

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



*Size
Matters*

STEPHANIE JULIAN

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Carrie Benton's got the best job in the world working as a reporter for the *Weekly News Journal*. Chupacabra picnicking at the Jersey Shore? Check. Aliens in the White House? Absolutely. Bigfoot stalking the forests of northern Pennsylvania? Well, okay...but Bigfoot is so Left Coast.

Tim Sattizahn can't believe his luck. The six-foot redhead who crashed into his forest during a snowstorm is gorgeous, funny and hot for him. Everything would be perfect except for the fact that she's looking for Bigfoot.

And, unfortunately for Tim, she found him...

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Size Matters

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Chapter One

"God damn freaking foreign cars."

Carrie Benton wrestled open the door of her Suzuki Sidekick piece of shit, swung her legs out then stepped into three feet of snow.

And promptly fell flat on her face when a wave of dizziness overtook her. Whoa. She must have smacked her head against the windshield harder than she'd thought when she'd plowed into that tree.

"God damn freaking snow."

Scrambling to her feet, she brushed white powder from her jeans and her favorite bright-green Liz Claiborne blazer, holding one hand to her head. Gonna have a lump there. At least there was no blood.

"I'm going to kill him. That son-of-a-no-good-god-damn-bastard."

Stalking to the front of the car, she stared at the crumpled bumper wrapped around the thick tree trunk on the side of the road. Steam seeped from beneath the hood.

"Great. Just freaking great."

She swung her foot at the useless bumper, knowing it was a stupid-ass thing to do. Luckily she was wearing her biker boots, the ones she'd picked up at an outlet for forty-five bucks a couple of years ago. They were her go-to shoes for mucking around in fields, woods, snow, rain and dark of night.

So, she wore them pretty much every day.

Especially today when it was below freezing, snowing like a bitch and she was out in the middle of *freaking* nowhere.

Alone.

With a busted car.

And a headache.

“And is that a smart-assed comment on my life, or what?” she said to no one in particular.

Of course, if Luke hadn’t caught the stupid stomach virus that’d been going through the editorial office like rotten Mu Shu Pork through a dog, she wouldn’t be alone.

She’d told him not to get too close to that intern with the big blue eyes and even bigger tits.

But no, he’d had to go sniffing around like a hound in heat. Just before he’d done his impression of Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*.

He hadn’t even gotten laid for his trouble but he’d spent the last two days in bed, turning a shade of green reserved for moldy food.

Unfortunately, his head hadn’t spun around completely. At least they could’ve used that as art for the *Weekly News Journal*.

“Photojournalist Possessed by the Devil” would’ve looked great on the front cover.

But now she was stuck, by herself, in a freaking snowstorm somewhere in the state game lands shared by Berks and Schuylkill Counties in southeastern Pennsylvania, all because her editor wanted a few photos for inside art.

“Hell, Care,” Bill Dailey had bellowed. She didn’t think the forty-something-ish, old-school journalist knew how to talk in a normal tone of voice. “We’re only thirty minutes from ground zero. Go get some live shots to use for the page next week before the damn *Investigative Weekly* gets their asses in gear and beats us to the story in our own backyard. And if you actually see Bigfoot, make sure the zipper don’t show.”

Carrie had seen some weird shit in her five years as a reporter (“Reporter my ass,” her father’s voice taunted in her head) for the *Journal*.

Most could be explained.

Alien crop circles?

Kids with sticks and a few too many six packs of beer beating circles in a corn field.

Dinosaur rampaging through eastern Lebanon County?

An escaped bull tearing through neighbors' gardens in the middle of the night.

Sure, she'd come across one or two things she couldn't explain.

Cold spots, disembodied voices, Lady Gaga.

Unfortunately, Bigfoot was not one of them.

And now she had a broken car and a cell phone that wasn't picking up a signal.

She thought about swearing again but decided she'd rather do it in the car where it was still warm. But wouldn't be for long because she was down to less than a quarter of a tank of gas.

Yeah, yeah, she should have filled up before she'd left. Hell, she should've turned around when the snow began to fall fast and heavy a few minutes after she'd departed the newsroom in West Reading.

But no, here she was, miles from nowhere with not much gas, no food and a few thousand dollars in camera equipment.

Think, Carrie. You're not a stupid woman.

Well, not usually. This didn't qualify as one of her better days.

Staring down the snow-covered lane that looked like the setting for some sappy Christmas card, all she saw were brown tree trunks and white snow.

Okay, no one built a road to nowhere. She refused to believe people would be that stupid.

Of course, some of her readers really did believe in Bigfoot and Dracula, so...

No. There had to be a home somewhere along this road.

Grabbing her purse and her pink parka off the front seat, and ignoring the slight dizziness she attributed to fear of the unknown, she made sure the camera equipment was hidden on the floor behind the front seat before she locked the car.

Then she started walking.

* * * * *

Tim Sattazahn watched the red-haired goddess trudge through the snow as she kept up a running conversation with herself.

She obviously had a lot to talk about because she never shut up.

Tim didn't mind. It was nice to hear someone else's voice, even if every other word was a half-assed obscenity.

Besides, her dirty mouth was turning him on.

She'd used "freaking" more times in one sentence than he'd ever heard other women say in their lives. Most of them she used in reference to someone named Bill.

He hoped Bill had his health insurance paid up because this woman was going to kick his ass when she got home. And from the looks of her, Tim figured she could do it.

Her legs looked long, lean and athletic in a pair of skintight jeans. The rest of her was bundled into a blindingly pink parka but he couldn't imagine the rest of the body wouldn't fit the legs.

Damn, the woman was gorgeous. He just hoped she wasn't seriously injured.

He'd been out gathering wood when he'd heard the car engine chugging along. He'd had just enough time to wonder what the hell someone was doing out here in the middle of what was expected to be a two-day storm when he'd heard the unmistakable crunch of metal-on-tree-trunk.

As the only resident within a forty-mile radius, he'd known he had to check it out. The driver or passengers could be injured. They might need help.

He hadn't been close enough to alert her to his presence when he saw her leave the car and start walking, which he wouldn't have done anyway. He'd started to make his way toward her, keeping out of sight, but even he'd been bogged down in the fast-falling snow.

As he'd gotten closer, he'd slowed, not wanting to scare the crap out of her by barreling up to her, especially not the way he looked now. But he would try to herd her in the right direction if she wandered off the track, now nearly invisible in the snow.

In the five or so years since he'd lived here, only three people had ever found the dirt track leading to his home. Just dumb luck that she'd found it in the snow.

If she kept walking, she'd reach his house in a few minutes. It sent a shiver up his spine that had nothing to do with the cold. It'd been a while since he'd had anyone in his home, much less someone who looked like a Valkyrie.

She had to be nearly six feet tall, with autumn-red hair in a braid down her back and a body that made his blood run hot. All long limbs, lush curves, full mouth and big eyes. She could have stepped straight out of a Titian masterpiece. Aphrodite or Danae.

He wanted her. No two ways about it.

But she had to be injured. No one in their right mind would leave their car in the middle of a snowstorm to wander off.

At least she wore that parka that stood out against the snow like a neon sign.

One that winked out of sight as he passed behind a tree.

Oh shit.

He took off at a gallop, not caring if he scared her. Plowing through the almost-knee-high blanket of white, he covered the distance in a matter of seconds.

She lay sprawled on the snow, her coat and jeans an odd stain on all that white, her hair like one long stream of blood.

He lifted her into his arms, his gaze going to her full red lips. They were parted slightly as she breathed. Good. But her skin was ashen and chilled and she must have passed out because she didn't open her eyes and start to scream when she got a load of him.

Careful not to hurt her, he gathered her against his chest and headed home.

* * * * *

Carrie woke to pitch black.

She was naked and warm, cocooned between firm, hot silk and soft, warm cotton.

No, not silk. Skin.

Okay, that was interesting. Not bad, just... She didn't remember going home from the bar with a guy last night.

In fact, she couldn't remember going to Third and Spruce last night.

And this didn't feel like home.

What she did feel was safe. And Carrie always trusted her instincts. Before she'd taken the job with the *Journal*, her father had praised her ability to assess any situation in seconds.

Right now, she sensed the absolute security of her surroundings and the desire emanating from the man—definitely a man—holding her on his lap.

What she couldn't remember was how she'd gotten here.

She wriggled a little closer to the guy, felt his arms tighten around her and the hard ridge of his erection press against the bare skin of her thigh.

Wow, the guy was huge! Long and thick and... Oh, baby, she really *had* gotten lucky last night.

Turning her head, she reached out with one hand and encountered firm muscle. His arm flexed under her touch as she smoothed her way up to his broad shoulder then trailed her fingertips over his chest.

And rubbed her thigh against that enticing organ.

Thank God she'd shaved her legs yesterday.

The guy groaned into her hair. "Carrie..."

Oh, good. He remembered her name. Too bad she was drawing a blank on his.

Didn't matter. Obviously, she'd gone home with him last night. Maybe she was still a little drunk, not just hung over.

But that ache between her legs... Damn it, she wanted sex. Now.

The dark closed so tightly around them, she could barely see his outline but she moved both hands up and up his body until she finally reached his face. Wow, he must be really tall and she meant *really* tall because she was no slouch.

At five-ten – without heels which she wore anyway because she looked damn good in them – she typically had a few inches on most men. And of course, she was the kind of girl who liked her men big and strong.

Which made sense of why she'd gone home with this one.

Stubble roughened his broad jaw, sending a shiver of lust through her and causing her to rub against his cock again. God, she loved to hear men groan. It made her feel all powerful, like Wonder Woman. Or that FBI chick from *Fringe*. She loved that show. Hell, she'd marry JJ Abrams in a heartbeat. The guy had a better imagination than most of the yahoos she worked with.

And she worked with some of the best in the field. Granted, the field wasn't huge but...

With one hand, she traced his lips, pushing the other into his hair. The guy had lots of it. Down to his shoulders, at least.

Another point in his favor. She must've thought she'd hit the lottery last night. Wherever that had been.

And who cared about that now? Shifting around was a little difficult in the dark and she didn't want to hurt anything vital – namely that gorgeous erection – but with a little help from him, she wound up with her knees on either side of his thighs as he sat upright, her hands on his cheeks and her mouth descending on his.

He seemed surprised at first, his body freezing into stillness, but when she licked at his lips, he got with the program and kissed her back. And great freaking Jesus, the guy could kiss.

His tongue dove into her mouth and twined around hers while his hands grabbed onto her hips and pulled her even closer.

God, he was *huge*. And she didn't just mean his cock. Pressed against him the way she was now, she got a better sense of his size.

Her breasts were cushioned against a chest so broad and muscular, the guy had to be built like John Cena, the professional wrestler one of the girls at the *Journal* had a crush on.

His abs felt like a washboard, which she discovered when she pressed forward to rub her mound against his cock, looking for some relief for the tension in her body.

He broke away from her kiss, but his hips rose slightly, rubbing his cock almost where she needed it to go. Just a little to the left and he'd rub against her clit.

"Whoa, Carrie." His hands tightened on her hips but didn't push her away. "Are you sure you're feeling okay?"

