



The Legends of Loving, Texas Series

Red Rose™ Publishing

A large, close-up photograph of a couple embracing. The woman's face is partially visible on the left, and the man's face is on the right. Their bodies are pressed together, with hands visible on each other's skin. The lighting is soft and intimate.

Pure Heaven

JENETTE DUPRIS

*The Legends of Loving, Texas
Series*

Pure Heaven

By

Jenette DuPris



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Pure Heaven by Jenette DuPris

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Chapter One

Loving, Texas, 1870

Honey Carrington gathered her feather duster and broom and headed upstairs lickety-split. Before dinner she needed to give a once over to those rooms recently used by the dust-laden cowboys staying at Aunt Dovie's Moonlight Hotel. It was mostly vacant except for the few single widows in residence, the occasional businessmen staying overnight, and cowboys on Saturday nights. The cowboys worked all week on nearby cattle ranches and always carried in dirt from the local stable on their boots. It created a constant need for cleaning at the hotel, the largest of such establishments in Loving, Texas.

Honey hurried along the upstairs hallway only to slow her steps when she heard more than one of the widows and at least two men laughing in a nearby room.

In the brief time she'd worked here, Honey had acquired a knowledge of carnal pleasures she'd never thought possible. Even though cowboys had commented about her 'pretty yellow hair' and invited her to spend time with them, she refused and stuck to her job. She took pride in her housekeeping.

Halfway down the hall, several men sauntered out of the room where the noise had come from. One of them started toward her. She didn't want anything to do with him or his friends. Once before, she'd seen the big one come from a room where she'd heard a woman scream and then sob. Aunt Dovie hadn't been anywhere around that day...just like today.

She turned back toward the stairs as a tall, dark-haired man gained the landing. He nodded to her. "I'll want a bathing tub and extra towels."

The velvet caress of his voice lured Honey closer. He watched her. His intense, wolf-like blue gaze made her feel as if someone held her too tightly around the waist.

She worried he might think her a soiled dove – as the other men seemed to. The residents of the hotel, some women widowed during the War of Northern Aggression, had been forced to take men into their beds in order to support themselves. Honey prayed she'd never have to do that, but would meet and marry a successful rancher. Intent on escaping his disturbing regard, she hurried toward the stairs, assuming her role despite her pounding heart. "I'll look after it right now."

This man was danger, and sinfully handsome.

As she heard the men's boot-steps coming toward her, she'd almost reached the end of the long hallway and the stairs leading down when one man caught up to her. She wanted to run, but he grabbed her arm. Turning halfway to face him,

her heart racing, she recognized one of the cowboys she'd seen the other day leaving a room where one of the resident widows lived. She pulled back, trying to free herself.

The slender stranger tipped his worn hat to her. He had curly blond hair and looked her age. "Howdy, ma'am. How 'bout when you come back, you spend the rest of the afternoon with me?"

"Leave her alone, Sunny." The deep growl of authority covered her like a heavy cape. She turned her head to find the tall man staring at her, a dangerous smile that didn't reach his eyes, curved his full sensual lips. "She's mine."

Anger filled her and she yanked her arm from the younger man's grip. When she dropped her gaze to hide her emotion, her glance fell on the area just above the crotch of the arrogant one who claimed her. She couldn't help but notice that the fabric of his black trousers stretched taut with his arousal. Her breath caught.

Threatened by him—and her own body's wanton reaction to his blatant lust—she straightened her spine with as much bravado as she could muster and gave him a slow second look. His trousers molded to his hips, a holster and belt emphasizing their narrowness, light and shadow playing over his erection. His black vest buttoned up over a flat stomach. The white cotton shirt beneath framed his broad shoulders and massive chest and opened to reveal dark curls at the base of his strong neck.

From his clothing, she assumed him a man of some importance. He moved to lean against a bedroom doorjamb and bent one knee in a relaxed, arrogant pose.

His black, wavy hair came to just below his ears. The sharp angles and planes of his stunning, darkly tanned visage revealed a strong square jaw, straight nose, and high cheekbones. He removed his charcoal-colored Stetson with one large hand and swiped at the unruly lock of hair which fell over his high forehead.

The scent of leather, starch, shaving soap and clean man drifted over her. She wondered what it would feel like to be held by those well-formed hands. His long fingers slid over the brim of his hat, which he lowered and held in front of that impressive erection. She swallowed in restless turmoil, adjusting her grip on the feather duster and broom handle as he stared at her with masterful intent.

“Excuse me, ma’am,” Sunny said. “I didn’t mean any insult. You’re about the loveliest thing I ever hoped to see. Like a golden angel.”

Honey met his gaze. “No offense taken,” she said, embarrassed her voice sounded strained and whispery.

She heard the tall one’s soft command of, ‘*Come to me, sweetheart,*’ and glanced back to see him holding out his hand to her.

“Just a minute, Masters,” came the gravelly voice of the heavy-looking man. “Sunny gets her first.”

Honey’s eyes widened with shock.

Masters straightened, took one step away from the doorframe and closed his hand over her wrist. He drew her and she walked to him as if in a trance. Masters was a fitting name for the man who wanted a bathing tub.

She swallowed again but her mouth had gone dry. "I need to be about my work now," she croaked, staring at him, afraid to look away, fear written on her face.

"Not now." He slipped his other hand around her waist.

He smiled with a warmth in his eyes she'd never before seen from a man.
How does a man who looks like him get involved with men like these?

"We settle this according to our rules, Masters," that same gravelly voice warned. The heavy man swaggered closer. "If you can't prove she's your mate, by pack law, Sunny gets his turn first, then me, then Blackie."

