounds like a lot of work on my part." Biting her bottom lip, she turned and crossed the cold wet squishy grass to the porch. *It could be fun. It could be awful. I don't want to be swapped back and forth like a shared object.* The problem was she had no idea how to handle such a situation. If one decided to be jealous, what would she do? They had said threesome—had they been involved in one before? If they had, they would know how to handle the situation. Again, she wondered if they had set her up.

Could she accept the pleasure they could offer and when the road was cleared, be on her way? It was doubtful. Did they expect her to know how to handle the situation? The biggest problem was, she was afraid she was already getting attached to Blake. *I could suggest staying with Blake's mother?*

By lunchtime she was dressed in the silk suit and waiting for Blake to return. Had the conversation in the yard had an effect on their lunch date with his mother? It wasn't until the first bike returned that she developed a new problem. If Ken returned first, how was she to act? To be honest, she really wished Ken wasn't here at all.

Sitting on the sofa before the hearth, she heard the backdoor open and close. Tension held her stiff. Her lungs tightened as she listened to the approaching footsteps. When Blake rounded the corner, her shoulders slumped and her lungs eased. Stopping in the doorway, he crossed his arms and stared at her, waiting. Tammy's tension returned. He was angry with her. Unsure how to proceed, she arched her eyebrows and remained expectantly silent.

"Do you sleep with every man that wants you?"

Heaving a deep breath, she closed her eyes and shook her head. "No. We are trapped here and I don't know what to say or do. I don't want you fighting with Ken because of me, but I don't want a threesome situation either."

"So you don't want to sleep with him?"

That was a dangerous question. She didn't want to sound like a woman willing to do anything to keep the peace either. "I find Ken appealing in a different way than you. He is an attractive man, but..." She shrugged.

"I can take care of myself, Tammy, and anyone that is with me. If you want to bed Ken, then the information is mute. However, if you don't want to be with Ken, I can handle any problems of discord that arise."

Lowering her gaze, she rubbed her hands over her thighs to her knees. "I will only be here a short time. I don't want to make you quarrel with your partner."

"So you are willing to bed him to keep the peace?" He snorted. "Have you ever been in a threesome?"

"No," she admitted breathlessly.

"Are you curious?"

"A little," she whispered. Keeping her head down, she hid the rising color that accompanied the heat burning her face.

"Only a little?"

"I think I should stay with your mother until the road opens."

"Ken and I share a strong loyalty to each other—so you cannot come between us." Hearing him advance, she held still, waiting. His hand grasped her chin, lifted and turned her face up to him. "We are not gay."

"Oh. I thought you were lovers. I mean, I was wondering."

"We're beasts, with raging libidos, but protective of what belongs to us. As far as I am concerned, you belong to me." Sliding down her neck, his hand went beneath her top and cupped her breast. "I cannot share you with Ken. If you lust for him, I will not stand in your way—but I won't be joining you in a threesome."

"Oh."

He shrugged. "If you aren't mine, then it won't matter. You can stay with him and he can share you with me, or vice versa."

His rolling of her nipple between his thumb and finger sent a wave of longing through her chest. Closing her eyes, she laid her head against his washboard stomach. "I don't know if Ken can arouse me. This morning...I was already aroused by you."

Blake chuckled. "Are you saying if I share you, I must arouse you first?"

"I believe it is possible," she admitted.

"How do you feel about being shared?"

"I have never been in that kind of an arrangement. I don't think it would be a comfortable feeling though."

"I think I have made it clear that I want you to be my woman. How do you feel about me?"

"I think you are wonderful, Blake, but I don't know if I want to be with someone that is willing to share me. I am not insulted now because we barely know each other, but a real relationship is different."

Stroking her hair, he pulled away and squatted before her. "Until you are completely mine, I really have no right to ask you not to be with another man. You may run across a fellow that appeals to you tomorrow. It's not like I want to

boast and say, *she is great – give her a try*. Nor do I want anyone else to enjoy you. I am willing to keep my mouth shut so you may enjoy him. If you aren't interested, the situation will never arise."

"And in return, you would expect me to do the same?" she mocked.

"Only until you agree to become my mate. Then I will be loyal and I will expect the same from you. I did tell you that I am a beast and I meant it, however, not that way, or in a violent way. I would never hurt you—even if you decide to leave me. When I mate, it will be for life. I won't leave my family for another woman. I have strong convictions about the family unit. As long as my family is safe, you will never even see the ugly side of my beast, but will see a lot of the randy side." He grinned, holding out a hand for her to accept. "Shall we go to lunch?"

"You are still going to take me to meet your mother?"

"I have asked you to be my mate for life. Why wouldn't I want you to meet my mother?"

"Actually, you didn't ask. You said you want me and asked me how I felt about you."

Grasping her wrist, he tugged her into his arms. "A slip of the tongue. I am asking you to be my mate for life? Now can we have lunch?" Releasing her, he started from the room.

She said teasingly while following, "Filling your stomach is more important than my answer?"

"It is an open-ended question. I don't want an answer until it is a *yes*. Besides, I am anxious for our motorcycle ride. I have never ridden with my cock in someone." Tugging open the backdoor, he stepped through.

"You are not serious?"

He was loping down the step with the grace of the beast he claimed to be.

"Apparently he is anxious," she mumbled as she followed him. Watching him swing his long leg over the bike, she moved close. The roar of Ken's bike could be heard approaching. Stopping, she looked around the area and then shifted her gaze to Blake. "Forget it. I am not doing it with him around. I'm not a peep show either."

Leaning back on the seat, he held up his palm. "Another time perhaps." He slid forward on the seat and placed his hands on the grips.

Thinking he was going to leave her since she had refused, Tammy glanced back at the house. She had locked the door and had no way back inside. She looked up at the gray clouds hanging low and heavy in the sky. Soon it was going to rain again. Lowering her gaze to Blake sitting on the bike, she found him watching her with an arched eyebrow.

Pushing back on the seat, he offered and patted the seat between his thighs, "If you are afraid to ride on the back, you can ride in front of me."

She hurried forward. "I was just wondering if it is going to rain."

"I don't expect it will start before lunch. I should have you back before it does."

"I love a man with confidence. One that can tell what the weather will do that exactly is to be much admired." Grasping his shoulder, she swung her leg over the bike behind him.

Scooting forward on the seat, Blake queried, "Are you doubting my abilities, my dear? Care to place a wager on it?"

"What sort of wager?"

"The one that loses will be the slave of the other for the night."

"As long as it doesn't involve doing anything with, or in front of anyone else that might be embarrassing," she countered.

"You are talking about Ken. He isn't coming back after lunch, nor is he coming here now. He will be meeting us at mother's house."

"When was that decided?"

"Earlier."

"Oh."

"The wager?"

She looked at the heavy gray clouds again. "No, I have a feeling I would only lose."

"Spoil sport."

She laughed. "You heard a weather report somewhere, didn't you?"

"No. We are the only people with a generator. I keep telling everyone to purchase one, but they claim that it isn't necessary."

"Then how do you know when it is going to rain?"

"As you said, my dear, confidence. It wouldn't dare rain after I declared that it would not."

She chuckled.

"Shall I make certain Ken understands that you aren't interested and to keep his hands off you?"

She dipped her head. "That would take the pressure off."

"Consider it done. I don't want you to feel pressured into anything." He started the bike and moved her hands around his waist and then they were gliding through the trees on the narrow path.

They arrived at a brown log cabin a short time later, much to Tammy's relief. She hadn't expected the cold air to be like ice. Shaking and rubbing her arms, she crawled from the bike.

"I'm sorry my mind was on other things and I didn't think about the cold air. I will get you something warm to wear on the way back." Wrapping his arms around her, he rubbed her back and arms. Once he had her securely against his hard frame, he kissed the tip of her cold red

nose that she had tried to keep buried in his back during the ride.

"You...why aren't you frozen?"

"Hot natured." He kissed her cold chin, then her lips. Lingering on her mouth, he pulled her tighter against his body and plundered the warm, slick wetness. "Mine." Lifting his head, he looked toward the house and called, "She is mine."

"Shush! What are you doing?" Smiling, she buried her face against his chest.

"Delivering our hands-off message to Ken."

"Oh, like that is supposed to warn him off, and make him leave us alone?"

"Yes." Placing the side of his curled index finger beneath her chin, he lifted her face. "I have defended you from man and beast--now I will protect you from my mother."

"How?"

He smiled. "You watch. She will treat you better than she does me or Ken. Hell! She will treat you as the princess you are."

"How?"

"Tell her," he murmured. He lifted his voice to speak in a normal tone of voice. "I want to plant my seed in you."

"Oh!" A woman cried from the porch. "Blake!"

Turning stunned eyes toward the voice, Tammy saw a woman was tossing her hand into the air and rushing across the porch. A red sweater

covered her black blouse and slacks, and black hair covered her shoulders and her expressive face with wrinkles on the cheeks and across the brow.

"I have waited so long to hear you are in love. I was actually beginning to worry."

"You shouldn't eavesdrop, Mother. You might hear something you shouldn't." A smile twitched at the corners of his masculine mouth.