Hmm, maybe she'd had more to drink last night than she remembered. But he was so nice to ask.

"I feel fine." She trailed one hand down his chest, fingers brushing against the tip of his cock. "And you feel amazing."

She wished she knew his name but didn't want to embarrass herself or him by asking for it. Later, after she satisfied this urge to jump his bones, she'd figure it out.

Right now...not caring so much.

Especially when she wrapped one hand around his cock and realized her fingers didn't meet.

Thank you, Goddess of...well, whatever goddess handled huge guys with accessories to match.

Warm flesh pulsed in her hand as she stroked from fat root to bulbous tip. Silky soft skin slid over the hard core and a drop of moisture seeped from the slit.

Using her thumb, she smeared the liquid over the head as she felt one of his hands leave her hip to trail over her ribs to cup her breast as he groaned deep in his chest. Long fingers kneaded her, pinching the nipple into a hard, aching point.

Nuzzling her nose in his neck, she breathed in deep, his scent musky woodsy and a little smoky. Kind of like sex and good barbecue.

Did he taste as good as he smelled? She flicked his skin with her tongue. Salty, heady. All man.

Yumm-O, as Rachael Ray would say about some thirty-minute, fat bomb of a meal. If this was the main course, who needed freakin' dessert?

She went back for seconds, licking from his neck to his earlobe, nipping the little piece of flesh and hearing his breath catch in his throat.

The hand on her breast tightened and, finally, he released the leash he'd been keeping on himself.

With another groan, he lifted his other hand from her hip to cup her unattended breast. She arched to give him better access and the motion rubbed her sex against his cock again. She clenched around nothing, needing something to fill her and fast. But with his fingers on her breasts, she was left with only one choice.

"Condom," she said. "Right now."

Tim heard Carrie say the magic word.

She wanted him to get a condom. Great freakin' Jesus, he was gonna get laid.

If he didn't come in her hand first, which was a very real possibility if she kept pumping him with her fist and rubbing herself against him.

And since he wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth, he released her breasts, wrapped his arms around her and stood to carry her to his bed in the loft.

It was pitch black in the house but he didn't need lights to get around. He had the layout memorized, even if it was his little head doing the thinking.

With Carrie a soft mass of sweet-smelling flesh in his arms, he took the stairs two at a time. With perfect aim, he tossed her on the bed, heard her gasp then start to laugh. Damn, she had a great laugh. Husky, low and just a little dirty.

His cock throbbed with each beat of his heart as he studied every curve, every line. He'd looked his fill earlier, downstairs, but that had been to make sure she didn't have any overt injuries.

Once he'd realized she'd just fainted, he'd stripped them both to warm her better in front of the fire and wrapped blankets around them as they sat on the couch. He'd figured he get her in one of his t-shirts and in bed before she woke.

But she'd felt damn good on his lap, so he'd held onto her.

He'd be a liar if he said he didn't want to screw her brains out. Hell, he'd take thank-you-for-saving-me sex over no sex at all.

Propping herself on her elbows, she tilted her head to the side, as if studying him, though he knew she wouldn't be able to see him as clearly as he could see her. His ancestors had developed incredible eyesight over the centuries. All that cave and forest dwelling.

Still, she had to realize he was taller than anyone she'd probably ever met before.

"You really are a big guy, aren't you?" she murmured.

He stilled. "I won't hurt you, Carrie."

"Oh, I don't think it'll hurt," she said, rising to her knees on the bed and reaching unerringly for his waist. "But I'm dying to get you inside me."

Her words made his balls tighten in response, his cock twitching with anticipation, and he was about to reach for the bedside table and the condoms he kept there when she wound her arms around his back, pulled him close and sealed her mouth on his chest.

He sucked in a deep breath and held it as she placed slow, drugging kisses from the center of his chest to his right nipple, where she opened her mouth to tongue it into a stiff point. Then she moved to the left nipple and did the same there.

With a groan, his hands fell on her shoulders, pulling her body even closer against his. With her gorgeous breasts almost exactly where he wanted them, he thrust his hips slightly, brushing his cock against her sternum.

She got the hint and moved her hands from his hips to her breasts, pushing the mounds together until they encased his cock in soft flesh.

Aw, hell. Now this was heaven. His eyelids dropped shut for a few brief seconds while he let himself soak in the gut-tightening sensation of his cock rubbing between her breasts.

So fucking good. Almost too good. He didn't want to come like this, didn't want to —

Her tongue slicked over his tip, bathing the heated skin with her moisture.

He groaned in surrender. Not that he hadn't already given in to her but, oh hell...

He thrust a few times, the drag on his cock enticing in ways completely different than being encased in a woman's sex.

Which was the next stop on this erotic journey they'd just started. One he couldn't wait another second to get to.

"Carrie. Lie down."

She didn't obey right away. No, she licked him again, barely touching him with her tormenting tongue before she lay back on the bed and let her legs fall open. Lifting her foot, she trailed her toes from his thigh to his hip with unerring accuracy before moving between his legs and rubbing her big toe against his balls.

His groan echoed in the open loft and he grabbed her foot to hook her leg around his hips. Then he reached for her other leg and hiked it around his waist, remembering at the last second to grab a condom from the drawer in the bedside table.

Carrie watched his every move from between slitted lids, the smile on her lips a promise that he was about to have the best sex of his life.

With her long legs wrapped around his waist and her ass in one hand, he fitted his cock to her opening with the other and pushed inside.

God, she was wet and tight, and she moaned as if he were the best thing she'd ever felt. Arching her back, she threw her arms over her head and reached for the other side of the king-size mattress.

"So good," she murmured. "So good."

He worked his cock into her by increments, centimeters at a time, drowning in the sensation of flesh on flesh – wanting to thrust hard and fast but not sure she'd be able to take him all the way. Not to brag, but he was seven feet tall and well-proportioned.

"Carrie, are you okay?"

Her response was to arch her hips and take a few more centimeters with a throaty, "Mm hmm. I'm fine. I'm more than fine. Please, do me."

His balls tightened in anticipation. Christ, he was gonna come just from the sound of her voice.

No, not yet.

First, he had to get all the way inside her. He didn't know how long it took until he felt her fine hair mesh with his, but when he did, they both froze.

So damn good. And he hadn't started to move yet.

Obviously, she was thinking the same because she opened her eyes and held out her arms, her mouth curved in a sexy smile. She wanted him to come to her, to cover her with his body and he wasn't about to say no.

Careful not dislodge from her, he eased his knees onto the bed, scooting her forward so he could join her. The motion made them both groan, the anticipation building to an almost fever pitch.

A full foot taller than Carrie, he covered her completely, her head tucking under his chin, his body surrounding hers, pressing her into the bed.

He wondered for a second if he'd scared her when he heard her take in a sharp breath. But her moan and the rocking motion of her hips reassured him she was right there with him. And just as horny.

"Come on, babe," she said, "I want you to move. I *need* you to move."

"Don't worry. You'll get it."

As slowly as he could go, he pulled out, feeling every delicate ripple of her inner tissues. He wasn't aware he was holding his breath until he had to suck in air when he pulled completely free.

She immediately arched into him and he allowed her to take him back in. Slow. He wanted to take it slow, wanted her to beg.

He managed slow for a few minutes, an easy glide that made her writhe beneath him and cranked his blood pressure until his heart felt like a jackrabbit in his chest.

Still, he managed to submerge his need to pound into her. Until she slid her hands around his shoulders and down his back. Her nails took sharp little bites in his skin on the way down to his ass, where she pressed down with enough force to make him move.

Tilting her head up, she licked his throat then whispered, "Faster."

That one word was all it took. His body responded before his brain fully comprehended what she'd said.

He came up on his elbows and began to thrust, his hips pumping hard, her heels on his ass urging him faster. Every sound she made, every sigh, every moan, lit an answering fire in his gut that translated to tension in his balls.

Moving faster, he felt her legs creep higher on his waist, tilting her pelvis into him, opening her wider. A slight adjustment to his angle of penetration and she gasped.

Right there. That's where she needed the friction.

He wasn't going to come until he'd knocked her off the edge. That little bit of focus helped pull him back, helped him make sure he stroked the base of his cock against her clit.

She rewarded him with a loud gasp and the snap of her body against his as she came.

Her sheath clenched around him like a fist, milking him until the tension released in his balls and pumped his seed through his cock and into her.

Collapsing over her, breathing like a freight train, he pressed a kiss to her forehead and whispered, "Name's Tim. Nice to meet you."

Chapter Two

It took Carrie a few minutes to realize what the guy had said.

She was enjoying the afterglow. She'd never come that hard before. Kinda scrambled the brains.

So his name was Tim. Nice. Nice, normal name.

But why had he just introduced himself like she'd never asked his name before?

Had she been that drunk the night before?

Tim rolled to her side and she immediately missed his bulk surrounding her.

Wow, scary. She'd only known the guy... What? A couple of hours?

What the hell had she been drinking last night that —

Wait a minute. She hadn't gone out last night. She distinctly remembered going home because no one else had felt like going out. Most everyone at the office was sick.

She'd gone home, watched a little TV. She was working her way through the second season of *The X-Files*. Lots of great material in there for inspiration.

This morning, she'd gone to work and Bill had sent her out to get photos. For a Bigfoot spread.

Shaking her head, she sat up, inching away from him, more than a little thankful for the dark so he couldn't see her.

"Hey, you okay?"

Whoa, that voice sent shivers down her spine, so deep and sexy. But she had no idea why it sounded so familiar to her.

"Where am I?"

He didn't answer right away and she sucked her bottom lip between her teeth, chewing on the soft flesh. Maybe she didn't want to know.

"You're in my home. You're safe here, Carrie."

She felt safe. Still... "And where exactly did we meet?"

He sighed and the mattress moved as he rolled to the side of the bed and started to move around the room, opening and closing a drawer.

"I'm going to turn on a light, okay?"

"Uh, yeah. That's fine."

Considering how they'd just spent the past however many minutes, she shouldn't have been worried about her nudity.

And she forgot about it the moment he turned on the lights.

Holy hell, the guy was *big*. And she didn't just mean tall. He was perfectly proportioned – to be a freaking god.

He stared down at her from the side of the bed, one hand on his hip, not at all embarrassed by his nudity. His other hand held a t-shirt and a pair of boxer shorts, which she took, with her mouth hanging open.

She'd realized he had long hair but the dark had hidden the gorgeous mass of gold, brown and red waves. The shaggy lengths just reached his shoulders and again... Wow.

Broad and muscled but not overly so, this guy wasn't some angular long-distance runner or gangly basketball player. His golden skin gleamed in the dim glow of the lamp on the bedside table.

Letting her gaze drop even farther, she eyed his six-pack abs with something close to awe then her mouth went dry when she reached his groin.

She'd already known his sex was tremendous but she hadn't realized she'd want to immortalize it in stone. Or firm latex.

Sue her.

And his legs. Muscular thighs, shapely calves and huge feet.

Guess that myth was true. The size of a guy's feet and his, well... Yeah...

By the time she'd dragged her gaze back up to meet his eyes, his lips had quirked into a smile.

