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The Edge of Morning

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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

The Sentinels
THE EDGE OF MORNING
Desiree Holt

Dedication

To Karen Whiddon who started my love affair with the wolf and to Kate Douglas who brought it to full flower.

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Montero Sport: Mitsubishi Jidosha Kogyo Kabushki Corporation Japan

Chapter One

The sun had already been up for an hour, but its heat hadn't yet warmed the air. The crisp chill of the night still lingered. Next to twilight this was Sierra Hart's favourite time of the day. She'd carried her mug of coffee out to the deck that ran along one side of the cabin and stretched out on the comfortable lounge chair. She'd found an old riding mower in the shed behind the cabin. Surprised that it still worked, she'd mowed down the wild growth immediately surrounding the building to give herself a small clearing. Beyond that, the Maine woods stretched forever.

What a shock it had been to learn her grandfather had left this to her—his cabin where he'd hunted as a young man and where he'd retreated after her grandmother died. The deed, which both the attorney and the county records verified, also included five thousand acres of forest and a small stream. It came to her at a time when she was at a crossroad in her life, relationship-wise and career-wise. Without a soul around for miles, she had plenty of space to do all the thinking she needed to.

She was idly scanning the trees at the edge of the clearing when she saw him—a huge silver wolf. Her first instinct was to barricade herself inside, but he made no effort to move closer to her, just stood there, watching her. A tiny breeze wafted from the forest across the deck, bringing with it an unusual sense of calm. She couldn't have said why but instinctively she knew the wolf meant her no harm.

She'd read about the organisations working to repopulate the wolf in northern Maine. An abundance of coyotes had demanded the presence of their natural enemy. But Sierra had never heard of a wolf coming this close to people without attacking. She watched him steadily, waiting for him to make a move, but he was as still as a statue. In fact, for a moment she actually thought he might be one, something she hadn't noticed, until he lifted his snout and sniffed the breeze.

She sat up in her chair, prepared to bolt into the house if he made a run for her, but he held his position.

Her concentration was disrupted by the sound of tires on the so-called dirt road leading to the cabin. She wasn't expecting any visitors so the sound of leaves crunching startled her. Who on earth would be coming here? No one except her closest friend, Nina, even knew where she was. Setting her mug on the little table next to her, she rose to her feet and walked to the end of the deck.

A black Montero Sport with tinted windows inched its way towards the cabin, finally stopping in the small gravel parking area. She waited, wondering if she should have a gun with her. Grandpa had been meticulous about teaching her with both rifle and handgun, and his entire collection was in the cabinet in the great room. Another bonus.

After a moment, both the driver and passenger doors opened and two men emerged. They could have been twins, dressed in black slacks and dark green polo shirts with a small logo over the breast pocket. One blond, one dark-haired, they sported short hair cuts, no facial hair and expressionless faces. Spotting her standing there, they walked towards her with steady strides.

Sierra leaned on the rail, bending forward. "Can I help you? This is private property."

Neither of them said a word until they were a foot away from her. Then the blond reached into his pants pocket, extracted a leather card case and pulled out a business card.

“Craig Danforth. Hagen Lumber Mills.” When Sierra didn’t reach for it, he set the card on the deck railing. “We’d like to talk to you about your land.”

She shoved her hands into her jeans pockets. “The same kind of talk you had with my grandfather? He wasn’t interested in selling and neither am I.”

“Miss Hart,” the other man began.

“Forget it. Save your breath.”

The other man stepped forward. “I don’t think you want to be hasty here. This is prime lumber property. Hagen is prepared to make you a substantial offer.”

Sierra clenched her jaw. “It’s prime forest, and it’s going to stay that way. Good day, gentlemen. Don’t bother coming back.”

The two men exchanged a look, then both nodded once and trudged back to their SUV. Sierra stood there, tense, until they drove away. When she turned to pick up her coffee mug, she noticed the wolf still standing there, only now his lips were drawn back in a snarl. She shivered then stepped back into the great room. Before she even poured another cup of coffee, she unlocked the gun cabinet, took out a rifle and a small 9mm handgun and loaded them. Next time she’d be prepared.

* * * *

By evening, when the sun had dipped well past the horizon, the temperature had dipped along with it. Sierra built a fire in the huge stone fireplace and warmed some cider. She was about to stretched out in front of it on the thick cushions she’d tossed on the floor when a knock sounded on the heavy wood door.

Now who? But this time I’m prepared. And tomorrow I’m getting a chain to go with the deadbolt.

Who’d have thought she needed it way out here?

She picked up the loaded handgun from the table where she’d left it and held it behind her back with one hand. Flipping on the porch light she opened the door with her other hand, barely cracking it two inches.

“Yes?”

“I think I’m lost.”

The voice was like melted chocolate, deep and warm and enveloping.

Sierra opened the door a little wider, looked at her visitor and every bit of saliva in her mouth dried up. The man on her porch was well over six feet, lean and broad shouldered. Dark brown hair with traces of silver dusted his shoulders and framed a starkly masculine face—high cheekbones, square jaw and unusual amber eyes. A long-sleeved black T-shirt and well-worn jeans clung to well-defined muscles.

Holy shit!

After three tries she found her voice, and then it came out sounding like a squeak. “Lost?”

“Yes. I’ve been hiking in the woods, and I probably got disoriented. Listen, I promise I’m not an escaped murderer or a rapist on the loose. It’s safe to let me in.”

Clutching the gun behind her back, she swung the door wider and he stepped inside. Up close his presence was even more overwhelming. She felt surrounded, all her breath trapped in her lungs, her legs suddenly shaky. She backed up until her legs hit the table behind the couch where she carefully placed

the handgun.

The thick, dark eyebrows rose questioningly. “Were you planning to shoot me?”

She wet her lips with her tongue. “Only if I needed to.”

He grinned, a smile that somehow reminded her of the silver wolf. “I’m certainly glad you didn’t need to. I promised you I’m harmless.” He held out his hand. “Luke Spencer.”

Gingerly, she reached out to shake hands. “Sierra Hart.”

The moment they made skin to skin contact a thunderbolt of electricity pierced her. Frighteningly, she felt her nipples harden, moisture seep from her cunt, and her pulse throb. She didn’t remember being in such a powerful male presence before. She could almost smell the testosterone in the air. What was going on here? She backed further into the room.

“Well, Sierra Hart, I seem to be lost out here in the woods. Do you think you could help me with directions? And maybe a hot drink? It’s getting damn chilly out there.”

Everything in her screamed to force him out the door at gunpoint, run to her bedroom and hide in the closet. And it wasn’t bodily harm she was afraid of.

“Um, yes. Sure.” She nearly tripped over the rug on the wood floor. “H-have a seat. I was just heating some cider. That okay?”

He smiled again and everything inside her body quivered. “Cider sounds great.”

She barely remembered to grab the gun and take it with her, stumbling as she headed towards the kitchen. Looking wildly around, she opened the freezer door and stuck the gun inside.

No. I should keep it with me.

Don’t be stupid. It isn’t death you have to worry about here.

She slammed the freezer shut and took another mug from the cupboard. Her hands shook as she poured the cider and she needed both hands to carry it into the other room.

“Thanks.” The warm chocolate voice caressed her. “This is great.”

“W-would you like to sit down?” *Am I crazy?*

“Sure. I could use a rest. I feel as if I’ve been on the move for hours.”

He sat with a loose-limbed movement on one end of the couch, the ankle of one leg crossed over the knee of the other. Sierra would have sat at the dining room table if she didn’t think it would look too obvious. She needed to put as much distance as she could between herself and this man. She settled for the arm chair set at a right angle to the couch.

He motioned to the cushions on the floor. “Looks like you were planning to crash in front of the fire.”

“Yes. It’s one of my favourite things to do.” She took a sip of her cooling cider. “Tell me, Mr. Spencer, how did you happen to get lost in the vicinity? It’s private property and I don’t get many hikers.”

His amber eyes glowed as his gaze raked over her and his mouth turned up again in a sinful grin. “I apologise for intruding. I’m staying at the motel in Pine Tree and just started walking from there. There weren’t any fences or posted notices so I thought I was still on public property.”

“That’s a long way to hike. More than twenty miles. Do you do that often?”

“Yes. My work is pretty demanding so solitary hiking vacations let me work out the kinks.”

She took another swallow of her cider. “What kind of work do you do?”

He stared at her for a long time, as if making up his mind what to tell her. “I work for a paranormal investigative agency. We take a lot of private cases as well as helping the police when they ask.”

“Paranormal?” She frowned. “You mean, like psychics?”

“Among other things. So. What kind of work do you do? Or you independently wealthy enough to enjoy life here all the time?”

She leaned forward and set her mug on the coffee table. “Actually, you could say I’m about to make a life-changing decision.”

“How so?”

She shrugged. “Got tired of everything. Quit my job. Sold my condo. My grandfather left me this cabin and land so it seemed like the door to opportunity was opening for me.”

The amber eyes were fixed on her again, like jewels reflecting the light from the fire. “Surely there must be some man waiting for you.”

Not any more.

“How did we get to talking about me? I thought you wanted directions out of here.”

“Do I make you nervous, Sierra?”