"Not today." Holding her arms wide, she wrapped them around Tammy and Blake, squeezing them in a wide bear hug. "I am so excited. I am sure you are, too, my dear." Releasing them, she stepped back with a warm satisfied expression on her face. "I was stunned when your father told me." Reaching out, she circled Tammy's back and drew her away from Blake's arms to her side. "We are going to be great friends. Don't feel afraid to come to me for anything. I will help with the babies, too."

"Nothing says she reflects my feelings, mother, so drop it." Although he didn't firm his tone, he sounded serious.

Wrinkling her nose, his mother speared a glance at Blake. "Did he just tell you?"

Tammy nodded as the dark head turned back to her.

"Men can choose the worst time. Really, dear, you should have waited until you were alone."

"We were alone before you interrupted," he pointed out in a mild voice. It became clear he respected his mother and didn't speak harshly to her.

"Don't you worry. Our men are very loving and loyal once they choose a life-mate. It will be so wonderful having babies raising a ruckus again. I didn't believe Blake's father Johnny myself, at first. You will adjust in no time." Giggling, she covered her mouth. "I'm Lydia, Blake's mom," she injected as though she had just realized she hadn't introduced herself, or given Blake a chance to do it. Stopping, she turned and glared at her son. "You haven't joined without my knowledge?" There was worry in her voice, full of concern and turbulent emotions, as only a mother can project.

"No, Mom." Sighing, his brown head reflected the silver shimmer in the light as he shook his head.

"Good. What's your name, dear?" Lydia spoke in a satisfied tone.

"Tammy S--"

Lydia interrupted. "Tammy. What a lovely name. I am certain Blake fell in love the minute he laid eyes on you."

"I'll never forget the moment. She was leaning over the counter. I had a great view of her ass. I definitely felt something in that instant." Flashing

a cheeky grin, he received a slap on the arm from his mother.

"Now you ignore him, Tammy. He is only being sassy because he always feels immature when his mom is fussing. Your boys will feel the same." It was obvious Lydia didn't believe anyone that her son cared about wasn't head over heels in love with him.

Tammy searched her feelings. How did she really feel about Blake? Her gaze skimmed down his body and her insides tightened with longing. *I definitely lust for him-- but is that love? I have certainly never felt this strong pull before.*

Entering the house behind Blake and his mother, Tammy spotted the sullen Ken sitting in a high backed wing chair beside the hearth. Nodding a greeting, he shifted his eyes to Blake, carried his hand to his forehead and saluted.

Blake nodded his head in acceptance of a win. A tension band inside Tammy unfurled.

Tammy felt certain there would be no more talk of sharing her. It was an exciting thought, but she wasn't into experimenting. Had she been the type, she would have tried it during her partying years. She left that behind when she had committed to building a career.

Blake couldn't have been more right about Lydia, she treated Tammy like a princess. She made Ken leave his chair so Tammy could sit close

to the fire and warm. Then Lydia sent Blake to the kitchen for a glass of tea for her.

"We will be eating shortly. Can't be skipping meals now, or worrying about your figure. You need to stay healthy for making babies. You will soon get your figure back when you start chasing after little ones. Did Blake tell you twins run in our family? A few have triplets, but mostly twins."

Tammy felt guilty over the trick Blake was playing on his mom. "Mrs. Floyd, Blake was just teasing me. He wasn't serious."

Clasping her hands together, Lydia twisted to gaze at Blake as he entered the room.

He shrugged. "Did you believe Dad was serious?"

"Oh." His mother twisted back to face her. "It is a gift, dear. All the men can tell when they have found their life-mate. Now you just rest while we set the table." Smiling with contented pleasure, she turned and grabbed Blake's arm as she passed. "Come help me in the kitchen."

Tammy assumed Lydia wanted Blake alone to question him in private. She was going to be furious when she discovered he had tricked her on purpose. It was a very comfortable country home, decorated in muted shades of brown, orange, and rust. The furniture was heavy and constructed to be durable. Sighing, she shifted her gaze to Ken. "Were you able to reach all the homes?"

"Yes, everyone is aware we have a beast on the mountain." He tilted his head. "You didn't seem so committed when I was kissing you earlier and holding your breast."

Heat burning her cheeks, she turned to stare at the flickering flames of the fire. "I was already aroused." It was a feeble excuse for her behavior, but she didn't want to explain that she had thought he and Blake were lovers and she had slept with Blake anyway.

Ken snorted. "Where were you heading when you ended up here?"

"A small place called Dark Corner."

"Then you arrived. This is part of Dark Corner."

"Really? Where is the town?" Her head came around to flash him a glance, but she felt uncomfortable meeting his accusing eyes, so she gazed at the room beyond his shoulder.

"Well, there isn't one really. Just some stores scattered about and a small industrial area, but even those buildings are spread a ways apart. What were you planning to do here?"

"I had an appointment to speak to Mr. Edward, the owner of Wolf Distributors. I am in advertising and we were hoping to sign him as a customer. With this delay, I may not be able to convince him that our firm is reliable."

"I don't think you will have much of a problem getting the account. I believe you can get old Edward to do just about anything."

She had a feeling there was an insulting sexual remark in there somewhere, but she ignored it. "I hope so. Do you know Mr. Edward?"

"As a matter of fact, I do." Twisting, he glanced over his shoulder at Blake entering the room. "Blake, did you know your girl was here for a meeting with Edward at Wolf Distributors?" Ken either had superior hearing or ESP to know Blake would be appearing at that instant.

"No." His dark eyebrow arched. "Why do you want to see him?" Shifting his gaze to her, he suddenly seemed suspicious.

"I am hoping to gain his advertising account."

Inhaling, he sat on the arm of her chair and placed his arm over the back to toy with her hair. "I didn't know he had an advertising account. I thought it was a pretty small outfit."

"But they are growing. My company believes if they branch out their advertising, their revenue will triple within a year."

"Indeed." Blake curled a strand of hair around his finger and released it.

Lydia called for them to be seated at the dining table.

Rising, Blake helped her to rise and escorted her to the adjoining room.

"You do know Wolf Distributors sell only one item? A drug called Lycanthrope Tracpyrodome," Ken queried strolling behind them.

"I know, but that doesn't mean they can't advertise."

Blake helped her into a chair and took a seat at her side.

"How did you happen to find out about the company, Tammy?" Lydia asked as they entered the dining room. "I mean, it is a fairly unknown company."

"My boss told me about it. I don't know how he came to know of the company. He even wants me to purchase a supply. What is it for? I understand a prescription isn't required?"

Lydia flattened her lips together and looked as though she wanted to smile. Blake, Ken and she each lifted a platter off the table and started filling the plates. Blake placed a biscuit on her plate and passed the platter to Ken. Ken gave Blake a platter of fried meat and the exchanges continued until all the plates had food from each bowl or platter. She didn't think anyone was going to answer.

Blake leaned close to her ear and murmured, "It's for a cellular problem that causes impotency in humans."

Heat rushed to her face and she lowered her head. No wonder they hadn't wished to tell her.

Then she remembered her boss wanted a supply and snickered. "My boss wants a supply."

Lydia burst out laughing and she followed. Ken and Blake also laughed a moment later.

"He should have come and purchased it himself if he didn't wish for anyone to know." Lydia struggled to stop laughing so she could talk.

"Where do you live? Where is your boss living?" Blake queried, shoving a bite of potatoes in his mouth.

"Savannah."

"Hmm." After chewing another bite, he looked at his mom. "We will be leaving right after lunch. I promised Tammy I would have her back before the rain starts."

"You will be cutting it close."

"I know. Tammy needs a coat or a blanket to keep warm. She about froze coming over."

"Men are so hot blooded they don't stop to think about us poor women. I heard you had a scare. Ken has agreed to stay with me tonight to keep me company."

Ken lifted his head and looked at Lydia, then smiled. "She treats me like one of her own."

"You are close enough. Ken is a distant cousin on my husband's side of the family."

After the meal, Lydia wrapped her in a coat and kissed her on the cheek. "Welcome to the family."

"We aren't married," Tammy whispered.

Lydia smiled and turned to kiss Blake on the cheek. "You take good care of her."

"I will."

"I mean it. No more careless behavior like bringing her out without a coat," she warned.

Agreeing to behave, Blake kissed her cheek. Following them out the door, Lydia stood on the porch and waved as they roared away.

Stopping behind the house, Blake assisted her off and then stepped from the bike. Taking her hand, he escorted her to the door and opened the lock so she could enter. "I'll be in as soon as I put the bike away." Turning, he hurried down the steps to push the bike across the yard and into the shed.

Well, they had made it back before the rain started. Glancing at the sky, she stuck out her tongue. She had wanted to win. The rain started falling and she grinned as Blake ran across the sodden grass to the porch. "I win. You got wet."

"But you didn't. So I win."

"No, I wasn't inside the house when it started raining."

He ushered her into the house. "There was no reason for you not to be. The door was open. Was I supposed to pick you up and bodily carry you inside to insure that you didn't get a raindrop on you?"

They argued playfully for several more minutes while he stood in the kitchen removing his wet clothing. Standing in white cotton briefs, he looked like a beautiful sculptured man. His muscles were large without bulk. His stomach was board flat and his ribs were covered with the ripple of muscles. Standing with his feet parted, his briefs were full in the crotch. Lips parted from the desire to kiss his body, she advanced and cupped his sac inside the briefs. Her thumb rubbed the swelling shaft. And her tongue licked up the flat disk of his nipple. "You look delicious in briefs."