She glared at him even as she felt that tug of desire deep in her gut. "I didn't pick you up in a bar last night, did I?"

He shook his head, his expression clearing into something close to a blank slate.

"But I did wrap my car around a tree?"

He nodded. "Yeah. I didn't see you do it, but I heard. I found you passed out in the snow and brought you back here."

Her mouth opened for a second before she could put words together. "And decided you'd get a little nookie from the unconscious girl?" She pulled the oversized t-shirt over her head, a little freaked out, though she wasn't sure why. "Who *are* you?"

His face twisted in a contrite grimace. "Hey, I didn't want to take advantage of you. But you woke up, a little, uh..."

She couldn't believe he was too much of a gentleman to say she'd woken horny as hell.

"Well, that's mostly your fault." She felt inclined to point out. "You were naked and you smelled good and...and you were *hard*."

Surely she couldn't be held responsible for wanting him under those conditions.

His brows raised and those gorgeous lips kicked into a full-blown smile. Which made her hot for him and pissed off at him at the same time.

"Okay, I'll cop to all those."

Damn, the guy was so freaking *hot*. Which probably led him to believe he could get away with anything. Well, not with her. "Who the *hell* are you?"

"My name's Tim Sattazahn." He gestured around him, still looking a little sheepish, a little guilty. "This is my home. I own Outdoor Enterprises, a camping and wilderness business. I'm closed for the winter, though."

Okay, that didn't sound too bad. It sounded normal. But if the guy was a serial killer, of course he wouldn't say, "I'm a serial killer. Let me get out my chainsaw."

Her eyes narrowed and she tried on her most fierce expression. "Why'd you take off my clothes?"

Again, he looked abashed as he held out his hands, palms up. "They were wet and you were cold. It was the easiest way to warm you."

Okay, that sounded kind of rational, too. She felt her mouth purse into a thin little line as she thought about that.

"So," he asked, "what were *you* doing out here in the middle of nowhere in a snowstorm?"

Well, shit. How should she answer that one?

Most people, when she told them where she was employed, laughed in her face then asked what she really did. She'd grown a thick skin over the years but she didn't want this man to laugh at her.

Not that she was ashamed of her job, not in the least. Still...

Her chin tilted up. "I'm a writer."

He lifted one eyebrow at her. "Which doesn't explain why you were out here in the middle of a snowstorm."

She stuck her nose in the air, practically daring him to make some crack about women drivers and snow. "I'm out here for a story."

Now a wary look came into his eyes. "A story?"

"I work for a newspaper."

His gaze definitely went a little frosty on her and her reporter antenna pinged. Usually only people who had something to hide didn't like reporters. "So what story's so important to make you come out in a snowstorm for it?"

Good question. What would he say if she told him she was here to photograph Bigfoot?

Speaking of big feet...

She looked down. Damn, this man certainly proved that old chestnut about the size of a guy's feet indicating the size of his cock.

They had to be at least a fourteen or a fifteen, if not bigger.

Could he be the reason she'd been sent out here? Had someone gotten a quick look at him and thought...

No, that was just stupid. Yeah, the guy was tall but really, that was stupid.

Maybe she'd hit her head harder than she'd thought.

"Carrie?"

"Wait, how do you know my name?"

"I checked your driver's license." He held up a hand, for some reason drawing her gaze back to his exposed groin. The man was built *not* to wear clothes. "And before you complain, I just wanted to make sure you didn't have any medical conditions I needed to know about."

"I don't. I'm perfectly healthy." And so was he, if his physique and stamina were any indication. Speaking of stamina —

Jeez, she had to get him into clothing so she could think clearly. Obviously she should be angrier about him taking advantage of her.

Okay, maybe saying he'd taken advantage was a little harsh. He *had* tried to get her to stop at least twice.

Thank God she hadn't listened.

She held up her hand in classic stop position, though she didn't know why. "Look, could you put some clothes on? Please? Your nudity is making me nervous."

His smile lit his eyes. "Nervous, huh? Well, we certainly don't want that."

He turned and walked back to the chest of drawers against the far wall and she considered begging him to ignore her previous request and walk around naked all day.

The man had *the* most perfect ass. Lean and firm and rounded and —

She swallowed. Yeah.

Before she could completely embarrass herself and put her hands on that ass, he'd grabbed a pair of jeans out of a drawer and pulled them up those long legs.

He didn't bother with a t-shirt, though, and for that she again thanked that elusive Goddess of Hot Guys.

"So," he turned back to her, "since you're not going anywhere for a while because of the storm, you want something to eat?"

Come to think of it, she was kind of hungry. "It's still snowing?"

He nodded. "Hasn't stopped."

"Got any chocolate?"

* * * * *

Watching Carrie drink hot chocolate gave Tim a hard-on guaranteed to drive nails.

She didn't actually drink it. She licked at the marshmallows then lapped at the chocolate, her pink tongue mesmerizing him with thoughts of what she could do with it.

"This is really good." She practically purred, her eyes closed, hands wrapped around the mug. "I don't think I've ever had hot chocolate made from real chocolate bars. Where'd you learn to do that?"

"My mom. She's good in the kitchen." Which was a gross understatement. His mom was a wizard with chocolate, which was really saying something in his community. The Citeka loved their chocolate.

"Well, your mom knows her stuff." She gave the chocolate another lap and his cock twitched in his pants. The damn zipper was going to be imprinted on his flesh for sure.

He wanted her back in his bed. Wondered how long before he could make a move without her thinking he was taking advantage.

But he also wanted to know more about her.

"So, what paper do you work for?"

She looked him straight in the eyes. "The *Weekly News Journal*."

Oh *shit*. Oh, no *fucking* shit. The fates wouldn't be that unfair, would they?

He tried to school his features into polite interest, instead of abject horror. "Um, not sure I'm familiar with that one," he lied.

Carrie didn't drop her gaze. "We cover news the other papers don't."

God damn, he *had* heard her right. He wanted to throw back his head and bellow. Damn it to hell and back again. Which deity had he pissed off lately?

It just wasn't fucking fair that the red-haired goddess wearing his shirt and nothing else was one of *those*.

Squashing a sigh, he prepared to have his hopes of doing her again crushed. "And what kind of news is that?"

Her chin lifted just a little bit higher, as if she were daring him to laugh. "Crop circles, UFO sightings, ghosts, out-of-the-ordinary stories."

He didn't laugh, couldn't find it in him to muster the strength. "Huh. That's...interesting."

She stiffened and set her mug on the counter. Very gently. "It *is* interesting. There's so much in the world we don't understand, so much that can't be explained by science." Then she shrugged and picked up her mug again. "But mainly, I'm in the entertainment field."

He blinked. Okay, not exactly what he'd expected to hear. "Entertainment?"

"Sure." Her slow smile had his blood chugging through his veins. "There's very real evidence for the existence of ghosts. UFOs? Not so much. I mean, I'm not arrogant enough to believe Earth is the only inhabited planet in the entire galaxy. But do I think people from other planets visit ours and kidnap people to probe them with steel rods?" She shrugged. "Not likely. Crop circles make good pictures but I've never come across

one that couldn't be explained by a couple of kids and a little alcohol. Cryptozoology, now, that has some merits."

More than she knew. "How so?"

"The earth is a huge place. Scientists are finding new species every day. Of course there are going to be animals in the world we don't know about."

"So, you go around trying to take photos of the Loch Ness Monster and Bigfoot?"

She grimaced a little. "I've never been to Loch Ness. Do I think a dinosaur lives there? Not really. Would I love to go and be proved wrong? Hell yes. Do I think there's a huge man-ape running around the North American forests? No. I don't believe in Bigfoot. At least, not in some freak-of-nature missing link."

Well, thank God for small favors.

"But," she continued, "did you know that a race of red-haired giants once lived in the western part of the country?"

His heart sank farther toward his stomach with each word. "Uh..."

"There are several documented cases of seven- and eight-foot-tall skeletons found in caves in the West and... I'm boring you to tears, aren't I?"

No, unfortunately she wasn't. But what the hell could he say? "Not at all. I've never really given that kind of stuff much thought, though."

Christ, if he lied any more, his nose would start growing.

"Sorry. I get carried away with work sometimes." She let her gaze drift as she shook her head. "I enjoy it. I used to work for my dad. He's the managing editor of the *Harrisburg Daily*. My dad loves his politics. I think it's deadly dull and sucks out your soul after a while. We had a difference of opinion about that. Actually, we had several differences of opinion. So I left."

He knew how hard it was to leave your family and strike out on your own. "And decided you were really going to piss off your dad and work for the *Weekly News Journal*."

There was that smile again. The one that made him want to pick her up and throw her on his bed. If she didn't stop smiling, he was definitely going to have blue balls.

"Actually, no. I freelanced for a while but you can't make enough to pay the bills. Then I saw an ad in the classifieds for a staff writer at a weekly paper. I didn't really know what I was getting into at first. I just needed to pay my rent.

"My first assignment was an article on a haunted house in Oley. A ghost that played music all night and forced the homeowners to dance with him. Turns out the neighbors had outdoor speakers they forgot to turn off most nights. I had the best time writing that story. After that, I was hooked.

"Where else would I get to take mundane events like a flu epidemic or an overgrown dog running around someone's backyard and make them fantastic? I've been there going on three years now."

"Sounds like you love your job."

Her smile made his blood burn. "It's fun. It may not be my dad's idea of journalism, but there's got to be a balance between all the political bullshit and the misery, right?"

When she put it that way... "Yeah, I guess so. So, you were out here for a story? In the snow?"

"It wasn't snowing this much when I left. And by the time I realized it had turned into a blizzard, I was already here. I figured I'd just get the photos and get home."

"Photos of what?"

She waved a lazy hand as she took another sip of the chocolate. "The trees, the area. Any wildlife that may be around."

Damn, he knew where this was going but he couldn't stop himself from asking. "Wildlife?"

She sighed. "Bigfoot, okay. I'm here to do a story on Bigfoot."

Carrie couldn't tell by the look on Tim's face whether he wanted to laugh, sneer or shake his head.

She'd had her fair share of all three in the time she'd worked for the *Journal*.

Usually, she didn't give a rat's ass what other people thought. If they couldn't accept what she did as a legitimate form of entertainment, then they needed to loosen up or get a life. Or both.

Hell, many of the people who looked down on her job regularly devoured *US Weekly* and *In Touch*. Those weekly tabloids dished just as much pain and misery as her father's "respectable" daily.

"Bigfoot, huh?" Tim's tone was carefully modulated, revealing nothing about his thoughts. "Someone saw Bigfoot near here?"

She nodded. "Got a call yesterday. My editor wanted some live pictures of the area, since we're so close."

Stretching his long legs out in front of him, he crossed his feet and rested his hands on his naked, flat stomach.

Damn, the guy was sexy as hell. Even his feet turned her on. They were lean and long and... Oh, for chrissakes, she was lusting after his feet.

"So," he paused as if trying to find the right words, "you're looking for Bigfoot."

She almost sighed but caught it back just in time. "No. I told you, I don't believe in Bigfoot. But when my editor tells me to get live photos of the area for the pages next week, I do what he says."

Tim nodded, his expression thoughtful as he stared at her.