Before she could shout her outrage, Masters wrapped his arm around her waist. "Hush, darlin'." Shifting his gaze to the heavy man, he said, "You won't gain anything, Grady." Then Masters lowered his head and whispered against her ear, "Trust me. I'll protect you. Come."

Dazed with disbelief, afraid to take her eyes off him, she moved on legs gone wooden as he escorted her through the entrance and across to the far side of the bed. She heard the door click closed. A key rattled. *Oh God.*

She panicked, grasping his arm to free herself, but froze at the sight of the other men lined up, blocking her escape. She'd never force her way past all three of them.

"Don't show them fear," he whispered. Masters' hands brought her snug against him, so the two of them faced the others with her backside firmly against the front of him—and pressed into his arousal.

His soft breath heated the side of her neck beneath her ear. "I won't hurt you," he whispered, making her shudder. "Nod once if you're a virgin."

Her breath stopped. She stared at the men across the room and nodded.

"Pretend you're my lady and you're in heaven," he continued, his breath wafting over her chilled skin.

Heaven? At the moment she believed she'd fallen into purgatory and hell was soon to follow. If he took her virginity, she'd shame the rancher she dreamed of marrying someday. She'd never find the happy home she yearned for.

"Close your eyes, honey," he ordered, his voice clipped, as he smoothed his hands upward from her waist. "Pretend."

She snapped her eyes closed. Did he know her name, or was 'honey' what he called every woman? His large hands cupped her breasts and she gasped at the sensation. Her whole body shook and she didn't know if her legs would hold her. What was he going to do to her?

"Heaven," he said, his low voice and hot breath in her ear.

She dared to hope she'd come out of this still a virgin and complied. Remembering how those loose women moaned with pleasure, she dropped her head back against his chest and moaned, not sure, in her experience, how convincing it sounded. The soft touch of his fingers brushing over her nipples brought heat to her face and sent a surging ache to her private parts.

Surely it's wanton to respond to this man's caress.

Her dreams for the future went up in flames just as her body burned from his touch. He kneaded her breasts and his arousal pressed along the crease of her buttocks. "Oh, God," she cried, every nerve tingling with incredible sensations.

"It's all right," he said softly. One of his hands left her breast and glided over her ribs and waist.

When his fingers stroked over her belly and down between her thighs, her muscles tensed. *What's he doing?*

"Heaven, honey. Don't forget," he murmured, his warm breath tantalizing the place beneath her ear, making her pant.

Licking her dry lips with the tip of her tongue, she writhed from the tension he created. How long must she suffer the tormenting touches from this handsome man that made her body burn? Touches only a husband should be allowed.



Brett Masters studied her beautiful profile and berated himself. He'd recognized her as his mate the moment he'd seen her, had inhaled her delicate scent. He should have known she was a virgin, this golden angel in her prim brown dress, clothing at complete odds with what women usually wore at the Moonlight Hotel.

She belonged to him. He growled as her tantalizing body tempted him. His senses heightened with the torment of her body touching his. He ached to possess her. He would prove his right of possession. Afterwards, no one would touch her but him. He'd protect her at any cost. *If she doesn't accept me now, there won't be another woman for me. Ever.* He knew it as he'd never known anything else in his life.

He smoothed his hand over her slender belly and heard her quick breath. He could span her tiny waist with his hands. Aching to have her naked, he wanted to caress her wet sheath, taste her more than ample breasts. He wanted to grasp her slender hips in his hands while he pulled her tight around his cock.

Her courage thrilled and enchanted him. *Why is she working as a housekeeper at Dovie's hotel?*

Lust tormented him as his fingers glided over her soft pussy. Her hips bucked against his palm. *Yeah, she belongs to me.*

Mating with her tempted him to the point of pain. He could feel her damp heat through her skirts and imagined her taking him inside her sweet body, hard and fast. This brave innocent, his life mate, didn't belong within these bedrooms.

She gave a sharp, high-pitched moan and thrust once more beneath his hand. He'd like to savor the dream for just one night with his ethereal beauty. There was no question she belonged to him tonight, but would she accept a werewolf as a soul mate?

He must convince her she belonged with him for a while at least. With any luck, he'd talk her into a sensual interlude, followed by a night of pure pleasure. If she was willing. But that was all. Being a shape shifter and with a risky job like his, marriage could only leave a widow. He couldn't afford to think of her long term, but was it too much to hope for one night with this responsive woman?

"Don't be afraid, honey."

To convince his dubious friends, he had to make this look good. He glanced at them, sickened by their hunger for a taste of her. Their tongues almost hung out of their mouths. Grady rubbed his damn crotch.

The laws of the pack would protect her once Brett demonstrated she reached her climax with him and therefore belonged to him. Even as pack leader, he was bound to prove his claim.

If he failed to bring this gentle woman to climax, Grady would demand pack rights. Brett would never let that happen. He'd protect her unto death—his or someone else's.

Gathering her clothing upward in a way that would conceal her long legs from the other men, he raised her skirt and petticoats behind her and smoothed one hand beneath her skirts. He caressed her warm thighs and sweet rounded bottom. The slit in her drawers parted for his probing fingers. He touched her clit, teasing the sensitive nub.

She gasped, her soft body undulating like a whip.

Nuzzling her earlobe, he said "Heaven. Remember. Won't hurt you. Trust me."

She moaned low and leaned her trembling, feather-weight against him. Her body tensed as he removed his hand, opened his trousers and loosened his drawers.

He lifted her higher. Her head dropped back on his shoulder. Thrusting his eager cock between her thighs, he clenched his muscles against the need to plunge inside her satin heat.