"Oh, yeah?" His large hands came around her back. "How about we skin you down to your panties?"

"You want us to run around in our underwear all afternoon?"

"Uh-uh. That wasn't my idea. I never mentioned running—of course I could chase you." Grasping her shoulders, he set her back from his body and spoke in the deep husky timbre that seduced her mind each time he used it. "Meet me before the fireplace in the front room. I'll fetch something to sit on."

Stepping backward, she turned and strolled toward the doorway.

"Wait." Moving behind the counter, he bent down and grabbed something from beneath.

Withdrawing a bottle of wine, he held it out to her. "Take this. I will bring the ice bucket. Will you fetch the bottle opener from the second drawer there?" He pointed at the counter.

The blood tripping through her veins, she took the wine and bottle opener to the living room. She sat the items on the hearth and started removing her suit. Standing facing the doorway, she opened the catch on her bra and waited until he appeared before allowing it to slide down her arms. "You did say panties?"

"Right." Stopping in the doorway, he held a cotton quilt under one arm and a bucket containing ice in the other. "You are more beautiful than I can grasp in my feeble mind. I leave you and think I am carrying the picture of you perfectly in my memory. Then when I see you again, I realize I am unable to give that mental image vibrancy of life, or the warmth of your flesh, or the drug of your kiss. I can remember these things, but I can only experience them with you."

He touched her heart in a way no other had. By her next heartbeat, Tammy had fallen in love with this emotionally honest man.

Advancing, he placed the ice bucket on the table and shoved the bottle of wine into the ice. Then opening the blanket, he flipped it into the air. While spreading it out, he lowered it to the

floor. Quickly stretching out on the quilt, he patted the spot before him. "Join me, beautiful."

She waved her hand to encompass the room. "This is very romantic."

"Um. Want some music?"

"Not necessary." Feeling as nervous as a schoolgirl, she moved to his side and dropped to her knees, then sat to the side. Unaccustomed to the tension caused by the new emotions, she felt nervous of failure, of failing his expectations. *Damn! From where has all of this tension come?* What if she didn't live up to this princess image he was building? Placing her on a pedestal was a sure way to make certain she fell. Swallowing a huge lump, she stretched out her limbs and lay on her side beside him.

"I want you, Tammy. I want you with me always." Reaching out a finger, he touched the tip of her nipple. Slowing circling in ever widening circles, he explored her breast.

"I live a long drive from here, Blake, and I work late a lot. We could see each other on weekends." She would be willing to drive the distance to see him. If he were serious about her, he would be willing to drive to see her. The problem was work traffic. The thirty miles between their homes could take an hour or two in each direction.

"You could stay and work from here if you got that account. You would need to stay to work on it and present ideas, right?"

"Well, yes. I could for a while, but I may not get the account and I won't need to present ideas constantly. This rain has caused me to break my appointment." Shaking her head, she closed her eyes. "I...don't know what will happen. I can't make any promises. He may refuse to see me.""

"If you get the account, do you want to stay with me?"

"You don't think it would be better if I stayed in a hotel?"

"Certainly not. Besides, there are none close. You would need to drive at least fifteen minutes away and that would be a waste of fifteen minutes that I could be holding you. Thirty, if you count both ways and that would only be one day over...say a period of six months at, say...three days a week--that would be nine hours. Nearly a full day you will have wasted."

She smiled. "I get the point. I am satisfied that you have a logical reason therefore, yes. I think I would like to stay here with you."

"I know I am pushing hard for a commitment, but I am working under pressure here. The roads could clear tomorrow."

"Then stop worrying. We can always date--even if I don't get the contract. People have been

doing it for years." She knew she didn't want to walk away and not explore these feelings. Still, she couldn't make a commitment. There was so much tension and sexual desire flowing inside her that she was uncertain of any decision she might make right now.

"I can. I can make certain you get that contract, if you are certain you wish to stay."

A grin lifted the corner of her mouth. "How? Not that I want you to do it. I would rather gain the account by merit. I'm good at what I do. If he doesn't appreciate my work, it is his loss." Stroking down the soft curve of his torso, she admired his body. The feel of his supple flesh beneath her fingertip made her mouth go dry. Her hand trembled when she thought of losing him. She knew her heart was going to break when she left. But she didn't really know him and moving in with a stranger wasn't wise. She needed time, and Edward could give her that time—if only she could talk him into signing a contract with her company.

"I am a stockholder of Wolf Distributors. A *major* stock holder."

"If you can get me another appointment, I would appreciate it. I won't ask for more. You would only believe I had used you to get the account if we don't work out."

"We will." Nudging her shoulder, he revealed his wish for her to lay flat.

Rolling onto her back, she gazed up at the wood ceiling. "I would still prefer to keep my work separate from our relationship. However, if I should get the appointment, I could stay here until I see him. It would give us some time to get acquainted." Moving over her, he filled her vision. Smiling, she reached for him and drew him down against her body. Raking the hair back from the side of her face, he studied her with midnight eyes that were dark with passion.

"Give yourself to me, body and soul."

Claiming her mouth, he plundered with tender passion. Making love to her with his mouth and mind—without touching her body-- he made her long for this to last forever. When his hand touched her breast, she gasped from the shock of it. Her skin was vibrating beneath his touch as though she had never felt the contact of another human before in her life. "I think I can do that," she admitted breathlessly.

Smiling against her mouth, he explored her body as though he was blind and memorizing every curve. Moving with slow precision down her body, he finally stroked his fingers lightly over her mons. Groaning into his mouth, her pelvis arched up to meet him and ask for more.

Stroking his body, she was memorizing him. She wanted every detail preserved in her mind. Moving his mouth to her breasts, he began suckling her nipples, moving back and forth from one to the other. She withstood his torture for a few minutes, savoring every feeling.

Rolling onto his back, he took her with him. Suddenly she was lying on the pillow of his torso. "You have certainly proved you are strong. However, the question is, can you make love without the distraction of Ken, or the aide of this pill we spoke of earlier?" she teased.

"Allow me to show you." He spoke in that deep husky timbre that turned her insides to jelly.

"Uh, my turn. Remember." Licking his flat disk, she forced the smooth flesh to form a tight nub. Moving to the opposite nipple and back again, she reveled in his deep guttural moans. Playing her tongue and lips over his body, she worked her way down his torso. Reaching his nest of curls, she lifted her head back to admire the thin delicate flesh stretched over the steel-hard muscle. She took her time.

Blake's animalistic growl of frustration brought a smile to her lips. Opening her mouth, she moved close to his red swollen head and waited, but not long. Grasping the back of her head, he arched up into her mouth and pulled her back down with him. Immediately, she began working him with

her lips, jaw muscles, and tongue. His guttural growl of appreciation filled her with satisfaction.

"Oh yes, baby, like that. Do it more. Oh shit!"

His legs anchored at her sides and she was rolled onto her back. He pumped into her mouth for a moment. He jerked free of her mouth and slid down her body. His legs moved between her thighs and he thrust into her hot juices.

"Hmm, this is where I belong."

"I have to agree."

Minutes later, she felt as though her body climbed to the ceiling as she neared climax and then it leapt into a shattering that was so good she evaporated before hitting the blanket. "Oh God, I love y—" Losing her breath, she hit and splattered. Stunned and panting by the startling experience, she stared at the ceiling.

"Me, too, sweetheart." Cupping her cheeks, Blake kissed her lips.

"I love being with you."

His masculine lip quirked up on the side and he whispered, "Liar. I love you, too."

She nodded, swallowing a nervous lump. "So where do we go from here?"

"Nowhere. You stay here with me, work your advertising from home, or we can rent you a building if you prefer."

"I might not get the contract."

"You will. If not, you can get someone else."

"Blake, how can we know this isn't just lust?"

"I know you are meant for me. Not since the moment I saw your lovely ass bent over the counter, although I admit that did make me hard. I think it was when I found you standing naked before the store and I knew God offered me a gift. I knew then to relax and enjoy what had been given to me. My advice is for you to do the same."

CHAPTER THREE

Lying on the floor cuddling, Blake smoothed the back of his knuckles over Tammy's cheeks. She was perfect for him. Soft skin that made him think of caressing a cloud, eyes warm with adoration. That adoration was bothering him. He wasn't being honest, and he couldn't expect to have a real relationship with her without telling the truth. It wasn't fair to trap her into the situation without her complete knowledge. He asked himself if he had stolen her choice by not using a condom? Worse, he feared condemning himself to a life of hell without her by admitting the truth. She may not be able to walk away from everything involved if she were pregnant, but she sure as hell could walk away from him without a backward glance.

Clearing his throat, he stroked over her turgid nipple. "Tammy, I need to be honest with you." She looked at him with calm expectation. It made

him want to lash out at himself for being such a fool as to bring this up now, so soon after she had admitted to having feelings for him.