Did he think she was a nut case? Did he regret having sex with her?

Hell, she certainly hoped not. Because they were going to be seriously bored to tears if they were stuck in this cabin together until the snow let up and they didn't have sex to break up the monotony.

And she really, *really* wanted to have sex with him again.

She wasn't a slut. She chose men as carefully as she chose her hairstylist and she was damn picky about who cut her hair.

But she trusted her instincts and her instincts said this man was a keeper.

Hell, he could've taken advantage of her in so many different ways, it was scary to contemplate. Yet, he'd been the utmost gentleman. And he'd given her the best orgasm she'd ever had.

He nodded, as if agreeing with her unspoken determination and she became mesmerized by the slide of his beautiful hair on his shoulders. She'd never seen anyone with hair like that.

"Guess your photos are going to have to wait until we can get back to your car," he said. "Do you want to call your editor and tell him you're not going to make it back tonight?"

Damn, he was thoughtful too. If he was some nutcase, no way would he let her call anyone to tell them where she was. He had to be on the up-and-up. "Yeah, I would. Thanks."

"I've got a satellite phone hookup." He rose to walk to the counter where he grabbed a blocky-looking phone off the counter. "Out here I can't rely on regular phone lines or cell coverage."

Giving him a warm smile, she called the newsroom and spoke with her editor and explained the situation, reassuring Bill several times that she was safe. Maybe the guy did have a heart, after all. He even demanded she give him Tim's name and his address, which Tim supplied.

When she hung up, Tim was kneeling in front of the fireplace, tossing logs into the flames. Walking over to stand next to him, she marveled again at his size. The top of his head was nearly level with her chin. If he turned, he'd probably be able to put his mouth on her breasts.

Just the thought of his lips on her nipples made her thighs clench in anticipation.

"So, Tim, what are we going to do for the rest of the day?"

Good question, Tim thought, throwing another log on the fire. And a dangerous one.

Because what he wanted to do involved his bed, a can of whipped cream and her naked body.

Christ, was it possible to have an erection-induced heart attack?

He wanted this woman like he'd never wanted anyone else. The fact that he liked her made him want her even more.

Smart, self-deprecating and funny women turned him on like nobody's business. Throw in Carrie's red hair and awesome body and — *ding, ding, ding*. Jackpot.

He picked up another log, even though the fire was burning bright. "Um, I think I've got a few board games or a deck of cards around here somewhere. Unless you want to watch some TV?" It would run down the generator and he had a finite supply of gas but if that's what she wanted —

Her hand landed on his shoulder, winding a piece of his hair between her fingers. He'd been thinking about cutting it lately. The wavy, crazy-colored mass of it, combined with his height, made him too damn memorable. If he wanted to have a shot at fitting in out here, he'd have to get rid of it.

Of course, maybe he'd never be able to fit in anywhere but the small village where his parents and most of his family still lived. Citeka, Nevada, boasted less than five hundred inhabitants, most of those related through blood or marriage.

The village had been founded more than a hundred and fifty years ago, after their tribe had moved from its former home in the Pacific Northwest. It was located hundreds of miles from either Reno or Vegas and in an area no one willingly moved to.

Travelers didn't even pass through because the village wasn't located on any major highways. So they didn't get a lot of outsiders gawking. And calling tabloid newspapers.

Damn it, someone must have seen him out here and called the tabloid to report a Bigfoot sighting. Just because he hadn't seen anyone in the past few days didn't mean someone hadn't seen him.

How could he have been so careless?

"You have beautiful hair," Carrie murmured, sending shivers down his spine to his balls and his aching cock and bringing him back into the moment. "Did you get this from your mom or your dad?"

"My dad." Actually, all males in his family had variations on the same theme. His hair was more brown than his dad's, which was closer to Carrie's auburn.

Her fingers combed through the ends and, even though he was done feeding wood into the fire, he stayed where he was.

"Do you have any brothers or sisters?" she asked.

"One of each."

"Younger or older?"

"I'm the oldest."

"Is your whole family so *tall*?"

He swallowed a bitter laugh at her innocent question. "Yeah, they are. What about you, Carrie?" He turned to stare up at her. "Where did you get that gorgeous red hair?"

Her smile made his gut twist. "My mom, though hers is steel gray now and just as beautiful."

Slowly he rose, catching her hand before she could retract it. She didn't pull away, just stared up into his eyes.

She shook her head. "I don't want to watch TV."

His mouth dried and he had to swallow to be able to speak. "Then what do you want to do?"

She lifted his hand to her breast, rubbing his knuckles over her pebbled nipple through his shirt. Her teeth bit into her bottom lip as she took a deep breath.

Okay, he could do that.

He lifted his other hand to join the first and watched her eyes flutter closed as her lips parted. Pinching her nipples through the soft cotton, he teased the already hard tips until she moaned.

She liked him to pinch hard rather than soft, to knead the firm mounds rather than caress. He'd learned that much about her already. He wanted to know everything.

Her head dropped back, exposing her throat and he angled his head so he could nip at the soft skin below her ear. She had cute ears, small and perfectly round, unmarked by piercings. She didn't have any other jewelry on her body except for a small silver ring on her right index toe that he'd only noticed a few minutes ago.

With his mouth still tasting her, he drew in a deep breath and noticed only the scent of vanilla lotion on her skin. She didn't wear any makeup, which she didn't need anyway.

Natural, fresh and refreshingly sexually open.

Was this his lucky day or what?

The answer was "Hell, yes" when she placed her hands on his hips and started a slow, sensual exploration of his skin. She touched every inch of exposed flesh she could reach, from his shoulders to his arms to his wrists. Her hands skimmed down his back to just above his jeans.

He groaned against her throat when her fingers slid around to the front, scratching lightly at the skin low on his stomach.

And when he felt her reach lower, his cock strained to break free of the waistband of his jeans. But still she didn't touch him.

Just when he thought he couldn't take it anymore, she slid her hands those few extra inches to the button on his jeans. But she didn't unbutton them.

He froze, waiting for her next move.

Which didn't come.

Instead, she tilted her head farther to the side and rolled her shoulder.

Ah. He strung kisses along her neck until he reached her jaw then followed the line of her jaw to her temple. Her hands responded by teasing his abdomen just above the waistband of his jeans.

Okay, she didn't want to play board games, but this game was even better.

Keeping one hand on her breast, he slid the other down her side and around the back to smooth over her ass. On the downward glide, he caught the fabric of the boxers she wore between his fingers and gave a good tug.

Her fingers slid back to the front and carefully worked open the button before easing down his zipper. She had to struggle a little to get it over his erection but finally she managed it without catching anything vital in those metal teeth.

To reward her, he kissed her forehead and shoved the boxers off her hips, drawing his hand around to the front to stroke through the fine hair between her legs.

It was her turn to shudder, pressing her face against his chest as her hands froze in the process of pulling his jeans off his hips.

He stilled his fingers.

"Two can play this game," she said.

"I thought we were."

He felt her smile brush against his chest, then her tongue slicked out to lap at his skin. A shiver rattled his body and his hands flexed on her breast and her mound.

And it wasn't a game anymore, unless she considered driving him out of his mind a game.

"Carrie."

He didn't know what else to say, only that he needed her to do something. Anything.

"Tim."

"I want your mouth on me."

"Where do you want my mouth?" Her voice flowed like warm oil over his skin.
"Here?"

His breath stilled as her lips brushed across his right shoulder.

His fingers slid a little closer to her clit. "No."

"Here." Her mouth slid down to his nipple, her tongue flicking over the hard nub, making him groan at the sensation.

"On my cock."

"I think that can be arranged."

With a shove, she pushed his jeans as far down his legs as they could go. Then she wrapped one hand around his shaft while the other cupped his balls.

And went to her knees.

His head fell back as his hands gripped her shoulders. He didn't want to force her to do something she didn't want to do but —

Her mouth enclosed the tip of his shaft in moist heat, forcing a groan from deep in his chest. Fire shot from his balls, up his spine and into his head, where synapses in his brain began to spark.

She took him deeper in increments, working her way down his shaft with a lazy pace. Sweat beaded on his forehead when she finally reached the root and started to work her way back up.

Her tongue flicked over the head like a lash before she sucked hard. His groan echoed through the room as her hands caressed his balls with a light touch, a direct counterpoint to the fierce suction.

She worked him with her mouth, his brain going completely blank, able only to process pleasure.

When she finally released him, he took a deep breath and opened his eyes to find her staring straight into his.

Those beautiful green eyes broke his control and he grabbed her around the waist, pulling her up against him and smashing his lips down on hers.

She sighed into his mouth, as if she'd been waiting forever for him to kiss her.

He tore the boxer shorts off her legs then had to release her mouth to get her shirt off. Before the shirt hit the floor, he grabbed her close again, her warm skin so damn soft against his.

Lowering her to the floor, he laid her out on the plush rug in front of the fire. As she smiled up at him, she moved her hands to her breasts, cupping them and playing with the hard nipples.

Lust rode him hard and he stood to shed his pants, grabbing the condom from the pocket before tossing them aside. Then he dropped to his knees between the legs she spread for him.

Now sheathed, his cock pulsed in his hand and he clamped two fingers around the base to keep from coming.

She watched him, her eyelids lowering even more as her smile spread. *Witch*. She liked the effect she had on him. Frankly, so did he.

Without warning, he slid his fingers through her slit, making her moan. When he had the confirmation of her desire all over his fingers, he started working two fingers into her. Slow and easy, he thrust and retreated, watching her every expression. Her eyes closed on his first inward glide, her lips parting in a sensual sigh. Her back arched just the slightest bit, allowing him to go even deeper. Her sex felt like slick, warm satin pulsing around his fingers in an ever-increasing beat.

He pumped in and out, taking it slow, focusing her passion on the spot they were joined – at her pussy. His cock began to throb in time to his thrusts, an ache building in his balls.

Carrie arched with each invasion, her breathing harsh in the quiet room. The sound rasped against his nerves, stroked along his shaft and damn near caused him to hyperventilate.

Her fingers plucked at her hardened nipples. He nearly swallowed his tongue as he watched her play with herself, watched her hands squeeze and release then slide down her stomach. Her head rolled from side to side, a moan passing through those luscious lips.

She came without warning, eyes closed, her hands reaching for his wrists, trying to hold him in place. But he wouldn't let her. He kept pumping until he couldn't take it any longer and fell on her with a raging hunger.

Propping himself on his arms so he could watch her face, he pushed his cock into her incredibly tight pussy, her contractions clamping around him. She was so damn tight, he didn't think he was going to get all the way in before he came, but he couldn't stop.

In a few centimeters, out a few centimeters. In a little farther until finally he swore his cock touched her womb.

She moaned again, her eyes opening to look into his.

He had no defenses against the raw pleasure he saw on her face and let his hips slam back and forth, fucking her with a brutal strength that had her wrapping her legs around his waist and her hands around his wrists, bracing herself.

The earthy sounds coming from her mouth let him know he wasn't hurting her. In fact, she encouraged him to go faster with the beat of her heels against his ass.