No. he made her feel hot and wanting. She was so wet just from being in the same room with him she was sure the scent of her arousal rose from her body. What was happening to her? “Well, you are a stranger. I don’t know anything about you.”

“Would you like to? Know about me?”

She’d been so mesmerised by his eyes, she hadn’t noticed he was sliding closer and closer to her until he reached out and took her hand. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to let him tug her out of the chair and coax her onto his lap. Beneath the soft denim of his jeans she felt the thick, hard outline of his cock pressing against her buttocks. A corner of his mouth tipped up in a knowing grin and heat flashed in his amber eyes.

One arm held her in a loose embrace, while the other hand cupped her chin, tilting it up to him.

“From the minute you opened the door, I knew I had to do this.”

His mouth on hers was like warm satin, pressing lightly, teasing as he rubbed it against her. When his tongue came out to lick the closed seam she felt as if liquid fire was being poured onto her. Unbidden, she parted her lips, welcoming the rough texture of his tongue as it tasted and tormented. Nothing was left untouched. He took it all—teeth, the inner side of her lips, her gums, the roof of her mouth.

She clutched at his shoulders, terrified of the unfamiliar heat sweeping through her, setting her blood to the boiling point and streaking from nipple to cunt like the flames in the fireplace. Yet, at the same time, she was seduced by it. She wanted more. More of him, of his touch, of his mouth. She wanted to feel his mouth everywhere on her body.

His hand held her head firmly in place as he continued to bewitch her with his tongue. That was the

only word for it, because surely under normal circumstances she would not be sitting here on a stranger's lap wishing his cock was inside her instead of in his jeans.

When he lifted his head, she was panting, her brain foggy, her hands still clutching at him in an attempt to keep herself centred. Without saying a word, he slid the soft fabric of her T-shirt up until her pale blue, lacy bra was exposed. His head bent, and his mouth captured a nipple, fabric and all, the touch more erotic because of it. He nipped the swelling bud with sharp teeth, then soothed it with his rough tongue, and the tiny shards of pain were like little pinpricks of pleasure.

After he had teased one nipple to the point of almost painful hardness, he turned his attention to the other. Sierra tilted her head back, thrusting her breasts up at him. His large hand supported her at the middle of her back while his mouth worked its erotic magic. She couldn't help wriggling on his lap, loving the feel of his rigid shaft against the cheeks of her ass.

What was happening to her? She had always enjoyed sex but never been suffused with such uncontrolled wantonness. She wanted to rip off their clothes and feel their naked bodies together.

As if he could read her mind, Luke chuckled, a low, throaty sound that sent shivers skittering along her spine. His nimble fingers unclasped her bra, then it was gone, leaving her breasts completely bare to his assault. He cupped one breast in his palm and took little nips of the creamy flesh, tiny bites that he then swept his tongue over, just as he'd done with her nipples.

By the time he finished his attention on both breasts, Sierra was a screaming mass of need, her crotch soaked and her pussy quivering to be invaded.

"Look at me, Sierra." His voice was warm yet demanding.

She opened her eyes and stared into his golden ones. She could almost see her reflection in them.

"I'm going to take off the rest of your clothes now, so I can see every inch of your body. *Every* inch. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

As if in a trance, hypnotised by his voice, she nodded.

"Are you afraid of me, Sierra?"

"N-no." She swallowed and tried again. "No. I'm not."

"Good. Because if you do everything I tell you to, I promise I will give you pleasure unlike anything you've known before. All right?"

"Yes." Short answers were all she could manage. Her body was on fire, and she wanted him to stop talking and do something about it.

He lifted her from his lap and stood her on her feet, lowering the zipper on her slacks and brushing the soft material past her hips to her ankles. Deftly, he helped her step out of them, tossing the garment to the side. Hooking his thumbs into the tiny hip band of her thong, he tugged it down slowly, revealing her pubic hair inch by inch, the backs of his fingers caressing the insides of her thighs as he stripped the garment from her body.

Bunching the scrap of silk in his hand, he held it to his nose and inhaled deeply.

"The best perfume." His voice was thick and gravely. "Your scent is intoxicating."

Dropping the thong, he placed his hands on her thighs, moving them apart, and bent to slide his

tongue through her curls. He flicked at the hot flesh of her now burning clit then delved between her labia to the slick flesh guarding the opening to her pussy.

Sierra closed her eyes, letting sensation wash over her. She didn't know how she managed to stay upright as he repeated the licking process over and over again. She simply threaded her hands through the rich black silk of his hair and held onto them as if they were lifelines.

She felt herself falling, unsure if it was a real or imagined sensation, until she felt one of the huge, thick cushions she'd dumped on the floor, hitting her back and her legs. She opened her eyes just in time to see Luke hovering over her, his mouth a breath away before he pressed it against hers. She tasted herself on his lips, a tart yet sweet flavour, and the tip of her tongue pressed between them to lick at it.

His tongue touched hers, a light caress before sweeping into her mouth again. He moved it in and out, mimicking what she hoped he would do to her with his cock. She sucked at it greedily, biting it lightly then tightening her lips over it.

"Open your eyes, Sierra," Luke's hot voice whispered.

The look in his eyes sent shivers through her.

"I am going to make love to you in so many ways you won't even remember who you are. Tonight your body belongs to me." He nipped at an ear. "Let me hear you say yes."

Her brain didn't seem to belong to her any more. There was only one answer she could give him. "Yes."

Chapter Two

When Luke stripped off his clothes and stood towering over her, the firelight brushed his body with a golden glow. He was solid muscle, each one rigidly defined, from his flat stomach to his solid thighs and calves. A thick mat of curls covered his chest and arched in a line down to his groin, ending in a heavy nest of curls from which rose the largest, most magnificent erection she had ever seen. It aroused and terrified her at the same time. She wanted to feel it filling her cunt, yet at the same time, she didn't know how she could stretch to take it.

Luke took the heavy shaft in his hand and idly stroked it, his gaze fixed on her.

"You have a tempting body, Sierra. Mouth-watering."

If only.

"I'm too short," she protested. "My breasts are too small and my hips and ass are too big."

Anger slashed briefly across his face. "Did someone tell you that? Obviously a man without brains or taste. You're perfect. For me."

He knelt down so his knees bracketed her and took her breasts in his hands. His thumbs rasped back and forth across nipples already swollen with need, hard and aching. Sierra sucked in a breath as he bent his mouth to them again. As he took them each into his mouth she felt the hot pull all the way to her womb and a fresh flow of liquid saturated her pussy.

She arched up to him, running her hands over the solid muscles of his back. A tiny moan drifted from her mouth as he worked at her breasts, nipping at them then laving them with his tongue. She loved the rough feel of it, the scrape of it across her over-sensitized skin. She wanted to feel it inside her again, scraping the greedy walls of her vagina and drinking her cream.

She bucked up against him, and the vibration of his quiet chuckle echoed through her body.

"Such impatience, little one. I want to be sure to pay complete homage to these perfect breasts and these ripe, luscious nipples. How I would love to see them gripped by solid-gold nipple rings, plumping out for my mouth to suckle. Maybe next time, I'll have a surprise for you."

Next time? Was he planning to come back?

But her questions disappeared as his mouth left her breasts and drifted first to the tender spot where her neck and shoulder met, nipping and licking, the sensation washing straight to her womb. When he moved to place open-mouthed kisses on her navel and tummy, little spasms set up in her vaginal walls and her skin felt too hot and too tight.

"Open for me," he told her in that low, rough voice.

He bent her knees and spread her thighs wide, exposing every bit of her sex to his avid, eager gaze. Reaching behind him with one of his long, muscular arms, he grabbed a throw pillow from the couch and pushed it under her hips.

"Much better," he growled and bent to his task.

If the swift licks of his tongue before had driven her crazy, now he took her mind altogether. His thumbs pressed on either side of her clit, pushing it free of its protective hood, and he proceeded to pull it into his mouth where he tugged and suckled it. His teeth grazed it, nibbling the throbbing tip, then his

tongue flicked wet heat over it.

He repeated it over and over again, until her moans became cries and her cries became pleas. The walls of her pussy flexed and quivered, desperate for something to fill the aching void. Yet still his mouth focused on that one, electric spot, tormenting it until without warning she came from that alone.

It grabbed her like a tight clamp, shaking her and roaring through her body. Her hips bucked, and her thighs clamped his head. Desperately, she tried to urge him to penetrate her, but he focused only on that one spot. Each time the spasms would begin to subside, he'd nibble and nip again, suckle and lick until another sequence of convulsions rippled through her.

At last, he released that tortured little nub, moved his hands to hold her thighs wide and used that coarse tongue to lap up the juices running from her opening. The tip of his tongue rimmed the entrance to her vagina, teasing all the little nerve endings then licking from there to her anus.

Sierra gripped the lustrous brown fall of his hair in her fists, pushing his head against her pubis. When his stiff tongue stabbed inside her, she jerked at its touch, the edge of orgasm rising in her again.

Luke raised his head, his face shiny with her juices. Licking her cream from his lips, he slid two fingers into the well of her vagina, curling them slightly to rub against her sweet spot. When he added a third one, her orgasm swelled, and as he fucked her with his fingers, the first of the spasms overtook her.