"I lied to you this afternoon about the medication Wolf Distributors supplies. It wasn't a total lie, but it was a lie by neglect. I didn't tell you the whole truth." The scent of their sexual fulfillment and her sweet body filled his lungs when he inhaled deeply. Her scent had changed, became very sweet since she climaxed. "The medication is for Lycanthrope Syndrome, more widely known as werewolf. The medicine stops the person with the DNA gene of the Lycanthrope from shape-shifting. What you saw in the house the other night was someone that hadn't taken their medication."

Shaking her head, she looked at him tenderly. "You don't have to explain how that mutant could be mistaken for a werewolf. I would be the first to agree that it looked like what the tales describe, so I guess I could call it a werewolf. I am certain a creature, such as the one here, was the reason the tales got started by some poor ignorant peasant centuries ago. As for how a werewolf came to be in the area, no one can possibly know where it came from, or why it is here."

He covered her lips with his finger. "I am a major shareholder of Wolf Distributors because my family helped develop the medication. It was

easy to find test subjects. They tested it on themselves. I am a Lycanthrope and you may be carrying my babies. I'm sorry. I should have waited until you knew before making love to you without a condom." Lowering his eyes, he waited for the explosion. "I do love you and we can live a normal life together."

A snicker, burst into a full laugh. "Oh, Blake. You must have been really good at spinning scary tales around the campfire. I know why you are making this up, but you don't have to try to make me feel safe just because it will soon be dark. I am not afraid."

"It is true, I am telling you the medicine will stop the person from shape-shifting. Either way, you don't have to worry. I have lived with them all my life and they don't attack people. Mainly one shape-shifts when they are aroused and looking for someone willing if they don't have a mate.

"So the only thing I have to fear from a werewolf is being raped?" she retorted dryly.

"Strong emotions like fear and anger can cause a shift, too, but the medication controls it and makes it voluntarily. As for a werewolf raping someone that has shape-shifted, you can say no, but it is best to do it before he becomes overly stimulated as the one in our bedroom was. As you must have noticed, he didn't want to stop."

Frowning, she looked down at the quilt they were lying on. "Blake, you sound as though you really believe all of this. Please stop. I don't think it is amusing."

He was obviously making her nervous. If he wanted her to stay, why was he trying to push her away now? "I won't hurt you, Tammy. None of us will." As she sat up, away from him, Blake knew she was beginning to wonder if he was telling the truth. "You are safe," Shamefaced, he dropped his gaze. "You are also probably expecting my babies. I suspect because your scent has changed."

Her eyes rounded like an owl's in panic. Looking down, she touched her stomach. "You are saying I have some kind of mutant creature growing inside me?"

"No. No." Reaching for her, he drew her into his arms against his chest and ran a soothing hand over her. "No, sweetheart, total normal human babies, probably twins, they run in my family. They just have some DNA that requires medication. You need to start taking it, or I would have waited a while longer to tell you."

"You bloody dung!" Hitting him with her curled fist, she shoved away and scrambled to her feet. Crying, she ran from the room, slamming the door behind her.

Blake exhaled a load of tension from his chest. "That went well," he said with resigned irony.

Now what was he to do? Rising to his feet, he padded down the hall to the bedroom door. Leaning against the door, he called in a soothing tone, "Sweetheart, it is believed if you start taking the medication immediately after conception it will suppress the gene." Something loud hit the door with a solid thud. "I love you." Whatever hit the door this time, shattered and then he recognized the tinkling sound of fragile glass. "That was my favorite vase." Another crash. "My lamp," he muttered, knowing that if he continued to talk, things were going to continue to break. "Should I get my mother?"

"Is she one, too?" Her tone was a high-pitched cry filled with tears.

"No. My father is." A long silence passed. Frowning, he tried to think of something to say to calm her fears, but he had never told anyone in the past. This was a totally new experience for him and he was floundering. "Sweetheart, can't you think of it like a skin disorder?" The door was wrenched open and he stumbled before regaining his balance by grasping the doorframe.

"Am I going to change into one?" Tammy demanded.

"No, sweetheart." Advancing faster than she could react to move away, he gathered her into his embrace. "You are going to be you all of your life. This is a genetic thing—not a werewolf legend.

Forget the movies. We are people—only a little different.”

She held him at a distance, holding her arms stiffly before her, digging her nails painfully into his flesh. “So are we just talking a little extra hair, right? Not much of a change for some men? I have seen some pretty hairy guys,” she spoke in an ill-tempered tone that asked for agreement.

Jealousy reared its ugly face in his mind. “Oh really? Hairy guys, huh? Well, there will be no more of that.” Grasping her around the waist, he squeezed her gently. “Not even hairy—if they take their medication—and you won’t *ever* need to buy Halloween costumes.” His attempt at lightening the mood fell flat. Her face was as cold as stone in appearance.

“Cut out the wisecracks. I want to talk to your mother?”

“Grab a coat out of my closet and let’s go.”

He knew her mind was working through their conversation during the ride over because she hit him on the arm, twice. When he stopped before his mother’s house, he helped her off the bike and walked toward the house with her.

“I want to talk to her alone,” she informed coolly.

Heaving a heavy sigh, he nodded. “I will fetch Ken and we can wait in the barn.” Climbing the

steps at her side, he didn't touch her because he was afraid she would pull away. Knocking, he waited, hearing Ken advance inside with his own excellent hearing. When Ken opened the door, Blake motioned him to come out. "We need to have a conversation."

"You're mad at me, right?" Ken said in a resigned tone as he stepped from the doorway onto the porch.

"Just come on." Descending the steps, he shoved his hands in his pockets and headed toward the barn behind the house.

"What is up?"

"She wants to talk to mom."

"You told her?"

"Yeah, she needed to know."

"So what you gonna do if she leaves you?"

"Beat the hell out of you for coming into my bedroom as a wolf and scaring her. What the hell were you thinking, sniffing around my woman like that?"

"Hey, I didn't know you were serious about her. Hell, you just met her."

"So you thought a complete stranger was going to let a wolf lick her off?" Shoving the barn door open, he stomped inside.

"She was asleep so I didn't think she would notice."

"Asleep or not, if you ever touch her again I will beat you within an inch of your life, if I don't kill you first."

Shoving the door closed, Ken followed him inside. "I wouldn't touch your mate. I'm sorry I did. Are you going to tell her it was me?"

"No and neither are you. I don't want her to be embarrassed around you any more than she already is after you fondled her today."

"Sorry about that, too, I was just testing the waters."

"Well they are ice cold and don't forget it."

"I get it, she is hands off. No problem. There are more women in the world."

"Not for me." Raking his hands through his hair, Blake paced across the straw, wondering and worrying what was happening up at the house. "I will go insane if this takes long."

"You think Lydia can convince her?"

"That we are not harmful? Maybe. It will be up to Tammy to decide if she can live with me."

"Ken sat on a bale of hay, swinging his legs, watching Blake pace. "Man, I hope it is a long time before I face this problem."

"I wish I knew what they were saying."

"If anyone can help, your mother can. She had been there remember?"

"Yeah, but Mom is so mom, she cannot imagine anyone wouldn't love me."

"True," sounding resigned to the monotony of Lydia's motherly praise, Ken agreed.

Blake leaned against the wall, looking out the window at the house out front.

* * * *

Stepping into the cabin, she faced Lydia across the front room. Moving to the back of a side chair, she gripped the top, digging her fingers into the material. There was no reason to circle the subject --Lydia would know the truth about her son.

"You have been crying." Lydia advanced toward her.

"He said...that...he...that they..."

"Yes, yes, we shall discuss it, but first, let me get you something to drink. You look frozen through and a little shocked." Circling her arm around her shoulder, Lydia escorted her to the chair before the hearth. She helped Tammy remove Blake's oversized coat, then tossed it to the sofa while Tammy sank to the chair.

"It's true then?" Her hands pressed over her stomach as she thought of something growing inside her.

"Let me fetch you some wine." Lydia hurried across to the cabin, opened the side door and removed a decanter and glass. "It's not like the movies at all, dear, so get that out of your mind."

Pouring wine into the crystal glass, she capped the decanter and lifted the glass and then hurried it across to Tammy.

"Then what is it?" Shaking her head, she informed Lydia, "I saw one—it wasn't normal."

"Yes. Blake's ancestors were the people the original horror stories were written about. People are afraid of the unknown. Back when everyone was afraid of a shadow, someone had betrayed the secret, probably a former lover. The rumors forced the Lycanthropes to go into hiding. In time, people hoped they would forget, but the rumors became legends and then books, later, movies. I have to admit, I enjoy a good werewolf movie myself, but that is not what Blake is, or for that matter, any of them. They are normal hard working people, with families, homes, and rules. Blake broke those rules when he had unsafe sex with you. He knew to use a condom and if he didn't have one, he should have known to remove before losing his seed. You must have really had him out of control for him to forget. Nevertheless, do not worry. He will be punished. You will be avenged." She looked sad as she sank onto the sofa.

"Avenged?"

"Yes. The men will punish him for what he has done. He should never have gotten an outsider with child."

"Then it is true? He can really tell?" *I will abort is as soon as I leave here.*

Lydia nodded. "I'm afraid you will not be allowed to leave the mountain until the babe is born. We cannot allow you to kill the baby, or have it made a lab rat by human doctors."

Her eyes grew wide as Lydia's meaning sank into her confused thoughts. A guilty flush burned her cheeks. "I wouldn't allow anyone to do that to a child."