A sharp moan escaped her and she gasped when he stroked her bare folds. She was so wet he almost exploded. He had to make her climax before he did. Hungry to taste her, he spread her wetness over her swollen nubbin.

When she gave a little whimper and clasped her hands over his forearms, he tightened his grip on her. “Feel, just feel, sweetheart.”

Her warm face pressed against his sweat-dampened neck, her buttocks and thighs squeezed his cock as his fingers delved to her heated opening. He slipped one finger inside her, slowly in and out, again, and again deeper. She whimpered as he reached her thin virgin’s barrier. When she shivered on a high-pitched moan, he returned to her stiffened nub, increasing the pressure.

His breathing became more labored as he fought the need to take her. The animal in him wanted her now. His wolf howled for release, but his human demanded control.

Her back arched. Her thighs hugged his aching erection. He shuddered, desperate for her to climax before he lost control.

She cried out her orgasm. Her slick sheath pulsed around his fingers.

From deep inside him, Brett’s feral roar of release erupted, his shaft pumped, his seed spurted beneath her petticoats.

When she slumped against him, Brett hugged her close while her head lowered and she panted, catching her breath. He raised a pointed gaze to the other three, who were also breathing heavily, their own cocks straining beneath their trousers.

“As you have witnessed, she is mine,” Brett growled. “No one touches her but me. Come near her and you’re food for buzzards.”

Sunny spun toward the door. “You’ll get no argument from me, Brett.”

Blackie nodded his dark head. “You’ve proved your right of possession, Masters.”

Grady didn’t say anything. Brett didn’t trust him. The man used his size to bully people. He was a troublemaker. “Get out,” Brett snarled. “And close the door on your way.”

After another glare, Grady left the room, slamming the door. Brett lifted the lethargic young woman into his arms, carried her to the four-poster bed, and laid her on the pristine white bedspread. He backed away from her, but was caught in the startling green depths of her wide eyes as she stared at his still open pants and engorged penis. He quickly straightened his clothing. Werewolf passion gave him a longer-lasting erection than humans.

This trusting young woman belonged to him, even if he’d only pretended to follow pack law. She wouldn’t understand that, but in order to protect her, he’d have to convince her. Where to begin? He supposed a little romance was in order. She was an innocent. “You’re a brave woman, Miss...”

“Carrington. Honey Carrington,” she offered, the bare whisper sounding sweet and a little breathless.

“I’m Brett Masters, a Texas Ranger. I didn’t take your virginity, Miss Carrington. You’re still whole. I apologize for my friends’ bad behavior. What

happened just now—if I hadn't gone along with them, you would have paid a high price. I hope you'll forgive me for any pain I caused you."

"No pain," she protested, shaking her head. "But I've never before experienced anything like that, or been so frightened."

"I'd like to try to make it up to you." When she nodded her agreement he added, "Will you let me start by taking you to dinner?"

"Oh! No. I mean..."

Chapter Two

Honey didn't know *what* she meant. The terror of the threat of those men raping her, followed by the most gentle, incredible touches she'd ever experienced, left her stunned. Yet she wanted to know more about Mr. Masters, the man who'd protected her from the others.

He didn't fit her expectations of the ranch owner she hoped to someday marry, not that Mr. Masters was a suitor. It was just dinner. But how could she face him and behave as if nothing had happened now that he had carnal knowledge of her?

He gazed at her, waiting for her answer. How could she make a decision now in his presence? Her face flamed with memories of his hands touching the most private, most highly sensitive parts of her body. His fingers had caressed deep within her woman's center.

The memory brought renewed heat to those places. She had no choice but to refuse. "I'm sorry, Mr. Masters, but I promised Aunt Dovie—I have too much work to do now."

"How about I come back for you at six o'clock this evening?" he persisted.

"Well, I..."

When she hesitated, he said, “Miss Carrington, Honey, I won’t hurt you. I’ll protect you and keep you safe.”

Staring into those penetrating blue eyes, she knew he spoke the truth. She did have to stop for dinner, and from his words, she had a feeling he wouldn’t take no for an answer. Deciding to go ahead and take the risk, she said, “Yes.”

“Good.” He tipped his Stetson. “I’ll see you then.”



Throughout their dinner, Mr. Masters behaved as Honey believed a true gentleman should, but now he held her hand fast as he closed the door to the empty parlor.

Honey waited, loathe to snatch her hand away. “Thank you for a lovely dinner, Mr. Masters, but I must finish my duties.”

He removed his hat as he lifted her hand and pressed a kiss to her fingers. His firm lips felt warm, the sensation sending tingles through her. Their pleasant conversation during dinner had increased her trust in him. There was something about him that made her feel as if she’d known him a long time.

He turned her hand over and the tip of his tongue tickled as he licked the skin where her fingers met her palm.

Her lips parted as aching heat swelled and tugged, making her wish against all common sense that he'd give her pleasure like he had that afternoon. "Mr. Masters." She pulled her hand from his gentle grasp.

"Forgive me, Miss Carrington. I couldn't help myself." He smiled, his eyes intent on her.

"I must be about my work now. Won't you please take a seat and make yourself comfortable?"

"I'll have a seat and wait for you." He indicated the threadbare red brocade settee. "Are you sure you won't join me now?" He gestured to include her, his hand perilously close to her waist, an aura of command surrounding him.

Cautioned by memories of the exquisite heat his capable hands had evoked that afternoon, she said, "No, I have more than enough work to keep me busy well into the night."

"No doubt." He poured a glass of wine from the decanter on the nearby sideboard and offered it to her.