"That's it," he growled.

Stroking his fingers in and out, he pressed the thumb of his other hand on her clit, sending steaks of lightning through her. She gripped his hair tighter, trying to anchor herself with it in the storm rapidly overtaking her. She heard the roaring of her blood in her ears and felt the throbbing of her pulse everywhere in her body.

Sierra pushed hard against his hand, riding his fingers. Then his tongue was inside her again, and one of his fingers, slippery with her cream, pushed against the tight bud of her anus. Pressing., Pushing. Pressing. And then inside, gripped by the muscles in her dark tunnel.

Her orgasm crested, shaking her with its force. The walls of her pussy spasmed around his tongue, and she bucked hard against the finger in her rear. He was merciless, pushing her higher and higher, fucking both of her openings, on and on and on. Until finally he began, slowly, to ease her down. Her lungs begged for air, her heat slammed into her ribs and her body felt as loose as if it had been stretched on a rack and released.

I can't stand any more.

But even as the thought stirred in her brain, Luke moved up on her body, straddling her, holding his penis in his hand with the broad head touching her lips.

"Open your mouth," he commanded.

Obediently, she opened her lips wide, the head of his cock sliding over her lower lip to rest on her tongue.

"Take me, Sierra. Take as much as you can. Suck it. Taste me, as I tasted you."

Millimetre by millimetre, he pressed himself into her mouth until she had taken as much as she could. She swirled her tongue around the velvet-covered shaft and raked her teeth against the soft skin

covering steel. Tilting her head back so she could get to the head, she dipped her tongue into the slit and pushed as he'd done with her.

"Jesus!" His whole body went taut, his hands tightening on her cheeks.

She did it again and again he jerked, his fingers like steel on her face. Then he pulled back, sliding himself out of her mouth and thrusting himself inside her. He bent her knees back until they touched her breasts to give himself greater access as he entered her slowly. Every muscle in her cunt strained to accept him, to ease the penetration.

He braced himself on her bent knees as he rocked in a steady rhythm, each thrust of his hips pushing him further inside her hot, wet channel. Sierra dragged her breath in and out, eyes closed, focusing on the thick, hard penis stretching, stretching, stretching her. With her eyes closed every part of her was centred on his movements, his shaft impaling her. She had never felt so full, her body had never been so filled, and still he pushed further inside her. At the moment, she was sure she couldn't take one more centimetre. The head of his cock pressed against her womb and his balls slapped the cheeks of her ass.

He was in, and every nerve in her body leaped in response.

He paused, giving her time to adjust to him. Shards of heat streaked over her body like licks of flame. Her breasts ached. Her nipples throbbed. Her breath felt trapped in her throat.

"Open your eyes," he commanded again.

She dragged them open, locked into the intensity of his amber gaze.

"Your cunt is like a wet glove around me," he rasped. "Jesus, you're so tight it feels like you'll squeeze the life out of me. I could fuck you forever."

His hips moved again, in the same, steady rhythm, only now the pace increased. With every thrust, electricity rippled over her body. Almost automatically, her hands went to her breasts and her fingers squeezed her nipples.

"Yes, that's it. Pinch them for me, Sierra. Squeeze them until the pain is so intense it turns into pleasure."

She pinched, hard, and the edge of pain turned into a pleasure consuming her. His cock stroked in and out of her, his hands on her knees holding her fast for his plundering as he fucked her, fucked her, fucked her. She was so exhausted, she didn't think her body could handle another racking spasm, yet at the same time, she craved it like a drug. A climax hit and raced through her, tearing at her exhausted body, and still he kept moving. Even before her body stopped shaking and her muscles clenching, she felt another one forming behind it.

Just when she thought she'd reached the last plateau, he increased his pace and tossed her onto a higher one, a deeper one. And on and on it went, one orgasm rushing through her on the heels of the one before until she thought her heart would stop. Only his eyes anchored her in place.

Then he tore his eyes away from hers and threw his head back, the muscles on his neck corded, his arms rigid, his balls slapping harder against the cheeks of her ass. In one roaring explosion, he poured himself into her, taking her on one final roller coaster ride. She shook like a leaf in the wind and her

cream bathed his cock in liquid heat.

When at last the final spasm, the last aftershock, died away, he collapsed forward, bracing himself on his forearms. Sierra's heart beat so loud she was sure he could hear it, yet she knew his own was just as intense. With ragged breaths they drew air into tortured lungs. Shivering in the aftermath, skin slicked with sweat, so exhausted she couldn't even think, and with his cock still wedged inside her, Sierra closed her eyes and fell asleep.

* * * *

The sun shining in through the big window tickled at the edge of Sierra's consciousness. Reluctantly, she opened her eyes and stretched, immediately regretting it. Every muscle in her body ached as if she'd been hit by a truck. Her breasts were tender and her pussy felt as if every inch of it had been stretched beyond endurance.

Her eyes popped open wider as memories of the previous night unravelled through her head like a DVD on fast forward. Luke! If her body didn't ache in every muscle she could almost believe she'd imagined the entire evening. Never in her life would she have thought she'd open her door to a total stranger and spend the night having incredible, erotic sex with him.

So where was he? Had he simply used her for his own purposes and disappeared? Not even a kiss goodbye?

He must have put me to bed. Otherwise, how did I get here? Certainly not under my own steam.

She lifted the covers gingerly and stared down at her body. Tiny little bite marks dotted her breasts and her stomach, pale reminders of Luke's mouth on hers. She reached down between her legs and realised there was no evidence of ejaculation sticking to her skin.

He washed me, too? Where did this man come from?

With tentative movements she folded back the covers and swung her legs over the edge of the bed. A folded piece of paper on her night stand caught her eye and she picked it up, filled with curiosity.

Take a long, hot bath this morning. You deserve it. Drink a glass of chilled wine for breakfast. I believe in decadence. Watch for me tonight.

It was signed with a flourishing L.

Impulsively, she sniffed the paper, hoping to catch a lingering trace of his scent, but neither the paper nor any of the bedclothes carried the earthy aroma that was distinctively his. Tonight, she'd find some way to capture it on something she could hold close to her.

Tonight?

I must be losing my mind. That's the only answer for all of this.

Maybe it was the upheaval in her life these past few weeks that jumbled both her brain and her hormones. Twelve years as a successful software engineer for a thriving company was down the drain because she wanted to satisfy her urge to write. Five years of a relationship was gone because they'd reached a plateau where she was...okay, say it... bored. Trying to explain that to Neil had been the least successful thing she'd done, and she still couldn't get the hurt look on his face out of her mind.

The inheritance from her grandfather had come at just the right moment for her. A place to live,

plenty of land and a small trust fund that would pay her taxes and living expenses were like a dream come true. Ignoring the arguments of her parents, her boss—make that former boss—and best friend, she'd packed whatever she thought she'd need for the foreseeable future and driven hell-for-leather to Maine.

She hadn't regretted it for one minute. She hadn't done any writing yet, but having the luxury to spend each day in beautiful solitude and isolation without any pressure was helping her to gear up her mind for her next phase.

Until Luke showed up.

Had he really been lost? Hiking from his motel wasn't just a Sunday walk. If he was an experienced hiker, he should have had maps. A compass. A GPS locator. Had it all been some kind of ruse? But for what? Surely the lumber company wouldn't resort to such dirty tactics.

Besides, the connection between them had been so strong, so intense, no one could have faked it. So what the hell was going on?

Looking at the clock, she realised with a start it was after ten. She never slept this late, but as she got out of bed and moved towards the bathroom, her aching body reminded her why. A tiny smile played over her lips. The suggestion of the bath had been a good one. She definitely needed to soak her weary body parts, especially if, as he said, he came back tonight.

While the tub filled with hot water, into which she'd liberally spilled salts and scented oil, she poured herself a glass of wine from the fridge.

Decadent, all right. But maybe this is what I need in my life.

Two hours later, feeling far better than she'd expected and dressed in shorts and a loose blouse, she carried a sandwich and cold drink out to the deck along with a book she'd been trying to read. Her eyes automatically swept the edge of the clearing and stopped in shock when she saw the wolf standing there again. He was truly magnificent, a huge silver beast, standing perfectly still, watching her.

She would have to ask someone the next time she was in town if this was one of the areas being repopulated and if the wolves were people-oriented or completely wild. Yet this one made no threatening moves towards her nor indicated in any way that she was in danger. It was almost as if he were guarding her. Standing sentinel.

When she heard the crunch of tires on leaves and dirt, she was sure it was the lumber people again. Sure enough, walking to the side of the deck she saw another SUV pulling into the parking area. One of the men from yesterday—what was his name? oh, yeah, Craig Danforth—climbed out of the driver's side, but the two men with him were strangers. From their carriage alone she judged they were higher up on the food chain. For a wild moment, she thought of calling over the wolf to stand by her side.

The man who'd been riding shotgun strode over to where she stood, stopping on the other side of the rail. He handed her the card in his hand.

"Good morning, Miss Hart. Gerald Hagen. My brothers and I own the lumber company adjacent to your property."

She ignored the card. "I know about your company, Mr. Hagen. I told your flunky yesterday," she

nodded at Danforth, “that I wasn’t interested in any offer you could make me, so you could have saved yourself a trip.”