His hips nailed her to the floor with each thrust, shooting wicked bolts of lightning up his spinal cord and into his brain. His synapses fried and his brain shut down so that all he knew was sex.

Carrie's musky scent, the sensation of his cock sliding in and out, the warmth. He wished he wasn't wearing the condom so he could feel her wetness against his skin.

Time lost all meaning as they lost themselves in the act, in each other.

His orgasm hit him as suddenly as hers had, his seed spilling from his cock, seeming to go on forever.

And a warmth that had nothing to do with sex followed on its heels.

With the final spasms, he let his body cover hers completely. Her arms wrapped around him and she sighed into his chest.

And fell asleep.

Chapter Three

Tim woke, wrapped around Carrie.

He'd carried her to the loft after that last bout of sex, crawled in bed beside her and went lights out.

Boom, boom, boom.

He sucked in a breath.

What the hell was that?

The sound came again and he thought the wind must have kicked up and was banging a tree limb against the wall.

He hoped it didn't wake...

Wait. *Shit*. Someone was pounding on the front door.

Tim rose, grabbing a pair of gym shorts from the pile of clean clothes on the chair next to the bed, trying not to disturb Carrie who was still out like a light. He took the stairs two at a time and skidded to a stop before the door. Checking the sidelight next to the door, he nearly groaned at the sight of the people standing on the porch.

Shit. Shit, shit, shit.

He ripped open the door before they started pounding again.

"Damn, Andy, what the hell are you doing here?"

His cousin stood on the porch, staring at him from beneath the hood of his white coat. His pale gray eyes widened and Tim felt guilt twist in his gut.

"Nice to see you, too, Tim. Guess that 'Come by and visit anytime' was bullshit, huh?"

Yeah, he was an ass. He shook his head and waved the pair in. "Shit, I'm sorry. You caught me at a bad time. Hey, Fry, what's up?"

The other man shrugged his shoulders, the humps on his back moving up and down under his coat. "Not much. Cold as a bitch out there today. At least it stopped snowing."

Fry started to unzip his coat but stopped midway, his nose twitching. "Uh, you got company, Tim?"

Andy paused for a second as he picked up the scent then laughed, a short bark of sound. "Hell, now I know why you're not happy to see us." He pushed his hood down and his white-blond hair fell out and around his shoulders. "Dude, you get lucky today?"

Tim gave him the finger. "None of your damn business. But you can't be here when she wakes up."

Andy's pale eyebrows rose. "She's one of them? I thought you swore off that flavor after Jenny."

"She's nothing like Jenny." *The bitch*. "But if she gets a load of you two, she's gonna put two and two together and come up with front-page news."

Andy hung his coat next to Carrie's on a wall hook and ran his hands through his hair, bending down to take off his boots. "We just need to hang out for a few hours then we'll go."

Tim glanced at Fry, who shrugged and looked apologetic. As opposed to Andy, who just looked amused. And a little worried.

Tim got a bad feeling. "What's going on, Andy? And don't tell me you just decided to make a trip halfway around the world to say hi."

His cousin's long legs ate the space between the door and the fireplace in two strides and he stuck his hands close to the screen to warm them, even though Tim knew he couldn't be cold. Hell, the guy lived high in the Himalayan Mountains most of the year. This twenty-degree weather should be subtropical for him.

When Andy didn't answer, Tim turned to Fry, who was just hanging up his coat. Flapping his blue-tinted wings a couple of times to stretch them, he turned to Tim and shrugged. His ears, the pointed tips clearly visible through his tousled black hair, twitched.

"Sorry, Tim," Fry said. "We picked up a SPAz tail in Jersey. We think we lost him somewhere in Kutztown, but we're not sure."

Tim's temples began to thump. Great, just fucking great. The members of the Society of Paranormal Anomalies, which Tim's community had given the unflattering and completely appropriate nickname of SPAz many years ago, were first-rate pains-in-the-ass.

Tim scrubbed at his eyes, trying to ease the headache he felt building. "Christ, Andy. You don't know how much of a bad time this is."

His cousin shrugged. "I must have been in the wrong place at the wrong time. I didn't even know I was going to pick up Fry in England when I started out from home. I was gonna hang out in Ireland for a while but Fry contacted me and let me know he was in London. We decided to hop the Atlantic, hang out with you for a while then head up to the Mystyk Bar in Tioga. I only noticed the damn tail when we were halfway to Reading. They must've gotten a tip from someone at the airport."

"Hell, I'm not angry with you, Andy. But Carrie...well, she..."

"Doesn't know who you are?" Andy snorted. "No shit."

Tim sighed again. "No, I mean she's one of them."

Andy's perplexed expression would have been funny any other time. "You mean she's like Fry? Hell, buddy, if I'd known you had a thing for wings, I would have hooked you up with Gizelle years ago."

And that would have been much easier, wouldn't it? To fall for a woman from the Fringe.

"That's not what I mean."

Andy frowned. "Then what—" His eyes widened. "Oh, you have *got* to be kidding me? She's a SPAz?"

"No. Worse." He paused then bit the bullet. "She works for the *Weekly News Journal*."

Andy's mouth dropped open for at least fifteen seconds before he started to laugh. "Oh, you are so *fucking* screwed, cuz."

Yeah, he was. Totally.

Because, from behind him, he heard Carrie gasp.

* * * * *

There was no way she was awake.

Carrie figured she was having a dream because Tim was standing in his living room talking to a Yeti with long, blond hair and a winged Mothman.

Except the Yeti was no ape man and Mothman had the face of an English fairy, all sharp angles and points. And wings.

And the Yeti kind of looked like Tim. Yeah, there definitely seemed to be a family resemblance in the deep-set eyes, the high cheekbones and the square jaw.

Damn. She must have hit her head harder than she'd thought in the accident. And she definitely needed a vacation. Her job had finally started to get to her.

"Carrie?"

"Uh huh."

She heard Tim say something else but she couldn't take her eyes off those wings. They must be attached to the tight cotton sweater the guy wore. They couldn't be real.

But how the hell was he making them flap? And why the hell would he be wearing them?

Walking over to the guy, she twirled her finger in the air and damn, if the guy's mouth didn't quirk up at the corners before he did a slow turn, stopping to give his wings a kind of a preening flutter when he had his back to her.

Nope, those suckers weren't attached to the sweater. They actually poked through perfectly made slits in the fabric. They weren't all that big, each only about two feet across and maybe that long again. And they were blue. Actually, they were the exact shade of the sweater he was wearing.

He was a few inches shorter than she was and he looked tiny next to the other new guy.

The blond giant stared down at her.

"Hi." Blondie held out his hand. "I'm Andy. This is Fry."

She took his hand, wondering when she was going to see a bug-eyed alien or the Loch Ness monster walk by. "Hi back. Carrie Benton."

"Nice to meet you."

Mothman held out his hand and she took it. Felt real enough. Warm, soft skin. "Hello, Carrie." Faint trace of an accent, a bit like Scotty on *Star Trek*. Did that make him Irish? Scottish?

When he released her hand, she waggled her index finger in the general direction of his shoulders. "Those wings are great. How did you make those?"

The guy smiled, showing off shiny bright teeth and two pointed fangs. Not huge vampire fangs, just sharply pointed canines. Wow, he really went all out. Did he have those filed or did he glue them on?

He'd make a great cover for the *Journal*. She wondered if he'd let her photograph him.

Not that she believed he was a real fairy. There were no such things. This guy just had a little too much money and way too much time on his hands.

Still... She walked around to check out his wings again.

"Carrie?"

She didn't bother to glance up at Tim, just gave him a distracted "Hmm?"

"You okay, babe?"

She smiled. "Fine. These are just too cool. How do you make them move?"

When Fry didn't answer, she glanced at him. He stared at her with an enigmatic smile. Like he was trying to tell her something.

She blinked.

No. There was just no way. No way in hell.

"Carrie?"

She glanced over at Tim, who looked a little green around the gills, his dark eyes shadowed.

And she was struck again by how tall he was. How tall both he and Andy were.

Her gaze narrowed and blurred as she continued to stare.

God...damn. No, she really must have messed up her head. They looked...like...

Oh, hell to the no. That was just whack.

"Tim?"

He sighed. "Yeah, babe?"

She tried. She really did. But she just couldn't get her mouth to form the words.

Instead, she shook her head and swore she felt a few marbles roll.

Tim walked over to her, put one large hand on her shoulder and squeezed. Heavy, warm. That hand had done amazing things to her body.

His eyes were such a warm brown, soothing and sexy at the same time.

If she was a fanciful person, she'd say she was half in love with the guy. She wanted to smile every time she looked at him.

But she wasn't in love with him. She couldn't be. She didn't do love at first sight. She'd been a reporter too long to believe in something as magical as that.

And he wasn't...couldn't be...

"Tim, I think... I think my job's going to my head." She tried to laugh but it sounded strained. "Maybe I hit my head harder than I thought because I just had the weirdest idea."

"Uh, Tim," Andy said, "your girl's got that look on her face."

Yeah, unfortunately, Tim had to agree. That look said her gears were working. Carrie was a bright woman. Too bright to let herself believe Fry's wings were real. But smart enough to want to figure out how he was making them move. And he knew she wouldn't let it go. She'd have Fry stripped out of his sweater in five seconds flat to find out exactly what she wanted to know.

And Fry would give it to her, if only for the pleasure of watching her realize those wings were real.

Then she'd take one more look at him and Andy and put two and two together and get Sasquatch.

When she did, would she still want him?

Or would she run screaming, calling him a freak all the way back to her office? When she got there, would she talk herself down, laugh about it, laugh about him? Then write up some outlandish story in her newspaper about her illicit love affair with Bigfoot?

"Carrie, are you okay?"

Now she turned to him and her expression told the whole story.

"His wings are real." Her tone was factual. Not even a hint of a question.

Tim thought about lying. Didn't want to, not to her. He nodded. "They are."

"And you two," she wiggled a finger back and forth between him and Andy, "you're related."

"We're cousins." Which was true. Tim's mom's sister had married Andy's dad. The Yeti and Citeka tribes did a lot of intermarriages. They had common ancestors, going back several centuries.

Their family trees looked more like an English royalty chart.

Her eyes narrowed. "And where did you say you're from?"

"Western Nevada."

She turned to Andy. "And you?"

Andy paused for a few seconds. "Nepal."

She nodded and her gaze arrowed back to Tim's. "Wow." Her rueful smile grew slowly and, as it did, Tim's heart sank. "Guess I owe my editor twenty bucks. I bet him there was no such thing as Bigfoot."

Carrie couldn't believe how easily all the pieces fit together and how easy it was for her to make the leap from skeptic to believer.

Of course, Tim did nothing to abuse her of the idea. He just stood there staring at her.

Andy was Yeti. Fry was a fairy. And Tim was...Bigfoot.

She wondered if he called himself that or if there was a more PC term —

No. *Great freaking Christ, no.*

Jesus, she was just as nuts as the people who wore tinfoil hats so aliens couldn't read their minds.

Tim wasn't some huge, hairy ape loping around the forest, impregnating rednecks and beating on idiots eating jerky.

There were no such beings as Bigfoot or Yeti or fairies. Logically, there was an explanation for the out-there conclusion she'd leaped over a crevasse to get to.