"No, thank you, Mr. Masters. I must see to my tasks." Honey moved to take the ashtrays to empty just as he strode toward the sofa. In her attempt to avoid him, she stumbled on a wrinkle in the worn Oriental rug.

He caught her and steadied her against the hard length of his body. "Careful, Miss Carrington. I don't want anything to happen to you."

Oh, God. His masculine scent held her captive and threatened to rip apart her defenses. Desire rushed to every sensitive place in her body. His breath teased her face as he pulled her too close. The ridge of his arousal pressed against the back of her thighs. She took a shaky breath and released it. "I'm all right. You may release me."

But he continued to hold her while he set his glass down on the table. "Are you sure?" His voice lowered to a caress as he turned her with his other hand.

He lured her with his sensuality and the pressure of his fingers. Her desire for his pleasurable touch held her in thrall. She glanced at his face to find that his eyes seemed to gleam with that almost wolf-like intensity. He lowered his head and covered her mouth with his.

Without a thought of protesting, she parted her lips to his demanding tongue. He stroked deep, tempting her to engage. Intent on his kiss, she was surprised when his thumb brushed over her nipple. Once again, need swelled deep inside her most private parts. His other hand cupped her hip and squeezed as he snuggled her against his questing erection.

Anticipation tempted her to remain in his beguiling embrace. Just a little longer.

His fingers smoothed over her hip and along the crease of her bottom, causing her to move against his arousal. His deep groan told her he liked that.

Good judgment failed her. She wanted him inside her where he'd had his fingers earlier.

He didn't stop. His caress continued between her thighs and feathered over sensitive places, tormenting her.

Tangling his tongue with hers, he took the kiss deeper. She couldn't catch her breath. When his other hand cupped her breast and tweaked her nipple, she gasped and tore her mouth from his. "Oh my."

"Let me make love to you, Honey."

She moaned at the temptation he offered. When she hesitated, he swept her into his arms and strode toward the stairs. She knew she shouldn't allow it, but his fiery touch built a raging hunger in her.

No one was around. No Aunt Dovie. No men. The cowboys played cards and drank at the saloon until late at night.

She wanted him to take her to paradise once more. Just one more time.

Upstairs in the bedroom, he lowered her to her feet, and closed and locked the door behind them. Kissing her again, he ravaged her mouth then trailed kisses over her throat to that ticklish place beneath her ear. His incredible hands cupped her breasts, and he brushed his fingers over her sensitive nipples. She moaned with pleasure and lifted her hands to slip her fingers through the hair at the back of his neck.

Their tongues stroked and explored every surface of each other's mouths. Suddenly she realized he'd unbuttoned her blouse and was pushing it off her shoulders and down her arms. She tore her mouth from his. "Wait, Mr. Masters."

"Brett. I want to see all of you, Honey." His words and deep voice made her shiver in anticipation.

The thought of his hands touching her naked skin made her body respond much like his touch had that afternoon. What would it feel like to have his hands on her naked breasts? She wanted to find out. Unafraid now, she *wanted* to take all of her clothes off for him. She unhooked her black skirt and stepped out of it. Before she knew it, he was untying the tapes of her petticoats and lowering them down her legs. As he hunkered down to help her, she rested her hands on his shoulders and stepped free of the yards of soft cotton.

His hands glided up her legs over her drawers to her hips. He pulled her toward him and kissed her waist, his fingers caressing her. Then he raised his head and pressed kisses over her breasts.

She gasped and closed her eyes as shivers and tingles raced through her, teasing the responsive skin between her thighs. Her eyes snapped open as her knees buckled. Her fingers dug into his shoulders. He caught her and steadied her.

His capable hands unlaced her corset and tossed it to join her other clothing on the floor. "I want to touch all of you," he growled.

Trembles ran the length of her when she imagined him doing that very thing. Feeling a tug at her waist, she looked down to find him untying her drawers. Expectancy made her shake. When he lifted her chemise above her bellybutton, his breath tickled her and she giggled. He smiled at her and then pressed hot kisses along her waist, growling softly as he did so.

When he glanced up at her again, his eyes darkened to cobalt. He held her gaze as he loosened her drawers and slid them down. She was bare except for her chemise, until his hands grasped the hem and lifted it upward and off.

Surprised she felt no embarrassment, she searched his face for his reaction, wondering if he approved of her. He looked at her, fierce longing in his expression.

She'd lost her mind to allow this intimacy, but it felt right with this man. Maybe a Ranger would be just as good a choice for husband as a rancher.

“You’re beautiful, Honey.”

Her breath caught as he used her name once more. He loosened her hairpins, placing them on the dressing table. When her hair tumbled over her shoulders and back, he lifted it to fall over her chest. Bemused, she watched quietly as he arranged the strands. He blew against one hidden breast, parting the thin veil he'd created.

Captivated, she could only watch as he took the nipple between his lips and swirled his tongue over it. Hot spears of need shot to her feminine core. He didn't stop and she didn't want him to stop. He placed kisses over her other breast.

Brushing her hair aside, he dragged his mouth down the center of her torso. She closed her eyes on the erotic vision, her muscles tightening as the sweet ache flamed.

His hot breath touched the sensitive place hidden beneath her nether curls. Her head fell back and her knees turned liquid. He swept her into his arms and carried her to the bed. When she felt the bedspread beneath her naked back and hips, she opened her eyes.

He stared at her with a gaze of burning possession as he undressed.

Oh, Lord. What had she allowed to happen? She knew so little about this man. Would he stop if she asked him to? She'd probably never see him again. What had compelled her to join her body with his? "Mr. Masters," she started, her voice raspy.