His face was like a granite mask, his eyes cold and hard as he studied her. “You may not be aware of some very important things I’d like to discuss with you. May we come up on the deck?”

“No. And I can’t think of anything we have to talk about. At all.”

The man behind him leaned forward, whispered in his ear, and he nodded. “Are you aware we made your grandfather a very generous offer before he died, and that he had verbally accepted it?”

She shoved her hands into her shorts pockets. “Verbal agreements mean nothing without something to back them up,” she pointed out. “Besides, if that was so, Grandpa would have told me about it and asked me my opinion. He knew how I felt about this place.”

“Perhaps his sudden death prevented him from doing so,” Hagen pointed out.

A tiny knot of ice settled in Sierra’s stomach. “What do you know about my grandfather’s death?”

Hagen shrugged. “Nothing except that he died of a heart attack. What *is* there to know?”

“Nothing.” She clenched her fists in her pockets. Surely these people had nothing to do with it. Did they? “In any event, the land is mine now, and it’s staying that way.”

“Lumbering is a big business up here in Northern Maine,” Hagen said. “It provides employment for a lot of people and dumps a lot of money into the economy.”

“Well, it will have to do it without this place. I’ll ask you to leave now, and please don’t come back.”

Hagen studied her for a moment, then nodded. “Fine. For now. But we *will* talk again. Count on it.”

The three men stalked away. Sierra stood at the rail, watching until the SUV backed around and headed down the way it had come. Remembering the night before, she hurried into the kitchen and retrieved the gun from the freezer, carrying it out to the deck with her. After she ate, she’d load one of the rifles, too. She didn’t trust those men for one second.

As she picked up her sandwich, she spotted the wolf still standing at the edge of the clearing. It seemed to her that he looked at her for a long time, then he turned and loped away. She settled back in her chair, but it was a long time before she actually ate her lunch.

* * * *

Luke ran until he reach his minimal campsite. When he’d set it up, he hadn’t known he’d be using it on a regular basis. All he’d wanted was some place to store his clothes and some necessities so he didn’t have to go back to the motel each time he needed something. The large backpack with the fold-up mini-tent and a few other necessities fit nicely in the crotch of the big maple tree, high enough up to be out of sight of both human and animal.

When he’d decided to come up in the first place, exhausted by the intensity of his last few cases, he’d been drawn by the isolation and the miles of untouched land. The motel in the middle of no place was a godsend. He’d unloaded all the provisions he’d brought with him and told the manager he was a writer who needed complete solitude. He could forego housekeeping services as long as he had plenty of towels, which he’d come to the office and get himself.

The situation with his last assignment had not allowed him to shift for days, and the wolf was hungry to be released. His body was so out of control, at the moment, and he couldn't risk having the maid walk in on a wolf. He preferred to run during the day, although he left the motel just before daybreak as soon as his body demanded that he shift. He knew each morning, until he'd satisfied the needs of the wolf and could again control when and how he shifted, his body would shift back to its wolf form.

He'd seen her on the morning of the third day. He hadn't realised he'd stumbled onto private property, just revelled in the fragrance of the trees and the rustle of dry leaves and twigs beneath him. But when he'd reach the clearing where the cabin was and seen the woman on the deck, his wolf's heart had nearly stopped beating.

Mine!

And in the next breath, *Mate!*

How was that possible? They'd never met, and when he lifted his snout to the breeze, the scent he caught was not that of another shifter.

He'd stood at the tree line for a long time, watching her, drinking in the long auburn tresses and the lithe, athlete's body. Her movements were so graceful, her hair shining like burnished bronze in the sun. He couldn't take his eyes away from her.

The men who'd arrived startled him. He could tell from their posture and stride they were anything but friendly. The woman hadn't even come down off the deck to greet them, and it was obvious she was not expecting them. He'd wished he was close enough to hear the conversation, but at last, they left, with great reluctance.

And possibly an implied threat?

That would never do. If she needed protecting, it was his responsibility. But first he had to meet her.

He'd managed a few hours sleep back at the motel before setting off again towards the cabin. He knew his internal clock would be screwed up now, and he'd have to watch himself carefully, but he didn't feel he had a choice.

The ruse of being lost had gotten him inside the cabin last night, but not in twenty lifetimes could he have imagined how spectacular the sex would be. Or how she'd captured his heart from the first touch. He knew he'd exhausted her, but he couldn't seem to stop. His cock had given him no relief until he'd fulfilled his promise to fuck her into unconsciousness.

He'd left her well before dawn, shifting as the sun came up. Dangerously, he'd hung around the cabin, watching for her to come outside. Good. She'd slept late. He hoped she'd taken that long, relaxing bath. His wolf lips turned back in a near smile at the sight of her.

He'd turned to leave, but when he'd seen the strange SUV come down the dirt, road he'd stopped. One of the men from yesterday was accompanied by two strangers. Again, the posture of the people had been anything but friendly. Sierra's body had been rigid with lines of anger yet she'd kept her cool. Whatever they wanted they weren't getting. When they'd stomped off, Luke had smelled danger in the

air. He'd have to find out what was going on so he could protect his love.

His mate!

It disturbed him that the moment they'd walked away, she'd hurried inside, returning with the gun from last night in her hand. Unless she knew what she was doing with that weapon, she could bring herself more trouble than she might be able to deal with. The men who'd been there looked like the kind who could easily disarm her. Then who the hell knew what would happen?

He couldn't ignore the draw to this woman and the overwhelming urge to protect her. A wolf met its mate only once in a lifetime, and he would not let this slip through his hands. Nor would he allow harm to come to her.

He allowed himself the luxury of a few hours run before returning to the motel to catch a nap, setting his watch to wake him. Tonight, he'd be back at the cabin again, but before taking them both to greater heights of pleasure, he'd find out what the hell was going on.

Chapter Three

Sierra fidgeted all day, unable to settle down. The mention of her grandfather's death irritated her like the sting of a wasp. Perhaps her family had all acted too hastily, despite the old man's wishes. But when his attorney had called to tell them of the death, and that all arrangements for his funeral had been made and paid for, she and her parents had simply followed the request.

They'd drive up to Northern Maine where his attorney had met them and guided them through the funeral arrangements. The old man's will had specified that he be cremated and what he wanted done with the remains. After the service they'd taken his ashes and, as requested, scattered them at the edge of the clearing into his beloved forest. Her father has taken the things that meant the most to him, mementoes of the past. Excessively wealthy in his own right as a result of his investment firm, he'd been pleased that the land had been left to someone who appreciated it. He'd hated every minute spent in the rustic surroundings and urged them to leave as quickly as possible. They'd returned to New York, ostensibly to pick up their lives.

Except for Sierra, who'd decided to turn hers upside down.

But now, there was no body to exhume to check for wrongdoing. She'd seen the coroner's report—heart attack. No autopsy required. So she had no place to go with this. But surely a corporation owning a vast lumber operation wouldn't resort to murder. Would they?

She kept trying to push the thought out of her mind, but immediately it would fill with images of Luke and her crotch would be soaked with her flooding juices. She couldn't believe how many times he'd made her come last night, how far he'd pushed her body. Or that she'd actually been able to accept that enormous cock into her vagina. Just thinking of him made her want to stroke herself to relieve the pressure, but she resisted the urge. She wanted nothing to take the edge off the anticipation.

Somehow, she knew he wouldn't arrive before dark, so as soon as the sun went down she drew another bath for herself. Meticulously, she scrubbed every inch of her body, shaving her legs and under her arms. Then, on a whim, she took a fresh razor and shaved off most of her pubic hair, leaving only a thin line defining her labia. She rubbed copious amounts of cream into her naked pubis, soothing and softening it, then over every inch and into every crevice of her body.

What else could she do to tempt him? When she recalled a statement he'd made, she hurried into her bedroom and opened her jewellery box. She'd thrown it into her tote bag from force of habit, not planning to wear any of it up here. Scrabbling through it, she found what she was looking for—clip-on earrings she'd worn two years ago to a Christmas party. She'd taken off the clusters of tiny gold bells after only a few minutes because they'd pinched her ears. But for what she wanted, they'd be perfect.

She'd never worn nipple rings before, or nipple jewellery of any kind, but she approached this with excited anticipation, her pussy already quivering. Standing in front of the long mirror on the inside of the closet door, she licked her fingers, then plucked her nipples and pulled on them until they stood out like plump strawberries. Gritting her teeth, she clamped one earring to each nipple. At the first streaks of pain, she almost took them off, but by the time she drew in a long breath and let it out slowly, the pain was overridden by a sense of exquisite pleasure.

The clothes she'd packed were serviceable rather than sexy—she certainly hadn't expected to meet a man who would drive her out of her mind with ecstasy on this trip—but like the jewel box, as an afterthought, she'd tossed in the short satin robe she'd gotten as a birthday gift.

She slipped it on over her well-scented skin, feeling the softness of it like an erotic caress. When she tied the sash the outline of the earrings was visible through the thin fabric. Already aroused, her hand stole between her legs, and her eyes glazed over as she caressed her newly naked skin between her legs. She was just about to run the tip of her finger over her clit when she heard the knock at the door.