She looked up—and up—at Tim. His grim expression made her stomach clench. And not in the good way it had earlier.

"Tell me I'm wrong."

She couldn't form the words, couldn't make herself say, "Bigfoot."

Tim didn't say anything. Neither did Andy or Fry. They all just stood there, staring at her.

"Holy shit." Her eyes widened. "Holy shit. No wonder you look like you're gonna throw up."

Because he was nuts, that's why.

Tim started to shake his head. "Carrie—"

"No, wait." She held up one hand like a traffic cop. "Don't say anything. Let me... Just give me...a minute."

"Carrie, we need to talk."

She looked deep into his eyes, trying to will him to tell her the truth. Or convincingly lie to her. "Are you really going to tell me you're Bigfoot?"

He didn't smile, his expression showing nothing. "No."

She sighed, relief pouring over her like a waterfall. "Oh, thank G—"

"But...you remember those red-haired giants you say lived in the Western desert?"

Her mouth dropped open but she couldn't make a sound.

"I'm one of them."

She didn't say anything for a full thirty seconds, her mind a complete void. "You're an ancient giant?"

His lips in no way indicated a smile. "The group of humans who became the American Indians crossed a land bridge from Asia a millennia ago. Our tribe arrived then, as well. The Citeka, what we call ourselves, are an offshoot of Andy's Himalayan tribe, the Yeti. Most of my tribe lives in Nevada in a remote village, where we moved after leaving the Pacific Northwest. We don't get many visitors and we tend not to move around too much because, well..." He made a sweeping motion with his hands. "We're kind of noticeable."

Tim paused, as if trying to gauge her reaction but she just knew there was more so she raised her eyebrows and waited.

With a sigh, he finally continued. "We're pretty self-sufficient and most of us are gifted with an artistic gene. We make a lot of money creating artwork for galleries and high-end boutiques and designer showcases. But...we also make a fortune propagating the Bigfoot legend."

He looked completely serious even though she knew he had to be kidding.

"Bigfoot." Her tongue could barely make the word. "As in big, hairy ape-like creature with huge feet." Her gaze automatically dropped to Tim's large feet for a brief second and she just shook her head. "I'm sorry but even if I saw you walking through the forest at a distance, I'd still know you were a man and not...not..."

"A monster? A freak of nature?" Tim sighed. "We're not. But...we do have special, uh—"

"Hey, Tim, maybe we just oughta show her."

The sly amusement in Andy's voice made her eye him with apprehension. And more than a little challenge.

"And what exactly would you show me?"

Tim drew in a deep breath then held it for a few brief seconds as he felt the air in the room crackle with the electric sensation of impending magic.

And it was magic, a magic handed down through the ages. A magic lost to everyone but the few scattered tribes of the Fringe.

Normals knew of them only as myth. The faerie folk. The Vampyr. The witches.

The shapeshifters.

In the blink of an eye, Andy was gone and in his place stood a huge, shaggy, grayish-white bear. He looked nothing like the grotesque pictures people created of the infamous Yeti. He looked like a bear, except with a more human-looking face.

Nearly eight feet of soft fur, powerful muscle and fearsome teeth. Which he bared at Carrie in a smile right before he made a courtly bow.

He looked so much like a trained circus animal, Tim nearly laughed. But he couldn't quite get his vocal cords to cooperate.

Because Carrie made a sound halfway between a squeak and a yelp before she fell silent with her mouth hanging open. She stared at Andy, wide-eyed and shocked.

But not afraid.

She'd already started to reach for him but her hand paused in the space between them. As if she needed permission to touch him.

Andy reached out his paw to meet her halfway and she drew in a deep breath when she touched his fur.

"Holy shit."

Tim braced himself for the inevitable screaming and running in fear most people did when faced with something magical and completely out of their comfort zone.

Of course, Carrie wasn't most people.

She turned to him, her cheeks flushed and eyes bright. "Can you do that too?"

His eyes narrowed, watching her for any sign of fainting. "Yes."

"Will you show me?"

He stared at her for a brief second, trying to debate all the angles.

She'd already seen Andy change and she seemed to be over her initial shock. And unlike in the movies, there wasn't any gross bone cracking or shedding of skin. It was pure magic.

But would she still want him after —

Oh hell, what did it matter at this point?

With a thought, he released the magic held in his very cells and let it transform his body into that of the reddish brown bear he'd lived with since he'd been a child. He could honestly say he loved his form, loved the strength and his glossy fur.

Loved the magic he'd been born with.

As he watched, Carrie sucked in a deep breath, her eyes wide.

Then she reached for him. Her hand paused for a brief second before she settled it over his forearm and stroked down to his hand.

Her touch felt wonderful against his fur but he knew how much better it felt against his skin and he shifted back into his human body, exactly as he'd been before he'd shifted.

She didn't pull away. She let her hand settle once again on the skin of his arm.

"That... That was..." She shook her head, blinking up at him.

"Andy's tribe has been perpetuating the Yeti myth for a thousand years." He moved his arm but only enough that he could lace their fingers together and hold her in place. "My tribe's only been doing it for a couple centuries. But it makes us a decent amount of money. The stories grew out of Western settlers catching sight of us in the forests. It started as a way to keep outsiders away from our lands but when the Patterson film was released, we saw how much money there was to be made from the legend so we figured why not? Besides, it's harmless."

"And it's fucking hilarious." Andy had reverted back to his natural state. "Normals are just too much fun to play with. Y'all are pretty gullible."

Carrie frowned as her hands went to her hips as she stared up at Andy. "Gullible?"

"Don't get your panties in a twist, sweetheart." Andy patted her on the shoulder. "Most Normals can't see beyond the nose on their faces. If they can't touch it or explain it using science, well then, they think it can't exist, which is a damn shame, if you ask me. They miss out on so many wonders of the world."

Her head tilted to the side, her eyes narrowing. "So you taunt them?"

"We have our fun, yeah." Andy mimicked her pose. "You Normals make it so damn easy. All we have to do is walk upright through a few backyards and your people fall all over each other to tell the tabloids. Christ, the National Geographic Channel

spends a mint on documentaries about Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster every year. Of course, we usually have a hand in making those shows. Bet you didn't know that, did you?"

Carrie blinked and her mouth opened then shut with a snap.

Andy just shook his head. "And you're all too willing to feed the frenzy, aren't you? You must have felt so superior to all those idiots who believe in people like us."

Carrie turned to face Tim again, her beautiful eyes sparkling. He swore he could see the gears turning in her brain. This was so not good. "So Fry's wings are real and you just turned into a bear?"

Tim's sigh held a note of resignation. "Yeah."

She swallowed and he could see the excitement she was trying to contain written all over her face. "Holy shit."

Tim just shook his head. "We call ourselves the Fringe. Fry's people are members. So are mine and Andy's."

"And Fry's a fairy."

"We call ourselves Fae," Fry chimed in, fluttering his wings for full effect. "You can call me whatever you like, sweetheart."

Whoa. Just...whoa.

Carrie's head buzzed with thoughts, images. Cutlines. Story ideas. Headlines.

"Does this mean aliens are among us? Bat Boy? Chupacabra?"

Tim's expression never changed. "I've never met Bat Boy."

Holy shit.

Holy freaking shit!

She'd crashed into the biggest story of her life. A story bigger than the *Weekly News Journal*. Bigger than the *Harrisburg Daily*. This was *New York Times* big. *Washington Post* big.

Pulitzer *freaking* Prize.

Her father would bow at her feet in awe.

And if she went public with it, she'd expose Tim, his family and his friends to the unwanted scrutiny of the entire world. And make his life a living hell.

She blinked up at him. "Tim, I—"

"Oh, *fuck*."

Carrie turned in time to see Andy make a beeline for the door. Throwing it open, he ran out into the snow. A flash of dark green streaked by the front window and she hurried to the door to see what was going on.

By the time she got there, Andy held someone three feet off the ground by the back of a forest camouflage coat. Squealing like a stuck pig, the man wore huge, round glasses that would have made him look like an insect if it weren't for his all-too-human expression of abject fear.

"Well, well, well." Andy turned the guy backward and forward as if he were inspecting a side of beef. "Looks like I caught a SPAz. My lucky day. I was just starting to get hungry."

Andy bared his teeth at the guy, setting off another round of squeals and Carrie rolled her eyes at Andy's over-the-top antics. How could anyone think the guy was serious?

Of course, if that weasely-looking guy had seen everything...

The SPAz shook and shivered and generally looked like he was about to be eaten. Yeah, he'd seen what she'd seen.

"So you wanna tell me who you are and what you're doing creeping around out here?" Andy shook his head and gave the guy a shake as well. "And don't be stupid and lie. Of course, you were stupid enough to wear forest cammie in the snow. Jesus, did you think you wouldn't stick out?"

"You c-c-can't h-h-hurt me." The man swung his gaze around at all of them, his pupils so dilated, she would have felt sorry for the guy — *if* he hadn't had that camera in

his hands. "My f-f-friends know where I am. If I don't return, they know where to l-l-look for me."

"Yeah, but they won't find you." Andy bared his teeth again, straight and pearly white, though he did have rather elongated incisors. "At least, not all of you."

The guy paled even more, clutching his camera to his chest, his knuckles white with strain.

Carrie walked over to him, wrestled the camera away and started to flip through the digital pictures, her heart sinking as she realized he had pictures of Tim. Before and after his amazing change.

Hell. Even though the quality wasn't great, Tim's face was clearly recognizable right up until the moment he became a bear. And she could still see a little bit of Tim in the bear's eyes.

Her heart pounded against her ribs like a trapped bird.

She dropped the camera and brought her boot heel down on it, smashing it with a satisfying crunch as the man gave a girly squeal of protest.

Her dream of breaking this story was just that.

A dream.

* * * * *

Fry and Andy bundled the SPaZ into Andy's rental SUV and drove off through the snow.

Tim knew Andy hadn't been serious about harming the guy. Once Andy used his own brand of inherent magic and wiped the guy's memories, he'd be harmless.

Now Tim watched Carrie as she just stared at him.

"I should be able to get you home now, if you want to go." The snow had stopped as abruptly as it had started and he'd be able to get her home safely in his Range Rover.

Not that he wanted her to go. He wanted her to stay.

He wanted her to *want* to stay.

“Can we just...talk a few minutes?” She looked at the sofa. “Just sit?”

Because he was an idiot, he waved her to the couch then sat on the chair opposite. He wanted to be on the cushion next to her but if he sat that close, he’d want to do more than just sit there.

Hell, he wanted more than one night with her.

And he knew that was out of the question.

He should take her memories of her time with him. Should but...

He was an idiot. He wanted her to remember him, to think about him.

Damn it to hell.

He’d have to think about moving. At least temporarily. His parents would be happy to see him. He could stay with them in Nevada for a while.

But... Damn it, he didn’t want to leave. He liked it here. He’d never been much of an artist, unlike most of his family, and he made a decent living with his outdoor business during the other three seasons to live comfortably in winter. He liked the area and he liked the fact his family wasn’t breathing down his neck at all times.