He smiled. "Brett," he reminded her.

"Uh--yes--Brett. Why... What will happen next?"

"I'm going to make love to you, Honey. I've never wanted another woman like I want you."

There was no offer of marriage, and he was a Ranger, not a rancher. He didn't fit in with what she wanted for her future, her dream, but she wanted him in her arms too. Lord, she wanted him. Dark, silky-looking hair shadowed his chest, reminding her of the masterful way he brought pleasure to her that afternoon. She let her gaze roam over his splendid nakedness and caught her

breath. His shaft was huge and satiny-looking. She didn't know how it would fit, but she wanted to feel him inside her, feel the whole length of his body move over her from breast to toes.

That settled it. She released the breath she'd been holding. She'd let him make love to her even though tomorrow he'd leave for parts unknown to bring outlaws to justice. She'd worry later about someday finding a rancher to marry and have a family with.

He sat beside her. Taking her into his arms, he pulled her close and kissed her deeply. She wrapped her arms around his neck and joined in, her tongue dancing with his.

Can he feel my heart beating as hard and fast as his? He lowered her to the pillow and slipped one leg between hers, gently pressing a knee between her thighs. The dark hair covering his thigh tickled and taunted.

Need built and she turned toward him, sliding her leg over his until she was open to him. She'd never believed herself capable of such wantonness. But she desired Brett with a hunger she'd never known before. She moaned at the possessive strength of his arms embracing her.

Gliding her fingers over his shoulders, she couldn't help but notice long ridges of scars. Concerned, she broke the kiss. "What happened to you?"

"One of the more violent disagreements I've encountered."

Fear for him punched her in the middle like a fist. "Does this happen often?"

“No. I like to make things easy when I arrest lawbreakers.” He nuzzled her neck.

“That’s reassuring. But...”

“That’s not what’s important right now. Kiss me, Honey.”

Sighing, she wrapped her arms around him and kissed him as if she could protect him from all future danger.

When he broke the kiss, he brushed his warm lips and nibbling teeth along her jaw, down her throat to close over one nipple, pulling it deep in his mouth and sucking hard. She moaned as pleasure raced to the ache she wanted him to fill. His fingers traced her hip and cupped her bottom. He touched her in places and in ways she’d never imagined, heightened her need until she thought she might expire. Moisture gathered at the opening of her woman's core.

His touch was gentle, and he moaned as he reached her wet sheath, his fingers making her writhe. He made her burn like the sun-scorched desert sand. She gasped for air, panting, and raised her knee higher to give him more access as his fingers probed her slick, needy flesh.

“You’re so wet, Honey. I’ve never known anyone as responsive as you are.” His fingers glided through her slippery folds and he gently turned her onto her stomach, settling himself between her legs. He spread them wider, caressing her thighs with his hands, the hot moistness of his lips and tongue branding her back.

A moan of need escaped her. She wiggled with nervousness and raised her head and shoulders to see what he intended. She watched as his fingers stroked her. With his gentle touch, he parted her feminine folds to slide his finger deep within her. *Oh God*. Closing her eyes at the intense sensations, her hips bucked with his touch. She wanted to clench her thighs together.

He didn't stop. His long finger slid in and out, dipping in her wetness before sliding further between her folds and tweaking her most sensitive flesh where he'd given her pleasure earlier that day. Like a cat, she arched her back wanting more.

"That's the way, Honey. Enjoy it," his deep voice crooned.

He feathered kisses in the valley between her hips making her writhe in ecstasy. His lips trailed upwards, his tongue tormenting her lower back, then further down. *He couldn't—he didn't intend...* She turned again to see where he was going.

His hands lifted her hips and spread her quivering thighs even wider. "You're so beautiful, Honey. I need to taste this little pearl." His breath and tongue touched her most sensitive flesh. She lowered her head and clutched the bedspread as he kissed her there, nibbled with his lips and teeth. His hot, tormenting tongue probed deep into her sheath. A keening whimper rose in her throat. He stroked and circled her needy flesh. Her hips swayed of their own accord as surges of pleasure swelled inside her.

Stretching her opening with one finger and then another, he stroked an acutely responsive place inside. Tension coiled through her body and she trembled. “Brett,” she cried out, as she catapulted heavenward, fireworks flashing around her as her body soared, her muscles pulsing with exquisite contractions.

As ecstasy ebbed, little pulsations continued to tease her. She felt Brett’s arm around her hips supporting her. Opening her eyes, she turned her head and found Brett watching her with heated hunger in his eyes. A smile of satisfaction curved his talented lips. His fingers moved inside her once more.

“Again?” she asked in disbelief.

“Again. You’re even more beautiful when you climax. Once more, Honey.”

Before she could catch her breath, he slid his fingers from her swollen flesh, gathered her in his strong hands, and turned her onto her back. His attention returned to her responsive sheath. Slipping his fingers through her slick folds, he manipulated her reactions and aroused the intense need which continued to simmer inside her. He crawled up her body. His fingers were quickly replaced by the head of his taut male member. Her eyes opened with surprise at the stretching sensation.

“Brett, I don’t think...”

“Spread your legs, Honey. Raise your knees.”

Trusting him, she did as he instructed. Clutching his broad shoulders, she felt every subtle move as he reached between their bodies and positioned himself. Slowly, he entered her tight channel.

“Are you sure this will work?”

“Curl your hips upward.” The command was wrenched from his throat.