Blushing as if she'd been caught in the school restroom, she adjusted the robe and hurried to open the door.

He smiled down into her eyes. "No gun tonight?"

She shook her head, speechless at the magnificence of him. Luke's amber eyes blazed as they took her in, and heat flushed his cheekbones.

"Jesus, Sierra." He swallowed hard. "Are you trying to kill me?"

She gave him a shy smile. "Just tempt you."

"If you tempted me any more, I wouldn't be able to walk my cock would be so hard. I wanted to take things slow tonight, but you make that impossible." Backing her into the room, he slammed the door, locked it and put the bag in his hands on the little table. "Come here and let me look at you."

She stood quietly as he undid the sash and opened the robe, sliding the fabric from her shoulders and onto the floor. He was silent for so long she began to get nervous.

"Is everything all right?" She looked down at herself and up at him. "Last night you said..."

"Everything is perfect." His voice was so husky, she almost didn't recognise it. He touched each nipple carefully. "You remembered about the nipple rings."

Her shoulders lifted an infinitesimal amount. "This was the best I could do."

"I wish I had a camera to capture this image." He bent his head and bit lightly at each distended nub, his fingers putting pressure on the earring clamps as he did so.

Unbelievable pleasure streaked through her at his touch. She'd never have believed that riding the edge of pain would give her such bliss. She felt her arousal seeping from her and wetting her thighs.

Luke's nostrils flared. "I can smell you already. Your scent is greater than any aphrodisiac."

He knelt before her, spread her thighs with his large hands and traced the line of her slit with his tongue. When he looked up at her there was such naked desire in his eyes it made her knees weak.

"You shaved. What a little minx you are. You have no idea how that turns me on." He nuzzled his face against her, ticking her with his tongue. "I want to shave the rest of it. Will you let me?"

Wordlessly she nodded. She could hardly comprehend the fact that in such a short time he owned her soul. He could do with her whatever he wished.

"Turn around," he ordered, "and bend over. Hold your ankles."

Blushing slightly, she did as he asked, knowing every inch of her would be exposed to him. Kneeling behind her, he pulled the outer lips of her cunt wide so her entire vagina was open to his eyes. She felt the tip of his tongue trace her opening, and a hot shiver raced over her body. He drew light,

teasing circles until she could barely hold her position. She knew her pussy was dripping, and her womb throbbed with hungry need.

When one lean finger reached into her vagina and gathered her cream she tensed, sensing what was coming.

“Relax,” he soothed, stroking the cheeks of her ass with his other hand. “Just relax and enjoy. My god, the view is so gorgeous, I don’t ever want to stop looking at it.”

As he talked in a low, calming voice, he painted the tight ring of her anus with her liquid and slowly sank one finger inside. The tiny climax hit her so unexpectedly she had to reach out to the couch to brace herself or she would have fallen over. He drove his finger in and out of her ass, riding her through the spasms, his hot breath blowing on her open pussy.

When she could catch her breath, she turned her head to look at him, and he responded by moving to the side and taking her mouth in a hot, greedy kiss. His tongue was a wild thing, plundering her mouth, licking the inside of it, even as one hand stroked her pussy, stimulating the tip of her clit.

He pulled his mouth away to drag in a breath, then lifted her in his arms and carried her to the cushions she’d once more arranged before the fire. Stripping off his clothes, he was beside her in a moment, his teeth pulling at her nipples again while his hand stroked and petted her cunt. She felt the heat rising in her again and was shocked that this man could keep her in such a constant state of arousal that even a small climax couldn’t take the edge off.

He licked the edge of her ear, his breath tickling her as his mouth moved over it and down to her neck.

“Do you have any more earrings?” he breathed?

“More earrings?” she frowned, trying to make her mind work.

“Yes. Do you?”

“I guess. In my jewellery box on my dresser. I’ll get it.” She tried to get up, but he pushed her back.

“No, stay here.” He arranged her legs so they were spread apart and moved one of her hands to her pussy. “Play with yourself while I get it.” His voice had that gravely sound again. “Rub your clit. And don’t stop.”

Automatically, her hand touched her clit. She was already so slick from the little climax that her flesh was well-lubricated. She closed her eyes and found a familiar rhythm. Instantly, her vagina responded, the inner walls pulsing, cream flowing, and she bent her knees to give herself better access. As if through a thick wall of cotton, she heard Luke moving around in her bathroom, running water, then in her bedroom.

“Stop.”

Her eyes flew open. She hadn’t heard him return. He was crouched between her thighs, leaning back on his heels. In one hand, he held another tiny clasp earring, this one sporting just a tiny pearl. She’d forgotten she even had it, a relic from the days before she pierced her ears.

“Take a deep breath, sweetheart,” he crooned, “and let your mind think of pleasant things. Think of my cock in your pussy. In your ass. Think of the climax you just had when all I did was fuck you with my

finger.”

She did as he asked and in a second she felt his fingers at her clit then a tight pinch. She jerked, and he pressed a hand on her abdomen to steady her.

“Stay still,” he ordered. “Give this a minute, and you’ll love it.”

She bit her lower lip against the stab of pain radiating from her clit and tried to ride through it. And then, just as Luke said, the pain disappeared to be replaced by the most incredible sense of arousal she could imagine. Her blood was like hot liquid in her veins, and her pulse raced. Her skin felt too tight for her body.

“See? Didn’t I tell you?”

He stretched out beside her again, his cock prodding her thigh, the wet tip depositing a tiny drop of fluid on her overheated skin. His lean fingers stroked her cheek, a caress at once sensuous and tender. She opened her eyes and looked into his, seeing this man who had simply taken over her life, and she couldn’t imagine being without him. The words were out of her mouth before she could think to take them back.

“I love you.”

Then she squeezed her eyes shut so she wouldn’t have to see the disdain in his, the rejection, the knowledge she was an idiot.

“Sierra, listen to me.”

“I’m sorry. I just—”

“No, hush. Listen. Do you believe that for everyone on this earth there is one true mate? One person to whom they can give their soul forever?”

She hadn’t before, but she did now. An idea that three days ago would have seemed idiotically romantic, now appeared to be a hard truth.

“Yes,” she breathed. “I do.”

“So do I. I think I was led here for this very reason. For us to find each other. And all the things I’m going to do to you—with you—are just an extension of that blending of our two souls.”

She wanted him to do them now. The earrings pinching her nipples and her clit and his soft words aroused her so much, she was sure she could climax again with just one touch.

“Please,” she begged.

“Please what?”

“Please do with me whatever you want. Please make me come. Please fuck me the way you did last night.” She couldn’t believe she was even saying these things to him.

“With very great pleasure.”

He moved between her legs again and raised them so they rested on his shoulders, lifting her bottom with his palms and holding her up to his mouth. His rough tongue caresses the length of her slit and traced lines over her newly shaved flesh. When he clamped his mouth around her clit, earring and all, she cried out in pleasure, her liquid gushing into his mouth.

He tormented her, his tongue tracing the opening to her vagina, then his mouth sucking on her clit, pressing on the clamp of the earring, then lapping her from clit to anus. She heard herself moaning, a

guttural sound that rose from low in her throat.

“Hold your breasts for me,” he told her. “Now. Lift them up and play with them. Pinch the earrings.”

When she did as he asked, the streaks of pleasure/pain only intensified her arousal. Her cunt muscles fluttered and pulsed, demanding something to fill the hungry opening. And still he tormented her. Now nipping here. Now licking there.

The first orgasm hit without warning, rolling through her in slow waves, her body shaking with it in the cradle of his hands. He lapped at her until the pulsing subsided, then began all over again, spending more time on each spot. Nothing evaded his questing tongue, not her labia, not the inner flesh of her lips, not her clit now throbbing with unfulfilled need, not her opening weeping onto his tongue.

He shifted one hand so the little finger rubbed against her anus, his fingernail scraping against the puckered flesh. Another climax gripped her, as he ate at her and teased her and slid the tip of his little finger into the tight entrance to her rectum. She squirmed in his grasp, needing him inside of her, but he was far from ready to give her what she wanted.

His mouth traced soft kisses on the inside of her thighs as he eased her down from the shudders racing over her body. She’d never known that the backs of her knees or the insides of her ankles were such sensitive, erogenous zones until Luke used his mouth and his teeth on them, nipping and kissing and licking. She clenched her fists to centre herself, fighting for control, knowing this was just the beginning. Yet already her skin was slick with sweat, and her heart was doing a tap dance against her ribs.

She ran her fingers over his chest, loving the soft, furry feel of the hair on the hard planes of muscle. When she found his flat nipples and twisted them, he gasped with pleasure and pressed himself into her hands.

And still he continued his assault on her body.

He closed his mouth over her clit again, pressing the clamp of the earring and sending spikes of pain/pleasure through her. Each time he did, she pressed her fingers against the earrings on her nipples, creating a triangle of arousal. She breathed slowly through her nose, trying to control the speed with which he pushed her to the boiling point, but his clever fingers and wicked mouth seemed to have a mission all their own.

The moment he slid two fingers into her cunt, her muscles clamped down on him and her hips began to undulate. A third finger joined the other two, stroking in and out of her grasping channel, curling to rasp each time against the sweet spot and drive her to the edge of sanity.