"Wouldn't you?"

Lydia looked at her with cold eyes that called her a liar, as though she had read her thoughts.

"I can understand at this time you are thinking of the babe as a freak. But it is not, it is merely different. I will speak to Edward. You can work from here until the babe is born, then you can leave."

"You would really keep me prisoner?"

"Oh no, dear. You will merely be in safe keeping—to protect you and the babe."

"I hope his punishment is going to justify all that he is doing to me."

Lydia sighed. "You will be allowed to watch. His punishment will not end until you are satisfied that he has been suitably punished."

"Good." At the moment, she felt totally heartless where Blake was concerned. She wanted him punished for stealing her life for a year.

"Then I gather, you'll not be forgiving him?"

"No way."

Releasing a breath between parted lips, Lydia nodded. "You can stay here with me."

"But your husband is one. I cannot stay here. There must be an empty cabin somewhere."

"Would you feel safe—could you sleep—if you were unprotected?"

"Safer than I would if living under the roof with one."

Heaving a deep breath, she nodded and rose from her seat. "I will see what is available. Drink your wine and try to relax." Crossing the room, she reached for the telephone receiver. "Tammy, don't try to run away, or they will lock you up. This way you can live a normal life, do your work, only in a new town, then you can go home and no one will be the wiser. No one need ever know you had a child."

She nodded, understanding her situation perfectly.

"Blake will pay all of your expenses while you are here. The money you earn, if you decide to work, will not be necessary as long as you are here."

Tammy drank the wine and mulled over the situation. She was furious with Blake for getting her into this mess. Why had she been so foolish? She knew not to have a fling with a stranger, but

she had fallen under his spell from the first meeting. *Do they have powers? Had he been able to hypnotize me, or something of that nature?*

Lydia called Edward and arranged the job. Then she called and arranged a furnished cabin for Tammy to stay in. Replacing the receiver on the base, she turned to Tammy with a forced smile. "Everything is arranged. You can stay here tonight and we will take you tomorrow after fetching your things from Blake's."

"I hate to impose."

"Nonsense. You are welcome. We can enjoy some girl talk. I am certain there is much more that you would like to ask, but have been too polite to so far."

The side of her mouth lifted in a grimace. "Actually there is."

"I'll run out and send the boys home, then we can talk." Taking her glass, Lydia carried it to the cabinet, refilled it and returned with it before departing. "I won't be but a few minutes."

Lydia was actually gone for quite some time before she heard the motorbikes start and roar away. When Lydia returned, Tammy had decided she didn't wish any more information at present.

"You are so right, my dear, there is plenty of time. Let's get you fixed with a room. You must be tired after all of this excitement."

“Actually, I am.”

Lydia settled Tammy in a guest room and offered a nightgown. When she returned with the gown she hugged Tammy. “Don’t you fret. Everything will be all right—just give it a little time.”

Tears in her eyes, she nodded. “Yes, I will. Thank you for all you are doing for me.”

“You just think of me as your second momma. I won’t let anything happen to you.” Releasing her, Lydia walked to the door. “There is a lock on this door. You use it and feel safe. It won’t insult us.” Stepping through the doorway, she pulled the door closed.

Crossing the room, Tammy locked the door and then changed into the gown and crawled into bed. She dreamed of making love to Blake and woke in the dark, searching the bed for him. It took a few moments to realize that he wasn’t there and why. Hitting the pillow, she bunched it beneath her cheek and cried herself to sleep.

She awoke aching for Blake. It only served to make her angrier with him. A tap on the door made her realize what had woken her. Sliding from the bed, she hurried across the room and released the lock. The door opened, forcing her to step back to prevent the door hitting her.

Blake slipped through the opening.

"Get out." Turning her back on him, she strode back to the bed where the robe Lydia had given her lay across the footboard.

"Cannot. Have to take you to your new home."

"Why you?" Snatching up the robe, she shoved her arms inside, tugged the lapels closed and reached for the sash.

"No roads. Remember?" Blake's arms slid around her waist and hugged her against his body. He nuzzled her neck.

"Let go." Tugging her body away, he released her and she spun around and hit him. "I hate you for what you have done to me." Then it struck her. Bile rose in the back of her throat. Covering her mouth, she ran to the window.

Realizing what was about to occur, Blake quickly raised the windowpane.

Leaning out the window, she was heaving while Blake held her hair behind her head. Panting, she slid back inside and sank to the floor. "Go away." Leaning against the wall, she stared at his shoes.

"Did you get drunk last night?"

"No. It is you that made me sick." Once she was certain she wasn't going to be sick again, she began relaxing.

Squatting before her, he had a worried expression on his face. "It is too soon for morning sickness."

"I said *you* – not *it*."

Rising abruptly, he spoke harshly, "They are not an *it*." Turning, he started toward the doorway. "I will be in the front room when you are ready to leave."

Lydia stepped into the opening. "Blake, they have come for you."

"Fine. See to her, will you? She is sick. Morning sickness I think."

Lydia stepped into the room as soon as he passed through the doorway.

"I'll get Ken to take you home. I didn't expect them to come so quickly to punish him. I have a tonic that will help your stomach. I'll be right back. Do you feel like dressing?" Retracing her steps, Lydia hurried from the room.

Pushing from the floor, Tammy moved to the chair where she had placed her clothes and began dressing. Lydia returned with a small juice glass with a dark liquid in it, which smelled like a mixture of sugar, light mint, and coco. Taking a sip, she noticed there was something else. *Maybe a little lemon?* It reminded her of sweet coffee. By the time she had finished preparing, she was feeling better. "That is some kind of miracle stuff you have there. Why don't you market it? You could make a fortune."

"Child, I have everything I need."

"What made you decide to get Ken to take me to my new home? Not that I am complaining, I appreciate it."

"It is Blake's responsibility to provide for all of your needs. Ken will bring your food and deliver anything you need until Blake is able to do it. Are you ready to go out? It sounds as though they are ready for us."

Tammy didn't hear anything until they stepped into the front room. Then she heard a low rumbling sound like a motorbike making a growling sound. "What is that?"

Lydia crossed to the front door and stepped through, leaving the door open.

The growling sound was louder. Moving to the door, Tammy looked out. Before the house, in the yard, was a circle of a dozen men. Blake was in the center of the circle.

"Come on out, Tammy. They are waiting on you."

"Me? Why?"

"You are Blake's victim. You get to witness his punishment."

"What are they going to do?" Stepping onto the porch, she closed the door.

"Gentlemen," Lydia called out. "You can begin."

Four men advanced on Blake, one from each direction. Each started pounding him with their

fists as though he were a punching bag. Blake didn't even attempt to defend himself.

"Why isn't he defending himself?" Horrified, she was afraid to take her eyes off Blake. The grunts and the sounds of fists impacting into flesh were making her stomach roll again. Covering her mouth, she rushed to the end of the porch and leaned over the side railing to heave once again. The sounds of the fists hitting Blake continued afflicting her ears. Although she was staring at the ground, the image of him standing between the men while they punched him was vivid in her mind.

From the sound of the impacts, they weren't holding back to prevent hurting him. Wiping her mouth on the back of her hand, she panted, keeping her eyes closed as she straightened. Raising her head, she gazed at the circle. Four new men were beating Blake. His face was swollen and blood ran from his mouth and nose. Her gaze flashed to his mother. Lydia was standing with her arms hugging one of the columns, tears running down her cheeks. "Oh God, Lydia."

Glancing at her, Lydia forced a twisted smile, tears leaking from her eyes down her cheeks. She was trying to be strong. "He is doing well – don't you think?"

"Lydia, make them stop."

"I cannot. When you feel he has been sufficiently punished, only you can stop them."

"Stop it!" she yelled, hurrying to the front banister. The fists continued hitting Blake.

"You must enter the circle and take Blake into your arms to show that he is forgiven."

"Shit! Why didn't you tell me before?" Running to the steps and down, she raced to the circle and shoved her way between the men and between the flying fists. One of the men nearly hit her.

Blake's arm flew up and deflected the blow.

"Leave him alone you monsters! You have no right to treat him like this!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Sorry, ma'am, but the rule —"

She pinned him with an evil glare and he shut up. Other mumbled apologies came from the crowd of men.

"We were doing it for you," one of the men said.

"Then you should have let *me* hit him. I wouldn't treat an animal like this."

Blows no longer holding him up, Blake sank to the ground before finally passing out.

"Oh, sweetheart!" She turned to the men and demanded, "Help me!"

The men rushed forward and gathered Blake from the ground. One called, "Where do you want him, Lydia?"

"In here, of course." Standing on the porch, Lydia watched the men carry her unconscious son into her home.

Tammy followed the men to the bottom of the steps.

Lydia turned and faced her. "Ken will take you to your new home now."

"Oh, but, I need to help —"

"That won't be necessary. I will tend to my son. You tend to your needs." Turning her back, Lydia entered her doorway and closed it.

"Tammy, are you ready?" Ken called from the side of the house.

"Oh...yes...sure." She strode across the yard to his side. "She acts like it's my fault."

"Well, you did let it go on a long time before stopping it." Shrugging, Ken turned and started toward his bike.

Gathering the robe and gown around her, she hurried along after him. "I was sick and didn't know how to stop it. We should stay in case he needs something."