She tucked in her belly and tilted her hips. His shaft pressed inside a little further. Not knowing what she should do next, she did what he asked and waited, all the while growing accustomed to the hard length of him. Her nostrils were full of his distinctive male scent, and she became aware of the tangy muskiness their shared bodies produced. He pushed deeper and in her desire to cling to him, she wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders.

“Honey, you’re so tight,” he growled. “I’m afraid this is going to hurt you the first time.” And with that he covered her mouth with his and thrust deep between her thighs. At the sharp pain, she gave a high-pitched squeak of protest. His body stilled, only his lips and tongue moving against hers.

The pain eased. Slowly her body relaxed and she returned his kiss. When she grew comfortable with the feeling of being stretched and filled, she gave a tentative squirm of her hips.

He groaned and tore his mouth from hers. “We’ll take this slow and easy this time.”

Honey wanted him deeper inside. As if he knew her wish, he sank slowly to the hilt. Loving the sensation of fullness, she raised her hips and he groaned again.

“You’re so hot and wet around my cock.” His hand slipped between their bodies where his nether curls brushed against hers, and his fingers found that sweet spot he’d caressed before. “Your clit is hard and swollen. Does that feel good?”

“Oh, yes.” She wasn’t sure what ‘clit’ referred to, but as he thrust in and out of her hungry sheath, he stroked her needy flesh, his breathing labored. Her own breath came hard. Desire tightened every nerve and urged her to move in counterpoint to his thrusts. She slipped her arms around his wide shoulders and hugged him to her, the sweat that covered their bodies mingling. He lowered his lips to her shoulder. Now, in awe, she knew what was meant by two becoming one.

Her pleasure built until she shook uncontrollably, her back arching. She reveled in the strong scent of sex surrounding her. With several wild thrusts, he filled her. A deep growl roared from his chest as his seed pumped into her welcoming body. “Brett,” she cried, as she convulsed around him.

Relaxing with him slumped in her arms, his weight felt wonderful, although he supported most of it. He feathered a kiss beneath her earlobe.

“Are you all right?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said, sighing in contentment.

“I didn’t hurt you?”

“No. That was wonderful.”

She heard him groan and then he moved off her. “You’re incredible, Honey.” He pulled her close against his side.

She curled into him, resting her head on his chest, and he wrapped one heavy leg over hers, his warm hand smoothing up and down her arm. “Can we do that again?” she asked tentatively.

His chuckle rumbled in her ear. “After we rest a bit.” He continued to stroke her arm.

She slid her hand over his sweat-dampened chest, his lean torso. Watching him in the low lantern light, she noticed his erection twitched. It had shrunk only a bit in size since he first undressed. She slid her fingers down the narrow dark line of hair to his nest of curls.

He grabbed her hand and laughed. “Not so fast. Rest for a while. You’ll need your strength when I rouse you again.”

Honey looked up at his face. His eyes were closed, but he had a very satisfied curve to his mouth. Feeling a desire to explore him, she smoothed her hand up his belly to his chest. She found a tight nub of a nipple beneath the silky covering of hair and tweaked it. He grunted and turned toward her, his shaft touching her thigh. At the drop of wetness, she looked down to find his male member a bit larger than it had been a moment ago.

“Rest,” he ordered softly.

With a sigh, she closed her eyes only to feel his warm hand cover her breast. *How can I rest with him touching me?* She doubted it was possible.

As she stilled with her cheek on his upper arm, reality crept in and stole her sense of ease. Brett was a Texas Ranger. That meant he’d be leaving soon to chase dangerous outlaws.

It would be impossible to meet a rancher who would marry a woman who had lost her virginity. *And what if I become pregnant with Brett’s child?*

It would now be more difficult than ever to attain her dream of marrying and having a secure, happy home and children—now that she’d lost not only her virginity, but her heart—to Brett Masters. She must not make love with him again. She’d dress and leave, but she needed to feel his arms around her a little while longer.



Brett pulled the bedspread around Honey and caressed her arms and legs to make sure she was warm enough. He’d protect her from anyone who threatened her. Holding Honey like this, being inside her before, he’d felt one with her. Never wanted to be without her.

Capturing outlaws alone had never appeased him. He was still always searching for that elusive satisfaction, haunted by responsibility to his job and a

promise to his parents. He'd never forget the savage attack by the pack of werewolves that had left his parents dead and him a werewolf.

Honey murmured in her sleep and he drew her closer, trailing his fingers up and down her silky arm.

Some day in the future, he'd return to his parents' ranch and settle down. He wished he could ask Honey to wait for him. But first he had to find the last members of the renegade pack that had changed him, and bring them in or destroy them. He must protect other ranchers in remote parts of Texas. Until he accomplished what he'd set out to do, he couldn't promise anything to Honey. He didn't want to leave her a widow.

The possibility of having a home and family with Honey was the strongest lure he'd ever known besides finishing the task of destroying the rogue pack. He wanted to start a family and have a loving home again at the ranch. Now that he'd met and made love to her, he wanted it sooner. That meant he had to head out and finish his present Ranger assignment.

Grady was a shifty sort of guy. He might lead Brett to the outlaws he hunted if given some rope. That was the only reason Brett allowed him to hang out in the pack Brett had gathered. Sunny and Blackie had been lone wolves before Brett had invited them to ride with him. But Grady moved in without an invitation, while Brett was away on a Ranger assignment, and challenged Brett at every turn. Or so it seemed.

The bastard Grady had challenged Brett for Honey, throwing pack law in his face. Only her courage and trust had saved her. Thank God. Brett raged at the thought of what would have happened to her if she hadn't played along with him or withstood the ordeal. He would have fought the others to protect her, but the odds were in their favor and even though he was strong, he couldn't have guaranteed the outcome would be in his favor.