She felt it rolling up on her again, the clenching of her body that began deep in her womb and spread to her breasts and her pussy. Luke’s fingers danced faster, his little finger stretching to her anus to press against that waiting hole. With his teeth, he pinched harder on the earring on her clit. She clutched her breasts harder and squeezed the earrings on her nipples as the orgasm finally broke loose.

She felt as if she was riding a tilt-a-whirl at a carnival, tossed this way and that, strapped into a machine that tossed her mercilessly and stole her breath. The heavy pulse in her cunt thundered harder and harder as her cream poured into his hands.

Carefully he lowered her legs from his shoulders and bent over her. He used a slow massage of his fingers inside her and tender kisses brushed across her face to bring her down until she lay panting against the big cushions, sweating and gasping for breath.

His grin was both hungry and feral as he brushed the damp curls from her forehead. "And we've barely gotten started." With the lithe grace of an animal, he leaped to his feet and reached for the sack he'd brought in, producing the familiar square bottle of amaretto.

Sierra's eyes widened. "My favourite! How did you know?"

He shrugged. "It's my favourite, too. I just took a chance. Let me get glasses from your kitchen and pour some." He nibbled her chin then brushed his lips over it. "You just lay there and rest."

As if she could do anything else at the moment!

She heard cupboard doors opening and the clink of glass, then he was back with two tumblers filled with the heady liquid. Arranging himself on the cushions beside her and propping himself on one elbow, he touched his glass to hers.

"To us. To forever."

Sierra had just taken a swallow and nearly choked on it. "Forever? Aren't we moving a little fast here? We just met last night. I mean, we don't know anything about each other."

Luke's face tightened for a moment before it eased with his soft smile. "Sometimes you can know people forever and never really *know* them. What would you like to know about me? I told you, I work for an agency that investigates crimes with paranormal elements. Some of our staff also have certain... paranormal abilities. I'm single, healthy, own my own house outside the city in a place that reminds me of here. No serious relationships. No medical problems. No outstanding debts." He grinned. "The perfect candidate."

"My god! You sound like it." She took another sip of her drink.

"Okay. Your turn."

"My turn. Well." She leaned back on the cushions, balancing her glass on the swell of her breasts. "Let's see. I quit my job. Boring. Broke off a long-term relationship. Boring. Came up here to figure out what to do with the rest of my life and met you. *Not* boring."

He chuckled. "I'm certainly glad for that qualifier. So has it been as peaceful as you'd hoped? You've certainly got the perfect place for isolation."

"Yes." She wrinkled her forehead. "Well, almost."

His amber eyes looked hard at her. "Almost? That doesn't sound good. Has someone besides me been bothering you?"

She flapped a hand at him. "No big deal."

"No," he insisted. "Tell me about it. Nothing should be allowed to disturb you unless you want it to."

Sierra let a heavy sigh whisper from her mouth. "It's just that the Hagen Lumber Mill seems hell bent on buying this land, and there's no way they're getting it. They've been here twice, trying to tell me Grandpa had given them a verbal agreement, but I know that's not true. Grandpa specifically left the land

to me because he knew I'd keep it intact. He even left me a trust to pay the taxes."

"Well, if you don't want to sell that should be enough for them."

Sierra shifted, lifting her glass and taking a swallow. "I guess. It's just that...I don't know, they make me uneasy. Grandpa died of a heart attack but today, they intimated they might have had something to do with it."

"That's why the thing with the guns."

She nodded. "I plan to sleep with one under my pillow."

"I think I should check out of the motel and move in here with you. It would be a lot safer."

She cocked her head and looked at him, grinning. "Is this just another move on your part so we can have more sex?"

He laughed. "No, but come to think of it, that's not a bad idea."

"Listen, Luke, this isn't your responsibility..."

"Now that's where you're wrong." He took her glass and set it on the floor. "Everything about you is my responsibility. I'm making it so. Just consider it done."

Whatever else she would have said was lost in the kiss—hot, hungry, greedy, demanding. Possessive. That's what she felt tonight. A sense of possession that, rather than putting her off, made her feel cherished and secure. She wrapped her arms around his neck, locking his mouth to hers, wishing she could crawl into his body and wrap it around herself.

She'd never, ever felt this way about any man in her entire life. If she were fanciful, she'd think there were mystical forces at work here, but she'd never believed in things like that.

Maybe it's time to start.

In any event, it gave her a feeling of protection to know he'd be here if those men came back again. Not that she couldn't blow their heads off if they tried to harm her. But there was the feel of the jungle warrior about Luke that said, *"I'll protect you. You are mine."*

While she'd been seduced by his kisses and letting her mind wander, he'd been removing the earrings from her nipples and suckling each bud in turn. The slow, pulling tug of his lips send arrows of excitement through her body. And when he used his teeth on them, she realised if he did it long enough, she could come just from that alone.

He pleased her breasts for a long time, licking every inch of the surface from the upper swell to the valley between. When she tried to reach for him, he wrapped the fingers of one hand around both wrists and stretched them over her head, arching her up to his ravenous mouth. She'd never thought she'd enjoy having someone nipping at her flesh, but it was incredibly stimulating, washing a strange heat through her that warmed the surface of her skin.

She was panting with need when he leaned back on his heels released her hands, reached down and removed the earring from her clit. He took his cock in his hands and fondled it, rubbing the head against her juicy cunt.

"Play with your clit," he commanded, the gravely sound in his voice again. "Let me watch you while you watch me stroke myself." He touched one fingertip to the head and scooped up the thick drop

of fluid sitting at the slit. “See what you do to me? I could come in a heartbeat if I didn’t control myself, Sierra. I can’t look at you without wanting to fuck you.”

Still panting, her breath coming in uneven puffs, she spread the lips of her sex and rubbed her clit, already sensitive and throbbing from the pinch of the jewellery. At once, she felt another rush of fluid and parted her thighs even more to let him see. His eyes darkened to a rich topaz as he stared at her pussy, at her busy fingers coated with her cream.

Slowly, he moved forward, pressing the purple head of his cock into the opening of her vagina, the ring of flesh surrounding it popping past the muscles, his entry made easy by her copious fluids. Tonight, she was prepared for him, still stretching to take him, but knowing the feeling of him filling her.

He was tender and controlled, easing himself in, although she could see the effort it took in the flexing muscles of his jaw and the tension in his arms. Then he was all the way in, his eyes capturing hers in a look that went straight to the very centre of her being, before he began that steady, rhythmic movement. In and out, in and out. Slow, then faster, then slower again. She wound her fingers hungrily in the silk of his hair, gripping the strands and pulling his face down for her to lick and kiss.

He cupped her cheeks, drifting his tongue lightly over her lips, then sat back so he could see every inch of the movement of his cock in and out of her cunt. His big hands spread her thighs further to give him a more unimpeded view as he stroked in and out, in and out.

Sierra felt the fire building inside her again, a raging inferno this time that threatened to consume her.

“More,” she pleaded. “Faster. Please.”

But instead of increasing his pace, he pulled out completely and, being careful with her body, flipped her over and arranged her on her hands and knees. He ran his fingers down the cleft of her buttocks, pausing to tease at the puckered ring with his fingernail, then spread the cheeks wide. One hand dipped down between her legs, gathering her cream and painting her anus with it.

“You’ll feel a little pinch at first, and some burning, but then...Oh, god, Sierra. Then it will be more than you could ever have imagined.” He leaned down and kissed her spine. “Take in a deep breath and let it out slowly.”

She did as he said, feeling his cock press against her hole and push into her as she expelled the breath.

“Again,” he said, his voice hoarse.

She repeated the process, over and over, each time feeling his penis invading her a little more. The dark desire curled in her belly unfurled and grabbed her as he plundered deeper, all her secret, forbidden urges whirling through her. Soon she was rocking with him, pushing back as he pushed forward until he filled her so completely, she didn’t think she had room to breathe.

His hands gripped her waist, holding her firmly. “Now, Sierra. Now.”

His movements were no longer slow and measured but hard and sharp, stretching her, carrying her past the burn to an exquisite pleasure she’d never even dreamed of. The harder he pushed, the faster it raced over her, like a thousand tiny fingers plucking at her nerves, igniting her from the inside out.

His fingers tightened on her, gripping her like steel as he slammed into her over and over and over again.

“Play with you clit,” he commanded. “Do it now.”

Barely able to think, she reached between her legs and pulled on her clit, rolled it between her fingers. The pressure inside her built and built, her pussy quivering, her muscles straining, the need so strong yet dancing beyond her reach.

“Rake your fingernail over that nub, sweetheart. Right...now.”

She did as he pounded her ass harder and harder, then like a rocket exploding out from the centre of her, an intense orgasm burst through her. It stole her mind, everything but the spasms that threatened to shake her apart. And still he rode her, in and out, slamming harder and harder, his balls slapping the backs of her thighs.

The orgasm never seemed to peak, just move from one plane to a higher one, ripping through her, tossing her like a tiny stone on the surface of the water. She couldn't think, couldn't do anything except keep rocking back and forth with him until finally his cock pulsed inside her, his fingers bit deeper into her flesh, and his semen splashed into the dark tunnel of her rectum. And at last, her climax crested and subsided.