"Lydia will take care of him." Swinging his leg onto the bike, he waited for her to climb on and started the motorcycle. He took her through the woods to a small cabin.

Stepping from the bike, she gazed at the narrow driveway. She had no idea where she was.

"The phone is working. Blake brought your clothes and some food over earlier. Call if you need anything."

"I don't have any phone numbers."

"There is a list beside the phone." Releasing the brake, he rode off through the trees.

The hum of the bike faded as she entered the cabin. Silence descended, surrounding her like a living thing. It gave her the creeps. The interior was typical of a rustic hunting cabin. It contained a few necessary pieces of furniture, oil lamps, and candles with matches. She was worried about Blake and...she was lonely.

Ken returned before dark with more of Lydia's potion for sickness. When she asked about Blake, he shook his head. "He's pretty bad. I hope I never have to take that kind of beating."

"Will you let me know how he is doing?"

"Why? It's your fault he took the beating."

"I'm not heartless!"

"Aren't you? Blake was a fool to love you." Starting the bike, he rode away.

The next few days seemed endless. When she called Lydia for an update on Blake, the response was always the same. "About the same."

"Is he awake? Can I speak to him?"

"No."

"Has he been seen by a doctor?" she asked on the third day.

"Do you need something? I can have Ken bring it," she responded stiffly.

"No, I'm fine." Although she was nearly out of food, she was rationing it, and drinking tea instead of eating. She didn't want to burden them over her little problems when Blake was in such a desperate condition.

"Good, I need to go. Much to do."

Then the phone clicked and a dial tone buzzed in her ear.

Tammy ran completely out of food on the sixth day. She was starving and lowering her pride, she called Lydia again. When she answered her greeting with a cold response, Tammy couldn't bring herself to ask the woman for anything. She asked about Blake's condition.

"He is improving."

* * * *

Blake sat up in bed. "Was that Tammy?"

"Yes, she continues to ask after you."

"Good." He smiled, then flinched from the pain it caused. "What kind of food is she asking for? Any cravings?"

Shrugging, Lydia set his food tray across his lap. "I don't know. I guess she is calling Ken for food."

"Hmm, I suppose that would be easiest as he is taking care of it for me. I'll try to remember to ask when he arrives."

"You want me to continue to let her believe you are very ill? She is going to be mad once she learns you are a fast healer."

"I suppose you are right. Might as well tell her I am improving nicely. I should be able to lift stock boxes in a few days."

"No need to rush things. You need a vacation anyway and I have enjoyed doing for you again."

"You are spoiling me so much I may never want to go home again."

"You deserve it. Four broke ribs, a broken nose, and jaw – the girl should be horsewhipped."

"She had no way of knowing how hard they were hitting and you said she was sick."

"Um, poor thing lost her morning sickness potion when she saw them hitting you."

A pleased grin lifting the corner of his mouth, he nodded to Ken as he sauntered into the room. "Evening, Ken. Saw doc this morning. He said all my bones seem to be knitted. Another day or two and they should be as good as new."

"Glad to hear it. You took a bad beating for that woman."

"Speaking of Tammy, what kind of food is she asking for you to bring? Any weird cravings?"

Ken shook his head. "She hasn't asked for anything."

"Healthy eater, huh? That is good."

"I wouldn't know. I haven't heard from her."

"You must have. I only took over enough food to last three days. Are you telling me my woman hasn't had anything to eat in three days?"

"The babies," Lydia gasped. "You think she is trying to lose them?"

"Ken, fetch her and bring her here. From now on she doesn't leave our sight."

* * * *

When Ken arrived, Tammy was feeling weak and dizzy as if she was going to faint. She forced herself to go to the door to greet him. "Hi." His hands were empty. He hadn't brought any food. The knowledge made her want to cry.

"Get your things. I am taking you to Lydia's house."

She leaned on the door. "Why? Is Blake all right?"

"He is much improved."

"Good." Careful with her every step, she sank onto the nearest chair.

"Fetch your things."

"I can't." Shaking her head, she admitted, "I am feeling faint."

"Ah, shit. I'll come back for them." Scooping her up in his arms, he carried her from the cabin. "How long since you ate?"

She shook her head. The roaring in her ears blocked his words. He put her on the bike, facing him, wrapped her arms around his neck and leaned her body against his. He drove slow to be able to catch her if she started to fall and to be able to avoid the bad bumps. Reaching Lydia's house, he stopped before the door. He carried her up the front steps and Blake wrenched the door open.

"Take her to my bed."

Tammy raised her head. "Blake, you are up?"

Ken raised a brow. "Are you certain you want to share? She could break your ribs with an elbow."

"My bed." Blake led Ken to the bedroom and crawled onto the bed.

Ken placed Tammy on the bed at his side.

"What is going on?" Tammy asked.

"You are going to lie here with me and eat some dinner."

"I can go to the table. I am not the one that is sick."

"She was feeling faint when I arrived. I was afraid to wait to fetch her things. I will go back now and get them."

"Thanks, Ken."

As soon as the bedroom door closed, Blake reached for the buttons on her blouse.

"What do you think you are doing?" She pushed at his hands, but he only pushed them away. "You cannot just undress me anytime you feel like it."

* * * *

Grasping her jaw, Blake covered her mouth. His tongue thrust between her lips plundered, while his hand opened the button between her breasts and slid inside. Covering one mound, he waited until the nipple hardened in his palm. Smiling against her lips, he plucked at her hard bud. When her arms came up around his neck, the fear that she hated him lifted.

His mother had said Tammy had called him sweetheart while he was unconscious. It was true he was a fast healer, but he had endured the pain, as any normal man, while his body was being pounded by the strong fists of werewolves.

Her hands smoothed over his cheeks, shoulders, and chest. Breaking the kiss, she whispered, "I was so worried about you."

"So worried you have been trying to kill my baby?" Baby did not sound as frightening as babies.

"What? I would never—" Pulling back, she stared into his troubled face. "I would never."

"You haven't been eating."

"I ran out of food."

"Why didn't you ask for more?"

She lowered her gaze. "Your mother was so cold and distant I hated to ask her for anything."

"Why didn't you call Ken?"

"I did. The line isn't working."

Hearing the approach of footsteps, he removed his hand from her breasts and pressed the lapels together. His mother opened the door, called a soft hello and stepped inside. Watching the door, Blake waited for Tammy to appear embarrassed to be in bed with him. His mother brought in a food tray and placed it on the bed. Then Ken appeared with her small parcel of clothing. When his mother and Ken departed, they left the door standing open.

Held immobile with tension, Blake waited, barely able to breathe. When Tammy sat up and reached for the food, he stopped breathing at the sight of her exposed breast between the gapping lapels. He knew this was the moment of truth. His future was in her hands. "Tammy?" he queried.

"Um, divine." Turning to him in response to his query, she happily chewed a pickled egg. "Do you think she has any yams?"

He chuckled. She was adorable. "I will ask." He sat up and rose from the bed.

"Where are you going?"

"To check on your yams."

Her head cocked to the side. "Do I get everything I want because I am expecting?" she queried, her eyebrows arching.

"Well, pretty much. I suppose you do."

A large smile spreading her lips, she patted the bed. "Then I want you here, now. I will not be responsible for you hurting yourself. Please, I insist."

Sinking onto the bed, he looked at the food remaining on her tray. "Don't overeat this first time. You will get sick," he warned.

Scrunching up her nose, she dusted her fingers and lay back against the pillow. "I will wait until later to finish."

"Shall I have Mother remove the tray?" A grin tugged the side of his mouth. He was pleased that she was willing to accept advice.

"No, if you must leave the bed I will move it in a few minutes." She nestled against the pillow and turned on her side to gaze at his face. "You are looking much better than I expected. You must not have been hurt very badly."

He shrugged. "A few broken ribs, nose, and jaw. We heal faster than normal."

"It must have been dreadfully painful."

"As long as you are satisfied that I was sufficiently punished for what I have done, it was worth it."

"I never said you were punished to my satisfaction—I said I should have been allowed not them to do it."

"Hmm." Pausing, he thought for a moment. "Would you consider waiting until my bones have healed before you decide to complete the task?"

"I couldn't believe you just stood there and didn't even attempt to defend yourself."

"I was being punished. Defending myself would have defeated the purpose."

Tammy yawned.

"Go to sleep. I could use a nap myself." Closing his eyes, Blake relaxed against the pillows.

When they awoke, Tammy was ready to return to her cabin.

"I don't think it would be wise. We learned this week how foolish it was to put you out there by yourself. What if something had happened to you? You wouldn't have been able to call for assistance. No, you shall stay with me," Blake decreed.

"I cannot stay with you for nine months, Blake."

"Why not?"

"Because we aren't married."

"Then we shall get married."

"No, we won't."

Gathering her into his arms, Blake covered her mouth to silence her. When she stroked his cheek with her fingertips, he felt it was safe to do a little exploring. His hand covered her breast and stroked her smooth nipple until it became a hard nub. Her purr of satisfaction was heavenly to his ears. Drawing her closer against his body, he fitted his growing erection against her, pressing firmly as he plundered the sweet recesses of her mouth.