He'd do whatever he had to in order to keep her safe.

Now, she slept in his arms with perfect trust.

If the rest of his plan didn't go right, he'd fight to the death before he let Grady claim her. But first, he had to finish his Ranger assignment to locate a hideout for outlaws near Loving and deal with whoever was operating it.

Honey moaned in her sleep, turned on her back stretching, reaching one arm above her head. Her thighs spread open, one knee crooked up.

The animal in him demanded he take her, touch her, taste her. He hungered to make love to Honey once more. He gazed at her ivory body, her luscious breasts peaked with rosy nipples pebbled in the coolness of the desert night. He stroked his fingers down the soft velvet of her inner arm and took her taut nipple in his mouth. She moaned and lowered her arm, slipping her fingers through his hair. Her touch was pure heaven.

Her delicate rose scent filled his head and entranced him. He gazed at her, the wild halo of her hair framing her lovely face. "You're hair is mussed," he teased.

She gave him a mischievous smile and tried to smooth the honey-colored tendrils.

He spanned her small waist with his hands, lifting her. "Straddle my hips."

She placed her knees on either side of him. "Like this?"

"Right. This way you can take as much of me as you want." He quirked an eyebrow.

"Oh," she said, surprise in her voice. "I want to touch you."

"Honey, you can touch me any way that makes you happy."

When she leaned forward and shook her head, her hair floated around her shoulders and breasts and over him. The silken strands teased his face, and he buried his fingers in them.

"Kiss me," he ordered.

She lowered her mouth to his. He ravaged her with lips and tongue while her hair surrounded them like a gossamer veil. Her fingers glided over his chest, circling his nipples. As she settled over his groin, her wetness tormented his cock. He moaned as it hardened even more with his need for her.

Breaking their kiss, she scooted down and covered one of his nipples with her mouth, flicking it with her tongue. He inhaled at the swift pleasure of her warm mouth and lush curves pressed against him. She moved lower, her full lips following the narrow line of dark hair down his torso.

When she reached his navel, she licked him. His penis twitched in response. She brushed feather-soft kisses lower, her fingers stroking his engorged shaft, lingering over the head, spreading the drop of cum with one finger, and closing her fist around him.

He rose up on his elbows to watch as she lowered her head, her silken tresses falling across his skin, increasing his burgeoning ache. The curtain of her hair prevented a clear view, and he could only imagine as the shadowy image of her fingers touched the head of his cock. He clenched his muscles and groaned with the sweet torture, desperate to bury himself in her.

Her hair trailed over him like tips of a silken whip, taunting even more. She smoothed her warm lips over first one thigh then the other.

As she explored, the caress of her fingers on his engorged balls wrenched another sharp groan from deep in his chest. The wolf in him threatened to howl for release.

“Enough!” He grabbed her shoulders, and pulled her up his body until her buttocks rested over his cock.

“Did I do something wrong?”

“No,” he rasped. “You did everything right. Take me inside, as much as you can.”

Reaching and grasping his hard staff in her hands, she positioned it at her slick entrance. The head of his shaft slid through her wetness.

Brett knew she held her breath as she lowered her hips, moving them in a circular motion until he entered her. Clenching his jaw, he smoothed his hand between their bodies to tease her clit. Slowly, she took more of him, until she nestled on his hips, her thighs hugging him.

“That feels so good,” she said, releasing her breath. She moaned and wiggled a little. With her hands braced on either side of his torso, she raised her hips up and lowered them over him. In the heat of her wet passage, his engorged phallus swelled even more. Her breasts jutted toward his face as she arched her back. He lifted his head and closed his mouth over first one nipple then the other, tugging. She gasped and rode him harder.

He steeled himself against the violent, otherworldly demand to mate but couldn't control his response to Honey. The need to plunge deep inside her drove him. With one hand holding her hip, he thrust upward, delved his fingers along her clit and felt her first contractions caress the length of him. Her head fell back and she cried out with her orgasm. Brett climaxed, his cum erupting inside her. Ecstasy more intense than he'd ever known swept through him, straining every muscle. He thrust deeper with each spurt of his seed.

When she slumped over him, her golden mane covering him like a blanket, he wrapped his arms around her, his cock still hard and pounding inside her. He felt her orgasmic contractions again.

She chuckled softly against his chest. “That was wonderful.”

He growled, pleased and satisfied. "You're wonderful, Honey." He couldn't let her go. If she hadn't answered his passion, he feared he might have come close to losing control with her tonight. The raging wolf in him was a dangerous threat to her. It could have destroyed her trust while breaking his own code. No one had ever affected him with this ferocious passion like she did.

She rested on top of him, and he wanted to hold her like this all night. He wanted to hold her forever. She made him believe there was a family in his future; that she would be there for him. Like a wolf mother, she would look after their children.

But he knew if they were to have a chance at a future together, he must finish his assignment and then destroy the outlaw wolf pack that shattered his family. Only then would he be free to ask Honey to be his life-mate. Would she agree to share her life with a werewolf, and mingle her blood with his in order to bear his children? Their joining made it clear. He had to ask her to wait for him. To be his mate.

Hell. Why am I even considering a life with her? He faced death too often to ever think of marrying. Even though Honey was his soul mate, it would be better for him to live alone than leave her a widow. She'd find a decent man to marry and live a good life.

That would be best for her. So why did it make him want to howl in rage?

Chapter Three

Honey awoke with the first light of dawn before the sun peeked above the horizon. Brett stirred beside her.

“Good morning,” he said, his voice soft and deep.