Collapsed forward, she had no memory of how long they lay there until Luke finally, slowly, withdrew from her body and somehow found the strength to lift her in his arms. His thundering heart still shaking his body in time with hers, he still managed to get them both to the bathroom and turn on the shower. They bathed each other with the movements of two people who have survived a hurricane then stumbled to her bedroom and onto the bed.

His arms closed around her, then she remembered nothing.

Chapter Four

Luke slept barely an hour before coming fully awake, his mind spinning at the enormity of what he'd committed himself to. The seed had been planted that morning when he'd seen Sierra's unwelcome visitors for the second day in a row. Listening to her story tonight, he knew she wasn't safe out here by herself, no matter how many guns she had. But he'd planned to be better prepared when he made his decision. He'd have to figure a way to leave early every morning long enough to shift and run for at least an hour, and maybe again at night. Hopefully, that would be enough to keep the beast at bay until his system was regulated again.

He'd brought something else besides the amaretto tonight. A book for her to read. A way to introduce her to what he had to tell her and show her, while he prayed she didn't run screaming into the woods. He found the book, wrote a note that he stuck inside the cover, protruding out where she'd see it, and set it on the nightstand. As soon as he got back from his run, he'd call the agency and have someone check into Hagen Lumber. Just looking at the men had given him an uneasy feeling.

He slipped silently into bed, trying not to disturb Sierra. She mumbled something in her sleep, turned on her side to face him and curled herself against his body. He slid an arm around her shoulders and hugged her to him, his hand stroking her arm.

This *had* to work. That's all there was to it. He'd known from the instant he'd spotted her she was his mate. No way could he let her go. As he tried to relax his mind and catch a little more sleep, he prayed to all the gods and goddesses that Sierra would read the book and understand. That when he shifted before her eyes, she'd accept him.

* * * *

Once again, Sierra woke feeling as if every muscle in her body, inside and out, had been stretched on a rack. Not only were her muscles aching but a her clit, nipples and rectum were burning and sore. It wasn't an unpleasant feeling, however. It was more the aftermath of something that had left her completely fulfilled, yet curiously wanting more.

I'm becoming a sex fiend. She grinned to herself at the thought, the images of Luke's magnificent body, his throbbing cock plundering her holes front and back, his teeth on her soothed by the pleasantly rough feel of his tongue dancing in her mind.

She realised she was again alone in the bed and wondered if he'd left to gather his things from the motel. Swinging her legs over the edge and sitting up, she spotted a book on the nightstand. Reaching for it tentatively, she brushed her hand across the aged cloth covering. The gilt letters of the title were so worn she could barely make them out. *The Legend of the Wolf*.

Why had he left this for her? Did he somehow know about the wolf she'd seen the last two mornings?

She saw the folded sheet of paper protruding from the edges of the page, slid it out and unfolded it.

Sierra, my love,

Enjoy another long bath this morning, perhaps with some amaretto in your coffee and relax with this book which I hope you will find interesting. I have gone to do some errands and will be back shortly

with my luggage and lunch. I would love to discuss this book with you.

Love always,

Luke

Sierra frowned. What a strange book for him to leave her. He had to have brought it with him, but why?

Sighing, she carried it into the bathroom where she began to fill the tub with hot water and fragrant salts and oils. Fresh coffee sat in a carafe on the kitchen counter—bless the man—and she took his suggestion to add some amaretto to it. Sliding into the bathtub, she leaned her head back against the foam cushion she'd placed there, opened the book and began to read.

By the time she'd finished her bath, her muscles felt better, but her brain ached. The book had been written nearly two hundred years ago. She was flattered that Luke would trust her with what was obviously a rare edition, but also intrigued by what she'd read. She supposed she should have been repulsed or frightened, but she'd always been obsessed by wolves and had been delighted when she'd heard of the repopulation program. When she was much younger and had come to visit her grandfather, the wolves were still plentiful. Often they would spot a pack hunting or see mates protecting newborn cubs. Grandpa always showed her how to avoid disturbing them.

She believed the wolf to be a magnificent animal. A courageous warrior. A symbol of life as it had once been in America. The idea of shifters—people who had the gene to shift from human shape to wolf and back again—somehow didn't disturb her at all. Did that make her crazy? A nut job? Well, she'd been called worse. But the history of these people fascinated her. For centuries, they'd lived in shadows, gravitating towards their own kind, sometimes, though, mating with humans.

She jerked herself upright as a startling thought stabbed at her. Was it possible that Luke was a shifter? That he was the wolf she'd seen at the edge of the clearing? No. She was imagining things. But the thought she'd had unbelievable sex with a man who was part wolf instantly aroused her.

I am crazy. That's all there is to it.

But she couldn't rid herself of the thought and wished Luke would hurry back so she could ask him about it.

She had just finished dressing in jeans and a tailored blouse when she heard the sliding door to the deck open and close then saw Luke reflected in the bedroom mirror.

"I thought you might have gone to get your things at the motel." She turned and smiled at him.

In two strides, he was in front of her, wrapping her tightly in his arms, just holding her against his beating heart.

"I went for a run. Is there any coffee left?"

"Of course. And thanks for making it." She stared up at him, quizzically, trying to see if she could discern anything in his features.

"Did I get dirt on my face?" he grinned.

"No, not at all. Go sit on the deck, and I'll bring out the coffee. I have a lot of things to ask you."

A few minutes later, she placed their mugs on the little wooden table and settled into one of the

lounge chairs next to Luke.

He picked up his coffee, staring at her over the rim of the mug. "I imagine you read the book I left."

"Yes. Not all of it, but a lot."

"And?" His voice was uninflected, giving nothing away.

"It was fascinating. But then I've always loved wolves." She sipped at the hot liquid. "Luke, if I ask you a question, will you give me a straight answer?"

"If you think you want one."

"I do. Very much." She gripped her mug a little tighter, wetting her lower lip with her tongue. "I read this book, and...are you a shifter?"

And do you think I'm crazy for asking this?

But before he could answer her, they both heard a vehicle heading towards the cabin.

"Don't open the door," Luke warned, shoving her into the house.

"I have a gun," she reminded him. "Surely they didn't come here to do me harm. Not out in the open like this."

"You're very isolated," he reminded her. "Where's the key to the gun cabinet?"

She opened a draw in the end table and threw him a key ring. "It's the long silver one. You think we both need guns?"

"I made a call to my office while I was...out on my run. Hagen Lumber is in big trouble. They've done too much clear cutting and not enough reforestation. They have orders they have to fill or their whole financial house of cards comes tumbling down. They need this land."

"Well, they aren't getting it."

They both heard the loud knock on the door.

"We know you're in there, Miss Hart," a heavy voice shouted. "Open the door."

"Go away," she called back. "We have nothing to say to each other."

"Miss Hart, this is Gerald Hagen. My brother, Frank, is here with me. I suggest you come out and talk to us. If we have to force our way in, you won't be too happy."

"Stay back," Luke hissed, trying to push her out of the way while he loaded the shotgun.

She shook his hand off. "I can take care of this. You back me up."

Inching open the door, she pointed the gun at them. "I can't get you all, but I can get at least one of you. Who wants to volunteer?"

"A gun?" Gerald Hagen laughed. "We're here to discuss a business deal with you."

"Right. That's why each time you come back you bring more people." She knew they couldn't see Luke and his car was nowhere in evidence.

One of the other men stepped forward, looking enough like Gerald she assumed it was his brother Frank. "This is a beautiful old cabin, Miss Hart. It would be a shame to see it burn down."

Icy shivers raced across her spine. "Is that a threat? Are you trying to intimidate me?"

"Just reminding you that a lot of things can happen to a woman living out here all by herself. We'll give you one last chance to think it over." He placed a business card on the top step to the porch. "Call

me, and we'll make the deal."

The men followed the Hagens back to the big SUV. In moments, they were heading back through the forest to the highway.

Sierra closed the door and leaned against it, her entire body trembling. Luke took the gun from her nerveless fingers and set it on the table.

"Come on. I think there's some more amaretto left. I know we need to talk, but I need to make some preparations, too." He led her to the couch, brought her a drink and forced the glass to her lips. "I don't think they'll be back today, but we need to be ready for them tonight." He studied her carefully. "Will you be all right if I leave for a couple of hours?"

She gave him a wobbly smile. "Just give back my gun. If I so much as hear a twig snap, I'll shoot the bastard."

He chuckled. "I'll be sure to give you plenty of warning that it's me."

"You didn't answer my question," she reminded him.

"Let's get this situation cleared up first. One of the things I'll be doing is paying a visit to the local sheriff. He may be in their pocket, but that'll be easy enough to find out." He bent and pressed his mouth to hers, his tongue ravaging the inside.

They were both breathing heavily when he lifted his head. "How's the cell reception out here?"

"Not so good. I'll give you the landline number. But what will you use?"

He winked at her. "I have a satellite phone. Agency perk. Okay. Don't forget. Anything at all, you squeeze that trigger."

Then he was gone. Vaguely, she wondered what happened to his car.