Forgetting about the food tray, he pulled her under him and settled between her thighs, nestling his erection against her crotch. The sound of the tray crashing onto the floor barely registered in his mind. He was as deeply under her spell as the night that had gotten him beaten. However, there was no longer the threat of a beating or possible baby complications to slow him down. When he released her mouth to draw her blouse over her head, Tammy was panting as heavily as he. His mouth had covered her breast and started suckling when the click of the door sounded.

Blake looked around and saw his mother backing out of the room, pulling the door closed. Returning his attention to Tammy, he knew they would not be disturbed.

Looking up with eyes bright from tears that sparkled with faith and hope, she gazed to him for

assurance. "We'll be okay." Curling her fingers into the shoulders of his pajama shirt, she tugged it.

Breathing a sigh of relief, he rose up and shucked his shirt, slinging it to the floor in one motion. "We will be perfect, sweetheart." Lifting her chin, he claimed her mouth in a deep loving kiss to bind their souls.

When he finally left her mouth, he returned to her breasts, giving them the tender attention they demanded. Her passion was ragging as high as his was. His fingers rubbed along the seam of her crotch. Tammy gasped and rocked her pelvis up and down against his fingers. His free hand worked on the opening of her pants. When he had the zipper parted, he grasped the material at her hips and dragged it down. Once this motion revealed her mound, he pressed a soft kiss there. When he had the pants down far enough, he told her to pull her leg free. The maneuver parted her thighs and made reaching her clit an easy accomplishment.

Dipping his head, he licked and suckled the tender flesh until she was quivering on the edge of climax. But no, she wasn't going to deny him the satisfaction of entering her body. Moving up her body, he met her gaze while positioning himself at her opening. Watching him with passion-glazed

eyes, she grasped his arms and pulled him toward her.

Entering her hot sheath sent chills down his spine. "Oh, baby!" Dropping to an elbow, he cupped her face and claimed her mouth in a passionate kiss as he continued to ease himself into her body.

Tammy waited until he was comfortably seated, then dug her nails into his shoulders. "Hurry, Blake, oh please."

Blake was happy to oblige. He thrust fast and drove deep into her body, meeting the upward push of her pelvis. A consuming coupling controlled their thoughts and movements. He heard the bed banging against the wall and the squeaking of the bed frame. His deep growl of satisfaction followed her high keening screech as orgasm claimed them both.

Laying his head beside hers on the pillow, Blake took a moment to regain his breath. "And that, my darling, settles the question as to where you are going to be staying."

A week later, they were ready to return to his home. "If it weren't for that man giving me bad directions, I wouldn't even be here," she said as they strolled toward the motorbike.

A grin lifted the corner of his mouth. "You mean Uncle Fred? He thinks of himself as

something of a matchmaker. In this case, I would have to agree. I will need to thank him."

"That was your uncle? But how could he have known I would be interested in you? Does he have physic powers?"

"No. If the opportunity arises that he can send a lovely lady in this direction, he does. I wouldn't be surprised if he isn't the one that let your boss know about the family business."

"You think my boss is a werewolf?"

He grinned. "No, he probably thinks the medicine is for impotency. That is what we tell most people. It works for that, too--so it won't harm normal people."

"So you can sell it to anyone?" Swinging her leg over the bike, her spirits seemed to perk up.

"Yes, it is safe."

"Then it won't hurt in the least if you have more publicity and more business." Tammy was in her comfort zone and concentrating on work to take her mind off her immediate worries.

"No, I will speak to the stockholders about increasing our advertising." Slipping his leg over the bike in front of her, he settled in and drew her arms around his waist to secure her hold.

"What about the FDA?"

"We are approved. Tested long ago."

She breathed a heavy sigh of relief. "I'm glad. That will be one obstacle out of the way."

A grin tugging the corner of his mouth, Blake started the bike and headed back to his house. Although he knew the trail and every curve and bump, he drove at a slow speed so as not to bump Tammy around too much.

When they arrived, he drove to the back porch stopped. She hopped off and he drove to the shed where he stored the bike out of the weather. Designed originally to be a storage shed, he found the size was perfect for his bike. The only things stored in the building were his helmets and ornaments for the bike for different occasions along with a spare seat. The seat that had come with the bike was lightly padded. After riding over the trails a few times, he purchased a new thickly padded seat. He wasn't a wimp and could have handled the jarring to his bones, but his mother had fussed constantly that he was going to ruin himself and be unable to produce children. Blake hadn't been in a hurry to breed heirs, but he knew he would want children one day. Therefore, he added the new seat. Then he had added a sissy bar at the back because he feared any female passenger that rode with him over the trails might bounce off the back.

It had seemed a foolish addition to Ken and several others, as he hadn't had a girlfriend at the time. Even then, he had been planning for the

future. Now he was glad he had made the effort. He didn't need to worry when Tammy had sat back while riding to his mother's. She had refused to hold onto him during the ride over. It hadn't pleased him, but at least she had been willing to make the ride. She had been willing to speak to his mother on the subject of living with werewolves. He didn't know what his mother had said, but it had relaxed most of the tension that had tied her in knots.

He knew she was still struggling with the concept of living with a man that was half-creature. She may even shudder with the thought of the beast in him, but when she looked at him, he knew she wanted him. She wanted to be with the man, and that meant she had to try to accept the animal.

Locking up the bike, he strode to where Tammy was waiting. He slid his gaze down her body. She was shivering from the cold in spite of the heavy coat she wore. He hoped she was cold. He didn't know what he was going to do, or how he was going to handle the problem if she was afraid to be alone with him. "Tammy, are you all right?"

"I'm cold."

"I know, but are you all right with this? Do you want me to take you back to mother's house?"

* * * *

Biting her bottom lip, she shook her head. "I think as long as I know you will take me back, it will be all right. You aren't going to change, are you?"

"No. I take the medication faithfully. I don't want you to be frightened of me. I won't harm you. Hell! I think mother would skin, stuff, and mount me on the wall if I hurt you. Did you not notice you are all ready perfect in her eyes? As far as she is concerned, you are my future. You are the future mother of her grandchildren. She would defend and protect you to her last breath. Just as I would."

"Could we not discuss it anymore tonight?"

"Very well." He escorted her to the backdoor. "Would you like something to eat? May I suggest grilled steak and a salad with a mixture of vegetables?"

"That sounds like an excellent idea."

"You aren't going to sleep with me tonight, are you?" Turning his back to her, he walked toward the kitchen as he spoke. He didn't want her to feel pressured, but their relationship was so new he hated to be separated from her even for a night.

"I think it would be best if I have a little more time to adjust."

"You know I am not trying to pressure you unduly. I just want you to keep in mind the comparison to a skin disorder."

"I have, which is why I am still here." Following him to the kitchen, she leaned on the counter, propping on her elbows, watching him work. "You seem to be good in the kitchen."

"I enjoy cooking."

"You really are a dream come true."

Twisting, he cast her a smiling glance. "I hate doing laundry."

"Not a problem. We can make Ken do the laundry."

"And what do you like to do around the house, sweet lady?"

"My all-around favorite is watering the plants."

He chuckled. Walking past her, he opened the door and moved to the grill. Setting the platter of steaks on the small patio table, he bent to light the grill.

She sighed. "I can dust and vacuum. Ken will be staying, won't he?" Leaning on the counter, she watched him through the doorway.

"He owns half of everything, including the house." Placing the steaks on the grill, he leaned backward to be able to look in the doorway at her.

"I assumed as much."

"Do you have a problem with Ken?" Straightening, he closed the grill lid and then strolled through the doorway and closed the door.

"Not really, I enjoy having men around that have licked my clit." Turning her back to the

counter, she watched him crossing to the hutch to remove the dishes.

He hesitated for a moment before opening the hutch's glass door. "I was hoping you wouldn't realize it was him. I am sorry about that. It won't ever happen again."

Puffing out a breath through pouted lips, she sighed. "Can you be certain?"

"I can. He wouldn't have touched you if he had known I was serious about you. Plus, I have told him I will beat him to death if he touches you again."

They ate a pleasant meal, talking about their dislikes and pet peeves. Blake wasn't happy about it, but he escorted her to his bedroom door, kissed her goodnight and then pulled the door closed. Punching the air, he strode down the hall, through the kitchen and entered the hall on the opposite side of the house. Going to Ken's bedroom for the night wasn't what he wanted to do, but it was better than sleeping on the sofa.

He was in the kitchen cooking bacon when she entered the kitchen the next morning. Strolling up to him, she stood on tiptoe and kissed him on the mouth.

"Good morning." Smiling, she strolled away.

Blake felt like he could send her up in flames merely from the hunger in his gaze. He wanted her in his arms, in his bed, not this polite friendly female strolling around his home as though she were a carefree teenager. The phone rang and he reached out and scooped up the wall receiver closest to the kitchen stove. "Blake, here."

"Good morning, son. Your mother said you have a stranded guest. She will be happy to hear that the road is open again."

"But how?"

"The rain left the bridge mostly intact. They replaced and fixed the broken parts. It is temporary, of course. They are going to replace it, but we have something to use until then."

"Thanks. I know Mom is thrilled to have you back." After his father hung up, Blake turned and held out the receiver toward Tammy. "Bridge is open."