He wanted Carrie to say, “Don’t worry, Tim. I’ll keep your secret. I’ll never tell a soul.”

He wasn’t even sure why he’d told her the truth. They could have lied, could have told her Fry’s wings were fake and never let her see his and Andy’s transformations.

But he hadn’t wanted to lie to her.

She started to blink, as if holding back tears but she didn’t cry. Instead, her chin went up and her mouth flattened into a straight line.

“Aren’t you going to ask me not to do it?”

He continued to stare at her.

Her eyes narrowed as her hands clenched into fists on her lap. “So, you’ve already tried and convicted me? You’re convinced I’m going to rat you out, aren’t you?”

No, he wasn't. But... She was what she was. She was a journalist. Yes, she worked for a newspaper most people thought of as entertainment but even if she wrote half of what she'd seen today, there were enough people like the SPAz group out there to make his and his family's and friends' lives more precarious.

Tim shook his head. "Not at all. I like you, Carrie." Probably more than he should, considering. "And I don't want to guilt you into this decision. I think it'd probably be better if we had a little space to work this out. You're a journalist. I just dropped the story of your life into your lap. You need to make your own decision. I don't want to influence you."

But he hoped like hell that she wasn't going to break his heart.

Carrie couldn't decide whether she was pissed off, shocked or hurt.

Probably a combination of all three.

As she stood there and continued to glare up at the seemingly most perfect man in the world, she thought, *Of course he's a magical Bigfoot.*

Maybe she should consider herself lucky that she hadn't crashed into the forest of the Big Bad Wolf.

She'd never gotten the whole werewolf thing. She'd never read the obscenely popular series of books but if she'd have to choose between Team Edward and Team Jacob, she'd probably have to go with bloodsucker over canine. Dogs shed and she hated to sweep. Vampires didn't leave sparkles on your couch.

At least, she didn't think they did.

"So you're just going to drive me home and hope I don't tell the world, oh, by the way, Bigfoot and Yeti are real and I can introduce you to them?"

She wanted a response from Tim, any indication of his feelings but he continued to stand there looking at her.

And she couldn't read him. She had no idea what he was thinking.

Maybe he just wanted to be rid of her. Maybe she'd been completely wrong about him and now that he'd had sex with her, he didn't want her around anymore and this was a convenient way of making her be the bad guy and storm out in a rage.

"No, I'm going to drive you home and let you think about what you've seen."

"So I can do what with it?"

There, finally a crack in his outward composure. She swore she saw frustration flash through his eyes.

"I don't know, Carrie. Why don't you tell me what you think you can do with the information? Do you honestly think if you write our little...encounter up as a story for your rag that anyone will believe you?"

Her gaze narrowed as she bristled outwardly, although she sometimes called the *Weekly News Journal* the same thing. "Did you just call my newspaper a rag?"

His short, indrawn breath made her cover a quick satisfied smile. He thought he'd hurt her feelings. And if he just wanted to get rid of her, he wouldn't care.

"No... Well, yeah, I did but I didn't..." He scrubbed a hand through his hair in frustration, making the muscles of his arms bunch and flex as her mouth watered. "Damn it, Carrie. Just get your stuff. I'm taking you home."

She stuck her nose in the air. "And what if I don't want to go yet?"

"Why wouldn't you? Don't you have some story about some 'hairy ape'," he threw her own words back at her, "to write about?"

"Maybe I'd rather soothe your ruffled fur first?"

The look on his face was priceless, she decided. And he probably hadn't even caught her little pun about fur, which she thought was pretty damn inspired, if she did say so herself.

"What... Why would you want to do that?"

He looked genuinely confused and she wanted to cup that gorgeous chin in her hands and plant her lips over his.

She'd admit to being somewhat—okay maybe more than somewhat—shocked at the fact that this man was a shapeshifter. That he could become something else. It should have made any normal person scream like a little girl and run for the hills.

So maybe she wasn't all that normal.

Maybe she was just a little bit off.

But Tim was something special. Not just because of *what* he could do but *who* he was.

A great guy.

One she wanted more with each passing second.

So she wrapped a hand around his neck and pulled his head down until she could reach his lips to kiss him.

At first, he froze, gave her no response at all. His lips remained closed against hers and he didn't reach for her like he had before. He didn't wrap his arms around her and draw her closer against that gorgeous, hard body.

But she wasn't giving up. She let her tongue slide against the seam of his lips, licking, begging for entrance.

He shuddered at the touch and she felt his hands brush against her sides before grabbing her by the shoulders...

And holding her away from him.

"So now I'm a novelty fuck, right, Carrie?"

Her mouth dropped open in shock. "A novelty fuck? What the freaking hell is a novelty fuck?"

"I'm different. Some women get off on that."

Her lips parted to tell him he was freaking clueless about women if he thought she wanted him just because of what he could do. If anything, she should be hauling ass out of here.

Then she took a good look at him, at the expression in his eyes.

"Wait. You knew someone like that, didn't you?"

His head tilted back and his mouth flattened even more. He didn't need to answer. She could read it in his eyes.

"What a *bitch*."

He watched her for a second before nodding. "Yeah, she was."

"How did she find out about you?"

"I stupidly told her."

"You're not stupid."

Her immediate defense of him made the hard line of his mouth soften just a little bit. "No, maybe naïve would be a better word to describe my relationship with Jenny. I met her at a Fringe bar. She knew the scene, knew a few mutual acquaintances. What I didn't know was that she needed a shapeshifter for her belt."

"You mean... Geez, what a slut!" Then she realized what he wasn't saying. "Wait... You think I want you now because I know *what* you are? That that's the only reason I want you?"

He dropped his gaze for a brief second and when his returned to hers, she swore she felt the burn of it inside. "I don't honestly know what you want, Carrie. And I don't think you do either."

Chapter Four

“What the hell are you still doing here, Care? Go the fuck home already.”

Bill Dailey dropped into the chair at the opposite cubicle in the offices of the *Weekly News Journal*, gnawing, as always on a toothpick. At forty-five, his dark good looks had weathered, making the man even more handsome than he’d been in his younger days. Not that Carrie had ever considered dating him.

The guy was married to the paper. And to his toothpicks. Bill had quit smoking nearly five years ago but he couldn’t seem to quit chewing the picks down to splinters.

One of these days, he was going to choke on the damn things.

Carrie sighed as she minimized the story on her desktop. Glancing at the clock on the far wall of the newsroom, she realized it was close to eight p.m. and no one else remained on the floor.

“I’m working,” she said. “What’s your excuse?”

“When I signed my soul to this paper, they chained me to my desk. I didn’t see that clause in your employment contract.”

Damn, the man had a devastating smile. Too bad he barely ever used it when he held court at his u-shaped desk at the rear of the room. One side held a thirty-inch screen where he oversaw layout. Paper covered the opposite side—page proofs, article drafts, photo proofs. The last side, the one facing the newsroom, would have put a candy store to shame.

The joke was that the candy drew in unsuspecting prey then Bill ensnared them in his web and devoured them.

It was true the *Journal* had a high turnover rate among staff, though honestly, that wasn't all due to Bill's usually gruff nature. Some writers just didn't have the talent for making the impossible seem probable. Or at least amusing.

Bill was a damn good editor. He had awards filling his desk drawers from stints at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Star Tribune* and *St. Petersburg Times*. As a former investigative reporter, he'd broken major political scandals and exposed police corruption while being able to bring a reader to tears with a column about a little girl selling cookies to raise money for her wheelchair-bound big brother.

Sometimes, though, even he couldn't save a story from the writer's inability to grasp the finer points of aliens in the White House. Little green aliens.

When she didn't respond to his last joke—which she really hoped was a joke—his gaze narrowed. “You sure nothing happened while you were at that guy's house over the weekend? You've been awfully quiet the past two days.”

Because she'd been waging a battle she couldn't win, no matter how she looked at it. If she wrote the story that'd fallen in her lap and published it—whether in the *Journal* or in the *New York* freaking *Times*—she knew she'd never have a chance in hell with Tim again.

But every journalistic instinct in her clawed at the chance to write an article that could change the world.

She shook her head. “No, nothing happened. The guy was a complete gentleman. I slept on his couch Friday night and was home in my own bed Saturday. End of story.”

Only, she didn't want it to be.

Tim had driven her home late Saturday afternoon, right after their little talk. He'd retrieved her cameras from her car, had even stopped for her to get a few shots of the snow-covered forest.

Neither of them had said much on the car ride, the awkward silence filled with unspoken desire and unanswered questions.

And when he'd pulled up in front of her modest townhome in Shillington, she hadn't known what to say so she'd kissed him and run. Like the coward she was.

She'd spent Sunday morning writing an article to go along with her gorgeous photos. An article that had just made it into this week's edition, published today.

She's spent the rest of Sunday researching, amazed at how much actual fact about the Fringe was out there for anyone to find. None of it, of course, from respected sources.

Geez, the story she could write...

"Bill, have you ever *not* written a story because of how it would affect the people involved?"

Bill's blue eyes narrowed on her as he leaned back in his chair. "I take it you're not talking about a story for the *Journal*. 'Cause you know what we write about isn't real, right? It's for entertainment purposes only."

The *Journal* had that disclaimer buried in the masthead, right under who to contact about sales.

And on any given day, Carrie believed that wholeheartedly.

But today...

"Have you?" she pushed.

Something passed through Bill's eyes, something sad. "No, I haven't. But that was a long time ago and I've learned my lesson. Some stories aren't meant to be printed. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't write them."

* * * * *

"Damn, man, if you're going to mope, move the hell to another table. You're bringing us all down and scaring away the ladies."

Andy just laughed when Tim gave him the finger. He, Andy and Fry had been holding up the bar at the Mystyk club, just outside of Wellsboro in Tioga County, since

Tim had arrived Wednesday afternoon. He'd been sick of prowling his own home and had needed a change of scenery.

He'd thought spending time with other Fringe dwellers, people he knew and who knew him, would make him feel better.

So far, only the alcohol had made him feel better.

He was feeling no pain at the moment. Tequila was his new best friend.

"I'm not moping, asshole." Well, maybe he was a little but no way would he cop to it. Christ, he wanted to see Carrie again, which didn't make a damn bit of sense. "Hell, I didn't know her long enough to be moping. Not even twenty-four hours."

"And yet here you are," Andy said. "Moping like a five-year-old who had his favorite toy taken away. Why don't you just put yourself out of your misery and call her, you sorry SOB. You know you want to. And for what it's worth, I don't think she's anything like Jenny."

Andy's quietly sincere statement made Tim stare at his cousin. "Did you *not* read that article in the *Journal*?" He picked up the offending tabloid and shook it in the vicinity of Andy's face. Or at least, what he thought was the vicinity of Andy's face since he was seeing two of them at the moment. "She practically foamed at the mouth about how Bigfoot saved her from a car crash and nursed her back to health."

"Dude, the woman has a job, which she does amazingly well, if you didn't happen to notice. I laughed out loud reading it. That's some skill there. But only a complete idiot would believe that story was true."

"The article was rather humorous," Fry added. "I must admit I found the entire edition amusing."

Tim just shook his head. "Have you both gone off the deep end? She used me. Just like Jenny."