* * * *

Luke desperately wanted to stay and answer Sierra's question, especially since she didn't seem particularly agitated about the subject. More curious, in fact. But he needed to be wolf. As soon as he was at his forest hiding place, he stripped off his clothes and shifted, his skin stretching and his bones elongating in seconds. He made his way to the lumber company where as wolf he could hide in shadows and eavesdrop on what was happening. While he was watching the lumber barons, he could be sure that Sierra was safe. If he picked up on anything out of the ordinary, he'd hightail it back to the cabin.

This way he could be wolf while there was still daylight, and return to his human form to protect Sierra at night. He just hoped they had their chance to talk before the edge of morning cut into the inky black of night and the wolf returned.

Several times during the day as he slunk around the lumber company buildings, Luke nearly was caught. Each time, however, he managed to make himself disappear. He was irritated because he can't seem to pick up any information. Then late in the day, when he was hiding beneath a window to an office, he heard the men from that morning planning how they would burn Sierra out of her cabin without damaging the valuable timber. As soon as it was dark, they planned to make their move.

"Just make sure she's trapped in there," he heard one of the men say.

Racing back to Sierra's woods, he shifted back into human form, yanked on his clothes and hurried

to her cabin. He almost smiled when he saw her through the glass doors. She was sitting by the fireplace with the handgun in her lap and the rifle next to her.

As soon as he came through the door, she jumped up and threw her arms around him. “Where have you been? I’ve been worried sick about you? And where’s your car? I didn’t hear you drive up.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa.” He loosened her hold slightly. “One thing at a time. I’ve been out checking on your friends from this morning.” Lifting her up, he took her place in the chair and arranged her on his lap.

She frowned. “What did you find out? And how?”

“The ‘how’ isn’t important right now. The ‘what’ is. These men are planning to set a controlled blaze outside the cabin tonight and trap you inside.”

When she tried to jump up, he tightened his grip on her. “Hold on. We need to make some plans here. Let’s go into the kitchen, grab a bite to eat and figure out how we’re going to do this.”

By the time darkness fell, they had their plan in place. Sierra had called the sheriff to tell him what was going on. Despite his scepticism—big lumber supplied the economy of the town—he agreed reluctantly to stand by. Leaving all the lights on as if they were inside, Luke concealed himself outside with the shotgun while Sierra sat on the deck with the handgun. As soon as they heard the car on the dirt road, she’d call the sheriff and they’d hold off the men until help arrived.

“You stay right there,” he cautioned her. “Remember.”

Expecting the men would leave the car up the road and walk stealthily to the cabin, Luke’s acute hearing picked up the sound of their steps. He readied himself and waited until all four men were in sight, two of them carrying gas cans. Then he rose from his hiding place, pointing the shotgun at them.

“If you don’t want unnecessary holes in your body, stay right where you are,” he told them.

They stopped, obviously shocked by his appearance.

“What the hell?” one of them said.

“Sierra?” Luke called. “Put that call through to the sheriff.”

“All right.”

Then she did exactly what he’d told her not to do. She came down off the deck to the front of the house, pointing her gun at the men.

The two Hogan brothers moved forward, careful of their steps but their faces set in arrogant grins. “What’s this? Got yourself some protection, Miss Hart?” He brought his hand from behind his back, his fingers wrapped around a grenade. “Not much protection against this.”

Luke ground his teeth. He’d have to take his shot carefully, before the pin was pulled. Luckily for him, the man was too arrogant to be careful. And everyone was watching the boss. Aiming the rifle, he shot the man’s hand. Hagen screamed and dropped the grenade. The other men, startled, pulled their own guns and began firing wildly.

“Get down, Sierra,” Luke shouted, as he and one of the men exchanged shots.

He managed to disable another of them, and the others dropped their guns and held up their hands.

“Down on the ground,” he told them. “Lock your hands behind your heads and spread your legs

wide.”

When they complied, he turned to see where Sierra was and his heart almost stopped beating. She was crumpled on the ground, deathly still, her blouse bloody at the shoulder. One of the stray bullets had found her.

Shaking, he knelt beside her and felt for a pulse. He breathed a sigh of relief when it beat strongly under his hand. Good. It had probably just grazed her. He stayed like that, his fingers on her pulse, until he heard the sirens of the sheriff’s vehicles.

* * * *

Sierra opened her eyes and shifted in bed, feeling as if she’d been run over by an eighteen wheeler. When she moved her right arm, she winced at the pain that shot from her shoulder to her wrist. And then it all came back to her.

The Hagens and their hired goons.

The fire fight in her front yard.

The sheriff grimacing at the job he had to do in arresting two of the area’s leading citizens, but hauling them away just the same.

She remembered how Luke had argued long and hard about not taking her to the hospital. As foggy as she was, her mind dulled by pain, she’d heard him explain it was just a flesh wound and he could handle it. He had medical training.

Then more pain as he meticulously cleaned the wound and bandaged it.

Four pain relievers later, he’d tucked her into bed and sat down beside her, crooning softly to her until she’d fallen asleep.

So where was he now? Not in bed with her.

She turned her head, and her heart almost stopped in shock. On the floor beside the bed was the magnificent silver wolf she’d seen for the past few days. Here. In her bedroom.

Common sense told her to be afraid, but her heart told her she was safe. At that moment, the wolf awoke, and she found herself looking into Luke’s warm amber eyes.

“It *is* you, isn’t it?”

The wolf peeled his lips back in what she could have sworn was a smile.

“Do you have to stay like this for a long time? I read that book, you know. All about shifters. It’s a wonderful book.”

The wolf lifted his head and rolled his eyes.

It’s almost as if we’re talking.

“No, I’m not frightened. Fascinated but not scared. You’re still Luke.” She wet her lips with the tip of her tongue. “How long do you have to stay like this before you can shift back?”

A burst of stars exploded before her, and when the cloud cleared away, Luke stood before her in all his naked glory. Being careful of her injured shoulder, he moved her over and slid into bed next to her. Pushing back her hair from her face and caressing her cheek, he explained about the case he’d been on when he couldn’t shift for days and how he’d come up here to get himself back on a regular cycle.

“I was man at night,” he told her, “but the edge of morning always brings the change. Last night, I tried to stay awake and resist it, but I fell asleep and the wolf took over.”

“That was you I saw at the edge of the clearing.”

He nodded. “I saw you and knew at once you were my mate.”

She quirked an eyebrow at him. “Mate?”

“Uh huh. It’s a connection you feel instantly. And so I came that night, in my human shape, to claim you.”

Sierra felt herself blush. “You certainly did that.” She looked into his eyes. “So what happens now?”

“For one thing, now that the Hagens won’t bother you any more, it should be very peaceful around here. I need a few more days to get my body back to its regular schedule where I can shift on demand and not because of need.”

“No one will bother you here,” she pointed out. “But what happens after that?”

“We have a lot of things to discuss. Decisions to be made.” Being careful not to jostle her, he slid his hand between her legs and caressed her slit, already wet for him despite her injury. “We need to make plans for the future.” Two fingers slid inside her pussy, and his lips pressed against her ear. “Lie still. Let me give you pleasure to take away the pain.”

“My future is open,” she reminded him, her breath hitching. “Can we stay here forever?”

His thumb found her clit and flicked back and forth over it. “Not forever, but it’s a nice hideaway. I still have a job, but we’re located in a small town outside the city.”

“I’d...like that.” Ripples slid over her body, and she found it hard to speak.

“Good. Because you know, wolves mate for life.”

“That’s the only way I’d have it,” she gasped out as a climax rolled slowly over her and her liquid heat bathed his hand.

As he held her quietly against him, soothing her and stroking her, she felt for the first time in her life she was where she ought to be. Where she wanted to be.

With her wolf.

About the Author

I always wanted adventure and change in my life, and I certainly got it. I grew up in Maine, a beautiful place to live, then lived in the Midwest and Florida. Now I make my home in the Hill Country of Texas, truly God's chosen place on earth. My husband, David, is a sixth generation Texan, tracing his roots here back to the time when Texas was a Republic, so retiring here was a dream we finally fulfilled.

I've had a lot of firsts in my life – first female sports report on The Michigan Daily at the University of Michigan; first woman to own a rock and roll agency in Detroit, the home of Motown; first woman president of the Pasco (Florida) Economic Development Council.

I graduated from the University of Michigan with a double major in English and History, and a minor in Economics, and went on to have at least four careers. When my children were small, I satisfied my need for writing by working for weekly newspapers. I had a wild and wacky time managing rock and roll bands. I joined the insanity of retail with a string of shoe stores. I worked in fundraising, public affairs and community relations. But writing fiction was always my dream. I had a lot of stops and starts, but it wasn't until we retired that I could devote myself to it full time.

My wonderful husband, David, encourages me and supports me in my dream. Our children are all grown and on their own, and are my biggest fans.

When I'm not writing I'm an avid reader – anything and everything – and watching football, especially my beloved Michigan Wolverines. David and I golf and target shoot, and of course enjoy life in the gorgeous Texas Hill Country, where most of my stories are based.

I am a member of Romance Writers of America, and San Antonio Romance Authors, Diamond State Romance Authors, and Passionate Ink chapter of RWA.

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