"Really?" Hurrying across the room, she took the receiver and walked away, punching the buttons to make her call. A few minutes later, she hung up the phone and headed down the hall to his bedroom. When she returned, she was in her business suit and looked as neat as a pin.

"I called and Edward is in, he hasn't been able to go to work since the flooding either, and he said you already had the job."

"Your mother arranged it?"

He sat her plate of food on the table.

Sliding into the seat, she smiled. "I must thank her. Although I would prefer to keep my present job and contract Mr. Edward's advertising. I hope you don't mind that I didn't help you?"

"No. I wasn't lying when I said I enjoy cooking. I usually cook breakfast while Ken runs the store. We swap out so he can eat. He works mornings. I work in the afternoons." Setting his plate on the table at her side, he settled onto the hardback chair and started eating. His heart was beating heavy and nervous tension held him in its grip. He didn't want to reveal how frightened he was that she might leave and never return. Picking at his food, he moved it around on his plate pretending to eat.

"If you always eat this slowly poor Ken must be starving by the time he comes down to eat," she teased.

"That must be why he always eats twice as much as I."

"I wouldn't be surprised." Glancing at her watch, Tammy placed her fork on the plate. "I hate to eat and run, but I have an appointment and can't miss it a second time. I wouldn't have a prayer of getting a third appointment."

"You never know, it is a small company, remember?"

"How many employees does Wolf Distributors have?"

"At present, I believe there are around a hundred, maybe a hundred and fifty people."

"Really! The company is bigger than I thought." Excited, she rose from the chair, leaned down and kissed him on the cheek. "See you later, gator." Straightening, she flipped the strap of her purse onto her shoulder and strode toward the ramp that led upstairs.

Watching her calmly walk away, Blake swallowed a lump of fear. Was he watching her walk out of his life forever? He needed to make that call. Shoving back his chair, he strode to the phone and punched in the number to Uncle Fred Edward's office. Fleetinglly, he wondered if Tammy would recognize him as the man that had sent her up the mountain. Uncle Fred could see the future. He must have known about the landslide and the bridge before they happened. Had he also known that Tammy would be safe and that he would fall in love with her? Blake really needed to sit his uncle down and learn more about his gift.

He waited impatiently while his secretary informed him who was calling. If Fred was as superior at foreseeing the future as he claimed, why did he need a secretary to tell him who was calling on the phone? Tapping his finger on the

table, he glanced at the clock, wondering what time was Tammy's appointment.

"How are you today, nephew?"

"Great, worried, take your pick, Tammy Sinclair is on her way to see you. It seems she has an appointment to discuss advertising for the company. Tell her you will have the company lawyers look over the contract before you sign, but give her every reason to believe that she will have a new client as soon as the lawyers have gone over the formalities."

"I have already heard from the other board members. You must have been busy on the phone last evening."

"I didn't have a lot to keep me occupied. If that is a smile I hear in your tone, I may need to come over there and punch you. How could you send her up a mountain when there was going to be a landslide? What if that landslide had killed her or broken her beyond recognition? You have a lot to answer for, old man."

"Watch how you talk to me, young man. I can still send the young lady on her way. You know as well as I that I knew she would be in no real danger. I had to send her to you. I knew the minute I saw her that she was made for you."

"Oh you did, did you? Well, I am certainly grateful I was able to help your concentration."

"Did it ever occur to you that you left too large an imprint in her mind as well as her soul? She will not likely forget you anytime soon."

"I want her to have a reason to stay," Blake remarked.

"I got the message. The board members are always willing to work with the members to keep them happy."

"What about the little lady? Will you promise to make certain these humans are happy?"

"I will see what I can do. I need to hang up now, I do believe Miss Sinclair has arrived."

To say he paced a groove into the rug that day would be putting it mildly. Blake was so stressed he didn't go to work. He couldn't because he had transformed. He howled so much, Ken had been forced to come down and order him to keep silent or get out of the house.

Blake had growled at him in response.

"I am warning you, Blake. If you don't get yourself under control Tammy is going to return and find you like this and you are going to lose her forever. You told her you could control it—now you are going to prove yourself a liar."

His chest heaved as he panted, Blake struggled to regain control of his wild emotions. Ken was right. He didn't want Tammy to return and find a werewolf instead of him waiting for her. He

battled with his emotions and tamped them down. Slowly he regained control and shifted back into human form. Taking a shower, he washed the day's sweat and grime from his body, dressed in fresh clothes and sat on the sofa, acting undisturbed when he heard Tammy's light tread on the ramp. It was such a relief that she had returned, he felt like dancing around the room like a fairy. *Who ever heard of a wolf fairy?*

Tammy sailed into the room as though she hadn't stayed away most of the day and driven him half out of his mind. Glancing up with an interested expression, he asked. "How did the meeting go?"

"He was interested. The company lawyers have to look over the company contracts before he can sign anything."

"That could take a few days."

"Nope, he said to come back tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" *I'm going to kill Fred.* "Isn't that rather fast to expect lawyers to go over a contract?"

"Not really. It is a rather simple, straight forward contract."

"Hmm. That's nice, then you should know something fairly soon. I wouldn't hold my breath on hearing back from lawyers by tomorrow though."

"I'm not really, but I can hope. Is Ken working this evening?"

"Yes. I decided I needed a day off."

"Excellent. I am so excited. I would really like to go to bed."

His ears actually perked up. "Really? A new deal turns you on."

"In a big way."

"You know I would love to make love to you, but I would really like to discuss our future."

"I was thinking you might, but I was also thinking I might need to see you as a wolf first."

"You did that first night when you invited me into your bath. I was being a total wolf then." Her fist hit his shoulder lightly and he chuckled.

"You know what I mean."

"I faithfully take my medication and that night was as close as I allow myself to the wolf."

"Oh. I thought you said you could change when you wanted."

"We really can live a normal life, but yes I can shift if I want, but you said you were excited. If I change now, you are going to be attacked by a wolf."

"I'm willing to take the chance."

Blake's mouth fell open. "I will, after we make love. I am not willing to risk frightening you away, when you are considering staying."

"Alright. Let's go. I am ready." Opening her top, she walked from the room toward his bedroom.

Blake followed her down the hall to the bedroom, tugging his shirt over his head. Kicking off his shoes, he opened his pants zipper and leaned against the doorframe to remove them. Tammy bent over, shimmying her skirt and panties down her legs. Grinning, Blake walked up behind her and grasped her hips.

"This will do." Pressing his hand on her back to keep her bent forward, he walked while pushing her gently toward to the bed. Laughing, she obliged until she was propped on the mattress. Spreading her feet with his leg, he moved into position and sank into her heat. Buried deep, he growled, his body trying to shift as the overwhelming desire surged through his body.

"Don't you dare change on me now."

"You said you wouldn't care." Struggling to control the shift, he was having a hard time because the sexual stimulation from his body was driving him insane with need.

"I would really like to be watching when you change."

"Now you tell me." Thrusting hard, he kept his hands on her head, and her hair covering her face. Running a hand down the smooth line on her back, he admired the silken texture of her skin.

Leaning over her back, he licked her neck and shoulders, staying on the opposite side from her face so she couldn't see him. He wasn't certain how well he was controlling the change and he didn't want to frighten her.

His excitement over her return to him had really gone to his head. He felt wilder than he had ever felt in his life. This was his woman and she wanted him as much as he wanted her. He had never made love while his body was shifting and it heightened his awareness of the sexual stimulation. She wanted him in spite of the fact that he wasn't normal and that really excited him. He knew he was over stimulated and struggled to resist the shift.

He didn't know how he had managed to be so lucky, but he wasn't about to blow his chances with her over hot sex. He maintained his shape, fighting the shift in spite of the fact that he had implied to her that he had shifted. Pounding her buttocks hard, he increased his speed when she started thrashing about and driving her body back against him. When she cried out with her release, he held her against the bed with his back pressed over her. Holding her shoulders, he drove into her hard and growled low and deep in her ear while his seed pumped into her body. Panting, he whispered in her ear. "That is how animals make love – wild and out of control. Did you enjoy it?"

"Um, yes. That was wonderful – exactly what I needed."

"And you don't mind that a werewolf loved you?"

"You didn't shift. You are only funning me." Rolling onto her side, she gazed up at his furred face and smiled. "You really did get carried away."

"Not completely." Stepping back from her, he allowed her to watch him finish the shift. As his breathing eased, he shifted back to his normal form.

She smiled. "You weren't frightening at all and were really quite adorable. Being a wolf suits you."

"You really do have a wild side that you keep hidden." He was awed and a little stunned.

She grinned at him. "It appears I have. I like that I made you lose control. It makes me feel like you really find me irresistible."

"I do."

Curling her finger, she wiggled it for him to come closer. "If you are as faithful to me as you are with your family, I think we could have a happy future."

Blake grinned. "Me, too, sweetheart." Sliding onto the bed at her side, he gathered her into his arms. "I would like to prove what a faithful lover I can be."

"I want you to."

Holding her against his heart, he poured his loving emotions into a kiss that sealed their commitment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Belita Renn lives in the southeast United States in northwest Georgia with her husband and two Chow dogs. She is a mother of four and has been writing since youth. She had written children's books under the name Belita Keaton and romance under Kim Parson also.