Andy snorted. "Carrie is nothing like that crazy bitch. She made you out to be her knight in furry armor, for chrissake. She's practically begging you to call her."

He really wished that were true. He wanted to call her. He'd picked up the phone so many times Tuesday, he'd actually forgotten he had it in his hand and fell asleep with it that night. But he'd never had the balls to complete the call.

Not even when he'd recalled the look on her face just before he'd left her at her house. She'd been hurt. Not pissed off that he wouldn't sleep with her again. Just...hurt. Like he'd rejected her.

He'd wanted to grab her close and kiss her until neither of them could breathe. Then he wanted to spread her out on a bed and screw her brains out.

They'd connected in the short period of time they'd spent together, shared something special.

"Ah hell."

"Yeah, that about sums it up, cuz." Andy motioned for another beer from the bartender. The German troll, four-feet-nothing and not as ugly as the name would suggest, nodded and drew another draft. "So what are you going to do about it?"

"I have to go to her." He jumped off the stool, barely noticing the wobble in his knees. "I have to tell her—"

Tim's knees gave out on him. Just buckled and dropped him to the floor like a sack of potatoes.

He barely heard the laughter from the other bar patrons and the last thing he remembered seeing was the *Weekly News Journal* fluttering down to cover his face before he passed out.

* * * * *

Friday morning, Carrie stared at her computer screen at the best non-fiction article she might ever write in her life.

All week, she'd cranked out stories for the *Journal* during the day and spent her nights researching. And writing.

After she had all her facts in order, she'd agonized over every word of the article.

Her father would have been proud. Hell, he might've even considered running the piece.

If he ever saw it.

Which he wouldn't.

If the piece was published, Tim would have to leave the area. Hell, he might have to leave the country.

Characters with *way* fewer scruples than she had would crawl all over his property trying to take his picture, get hair samples, maybe even capture him and take him in for tests. Yes, the members of the Society of Paranormal Abnormalities were that nuts.

SPAz was a group of lunatics who believed Jason and Grant from Syfy Channel's *Ghost Hunters* were messiahs. They constantly called the newsroom to provide "tips" or berate the staff for screwing up a story – most of which were half-baked to begin with while the other half were thought up by the staff in alcohol-soaked roundtable discussions, sometimes at the bar down the street.

Who would've believed those idiots actually knew what they were talking about?

But the main reason she didn't want to publish the story remained the same – Tim would leave.

She couldn't believe how badly she'd missed him these past five days. She couldn't imagine how awful she'd feel if she knew she'd never see him again.

Thursday, her car had shown up in the parking lot of her apartment building, towed there by a man who insisted he'd already been paid and told her to have a nice day. She could have sworn she saw two tiny horns peeking out from under his ball cap.

Her car would need a few weeks in the body shop, but she had no doubt it'd be up and running soon enough.

In the meantime, she had a rental. A kick-ass, four-wheel-drive Ford truck that could plow through snow like it was fluffy feathers.

She glanced at the window, noting the time as she did. It was close to nine at night and it was snowing.

She looked down at her feet. Black biker boots, check.

She smiled. Good thing she was always prepared.

* * * * *

Tim hadn't been able to sit still all day.

He tried to keep himself busy, fixing equipment, making lists of supplies he needed to stock for next season, but it'd mostly been an exercise in futility. The TV couldn't hold his interest. Neither could the new J.A. Jance book he'd tried to start several times.

Mostly he paced around the cabin, occasionally stopping by the front window to watch the snow fall. It'd picked up in intensity throughout the day.

He wasn't exactly sure how he'd gotten home from Tioga. He assumed Andy had driven him but after he'd passed out... Well, he didn't remember anything until he'd woken this morning.

He thought about donning his fur and heading out for a ramble through the quiet woods.

But not today.

Damn her.

He wanted Carrie. Wanted her to come back. Wanted her back in his bed so much he got a hard-on just thinking about her. He'd had a hard-on pretty much all freaking week.

And that pissed him off.

Hell, he missed her smart mouth. She'd captivated him in just a few short hours and he wanted more time with her.

Was she working on another article? One that would make her daddy proud?

He wanted to believe she wouldn't do it.

But he hadn't heard from her. And she had to be the one who made the first move. If she'd decided the situation was just too weird for her, that she didn't want to date a guy who could change into a bear... Well, he wasn't going to chase her.

He'd never been ashamed of his heritage. Hell, every family had a few skeletons in the closet, a few eccentrics.

His closet just happened to have eight-foot skeletons and the holy grail for cryptozoologists.

Damn it.

Opening the front door, Tim let the freezing air cool his frustration. But it did nothing to ease the ache in his chest.

Maybe he'd just give her a call...

The sound of a motor broke through the silence of the snow-covered forest.

His heart began to pound. He wasn't expecting anyone. Andy and Fry had left for points west, promising to call in a few days.

He looked down the lane and saw the steady glow of headlights.

Damn, if he didn't breathe, he was going to pass out. It had to be her.

Idiot. You don't have any idea what she wants.

But he could hope.

It seemed to take forever but finally a pickup truck pulled up to his front door and the woman he couldn't stop thinking about stepped out.

She wore her bright pink coat, her red hair loose around her shoulders, a furious look on her face.

Slamming the door behind her, she stalked over to him, a bunch of white paper in her hand, which she waved in his face.

"You never called."

His eyes opened wide. That wasn't what he'd been expecting to hear and it made what he'd been going to say stick in his throat.

“What the hell are you talking about?” he finally asked. “I didn’t know — Wait. Why the hell didn’t *you* call?”

“Because I was waiting for you, you big *oaf*.”

His mouth dropped open in shock. “What the — ”

He didn’t get a chance to finish the thought because she threw herself at him, wrapped her arms around his neck and planted her lips on his in a kiss that stole his breath.

He stumbled back a few steps, back into the house, his arms wrapping around her, as much to stop her forward motion as to trap her against him. He wasn’t about to let her go for a damn long time, no matter what those papers held.

His lips opened for her tongue to gain access and he groaned as she slipped into his mouth. Her mouth moved over his, almost painful in its intensity. She tasted hot and furious and hungry. For him.

Pushing the door closed with his foot, he set her away from him but only so he could tear at her clothes. He took the papers out of her hand and tossed them across the room. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw them flutter about like Bigfoot-sized snowflakes.

Then he dismissed them and reached for her coat. It’d barely hit the floor when he started working on her pants. But before he could strip the jeans off her, she stepped out of his reach.

Breathing hard, drawing his gaze to the rise and fall of her gorgeous breasts under her long-sleeved t-shirt, she held up one hand in classic stop position.

“I’m still mad at you,” she said. But before he could open his mouth to protest, she continued. “I might ruin your clothes. Strip.”

It took a few seconds for that to sink in and when it did, he started to laugh.

One of her pale brows lifted but he saw humor flare in those pretty green eyes.

“God, Carrie. I missed you so freaking much.”

She smiled. "Me, too. So shut up and get naked."

She started to pull at her clothes and he watched as she bared each inch of sweet flesh while he removed his own clothes. He ripped off his shirt as fast as he could so he only missed a few seconds of her show.

She seemed to be in as much of a hurry as he was because her clothes lay in a pile on the floor before his did. And she had more to take off.

Fully clothed, the woman took his breath away. Naked, she was a goddess to be worshipped. So he dropped to his knees.

Grabbing her around the waist, he lifted her off her feet and laid her out in front of him on the rug. With his hands on her thighs, he spread her wide and put his mouth on her.

He ate at her like he was starving. And he was. A week without her had been hell. He never wanted to be without her again.

Hoped like hell she wasn't here for a quick fuck and then would leave again.

With that thought, he pushed everything else from his head and focused only on making her come.

He sucked her slick lower lips into his mouth for a second before moving his mouth to focus on her clit. He nibbled the tiny bundle of nerves, her throaty moans pumping more hot blood into his cock. Her thighs tried to close around his head but he kept her spread open with his hands on her thighs.

He spent long minutes feasting on her, his hands massaging her thighs as her hands tangled in his hair and tugged, not hard enough to be painful. At least not painful enough to make him stop.

"Tim." Her lust-heavy voice made his cock throb and his balls draw up hard as rocks.

Alternating nibbles on her clit with thrusts of his tongue into her sheath, he worked her, wanting to feel her orgasm. Her hands began to tug on his hair, harder. The pain made him burn hotter, his hands tightening on her thighs.

She moaned his name this time...right before she convulsed as she came.

Her body writhed, her hands releasing his hair to reach for his shoulders.

He drew it out as long as he could but his desire began to claw at him with a life of its own.

With a growl, he crawled up her body, putting his mouth on hers and plunging into her body with one deep thrust.

Sweet Jesus. Heaven.

He tried to go slow but his body wasn't having any of it. His hips hammered into her, his mouth devoured her lips.

She didn't seem to mind. In fact, she urged him on. Her hands reached behind him to grab his ass, kneading the muscles as her legs rose to wrap around his waist.

He was deep but not as deep as he wanted to be.

And he couldn't see her.

He pulled out of her slick sheath, battling her clinging arms and legs. With a quick twist, he reversed their positions, lifting her above him as she reached for his cock to pull it up and impale herself on it.

She started to ride him immediately, planting her hands on his stomach and proceeding to drive him toward his own climax.

The blissful look on her face made every nerve in his body leap with joy. He reached for her hips, just to have that additional connection to her body. Her skin was slick with sweat, sleek and warm.

Their gazes connected and held. She smiled, so sweet he thought his skin might melt.

And he exploded.

* * * * *

"Here, I want you to read this."

Several long minutes after they'd finally caught their breath, Carrie rose, gathered the papers he'd tossed and handed them to him as she sat on the floor in front of the fire.

He took them, though he didn't start to read right away. Just continued to stare at her. Waiting. She knew what he wanted to hear.

"I think it's the best thing I've ever written."

His heart nearly stopped until she continued.

"Kinda sucks it'll never see print," she continued.

His cock throbbed. "Does that mean you're gonna stick around for a while?"

She gave him a little eye roll as her hands moved to her hips. "Does that mean you want me to stick around?"

"Hell, Carrie. I didn't want you to go in the first place."

She smiled as she dropped to her knees in front of him. His cock rose even farther as her breasts jiggled with the motion. "Even though I work for the *Journal*?"

He put his arms around her waist, lifting her off the floor and settling her over his naked lap. "You don't believe any of that stuff's real, anyway. The Loch Ness Monster is a hoax. And there is no Bigfoot."

Her eyebrows lifted in amusement. "And that's just too damn bad, because you know what they say about a guy and the size of his feet..."

About the Author

Stephanie Julian is an avid reader who used to have a book-a-day habit. Then she realized she not only wanted to read books but write them too. Romance has always been her first love, the sexier the better. Hot men, strong women and a heaping helping of magic dominate (and she does mean *dominate*) her blazing hot stories.

When she's not writing, she's, well...she's certainly not cleaning. And she only cooks when her guys complain that they're hungry (ain't cereal grand!). Otherwise, she's got her fingers on a keyboard, her butt in a chair and her head in the stars.

Stephanie welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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