She turned to gaze at him and found him fully awake. “Morning.” She smiled, feeling shy after the night she’d spent with him. *Has he been watching me sleep?*

He raised up and tugged her beneath him as he covered her. Without a word, he lowered his head and touched her breast with his warm lips, then took her nipple in his mouth, flicking the already turgid peak with his tongue.

She gasped. Aching shafts of heat coursed through her, centering once again between her thighs. “I should be seeing about my duties, Brett.”

He grunted and raised his head from her breast. “Stay a while longer.”

“Brett, I really need to do my work. I don’t want to lose the only job I could find.”

He supported himself on his elbow and stared at her, his penetrating gaze studying her. “How come you live in Loving? You have family here?”

“No. I’d lived with my uncle since my parents died of cholera when I was fourteen. A few weeks ago when the trouble started, he brought me here and left me.”

“What trouble?” Brett stroked his capable fingers over her breasts and rested his hand at her waist.

“Some new cowboys showed up at his ranch one day a couple weeks ago. One argument led to another, there was a fistfight followed by gunshots, and I heard my uncle telling the new men to leave. He also told them if they showed up again, they wouldn’t leave alive.” Honey suspected her uncle provided a hideout for outlaws.

“Why doesn’t he ask the sheriff to take care of the troublemakers?”

“My uncle is not a pleasant man. That wasn’t the only time something like that happened. I stayed out of his way as much as possible the first time I heard him yell at the cowhands. I don’t think my parents would have wanted me to live with him, but he was the only relative I had so that’s where I was sent.”

“Did he ever lay a hand on you?”

The threat in his voice drew Honey to study his expression. Muscles in his jaw tightened, his blue eyes glittering as he waited for her to answer. “I stayed out of his way after I heard the housekeeper scream one night shortly after I arrived.”

Brett didn’t say a word, but his hands fisted.

Honey continued. "I crept down to the kitchen to check on the woman and saw her on the floor crying, my uncle heading for the back door. I helped her to her feet, and she said she was fine. But I was afraid and returned to my room. She had bruises on her face the next day. I knew then I had to keep out of Uncle's way."

Brett pulled her closer to his side and rested a leg over hers. "If your uncle ever comes to town, stay clear of him and let me know he's here, all right?"

"What will you do?"

"I may not do anything as long as he leaves you alone. If he doesn't, he'll answer to me."

Honey gazed at this man who had protected her from those three who would've had their way with her. He was a Texas Ranger. He was strong and could handle himself in a fight. She didn't want him to tangle with her uncle though. One of them could end up dead, and it would be because of her.

He was a good man even if he had taught her carnal ways. When he left her, she'd never forget him. She feared his gentleness had stolen her heart for all time.



"How you makin' out, kid?"

Honey, who had been cleaning one of the guest rooms, whirled toward the dreaded voice. Her uncle stood near the door. "Uncle. What brings you to town?" She tried to keep her voice calm and even.

“Heard some gossip about you and your beau.” He laughed, a low, rasping, sarcastic sound.

Honey’s heart turned over, and her face heated at his words. His eyes reminded her of a dog intent on attack. His straggly unkempt hair and stained jeans and shirt showed he cared little about himself and nothing about what anyone else thought. He could easily ruin her reputation today if he chose to.

The thought of Brett and her uncle meeting brought an image of a deadly fight, only one of them winning. She knew her uncle never fought fairly, and that struck her with icy fear.

“What do you mean? I don’t have a beau.”

“That’s not what I heard. I heard that you’ve been spreadin’ your legs for a Texas Ranger who’s come to town.”

Honey’s face flamed at his vulgar words. Speechless, she stared at her uncle. How could she deny the accusation?

He took a step toward her. She backed away.

“I hear he lifted your skirts while his friends watched.” His eyes glittered with nastiness. “Shall I haul Doc over here to examine you? Find out if you’re still a virgin?”

Honey shuddered at his threat, her knees feeling like they wouldn’t hold her.

“Better yet, I’ll have one of my men do it,” he spat, and started toward her.

“You’re comin’ with me.”

Horrified, she grabbed the broom leaning against the bed. “Get out!”

But he kept coming. He grabbed the broom handle and wrenched it from her hands, knocking her back with the weight of his body. She hit the wall. He followed, raising his fist to strike her.

Honey ducked and grabbed the water pitcher from the dresser beside her. “I’ll smash this in your face before I let you or any of your outlaw friends touch me.”

His lips lifted in a nasty smile.

“Give your beau a message,” he said, his voice low and tight.

He loomed over her so close she almost gagged at the smell of his unwashed skin and fetid breath. She shook with cold fear and rage. “What message?”

“You tell him that Carrington said to stay out of his business, or else. And you, little bitch, tell him goodbye if you know what’s good for you.” He took a step away from her. “Find someone else to lift your skirts and word’ll get around. Then I’m certain you’ll have more men sniffing under your petticoats than you can handle.”

He tossed the broom across the bedroom, his worn boots pounding the floor as he disappeared through the open door.

Honey shuddered as she lifted a trembling hand to smooth back an errant strand of hair. She straightened her spine and moved to gather her cleaning tools.

What should she tell Brett? If she said the wrong thing, she could end up sending him to his death.



Honey was still cleaning when she heard Brett's boots in the upstairs hall. She knew that heavy, sharp stride of his. It was too late to close the door. He'd find her.

The confrontation with her uncle, and her resulting worry for Brett, had left her exhausted. It had taken her longer than usual to finish cleaning.

As his footsteps came nearer, she turned to the dresser mirror and smoothed her hair. There wasn't anything she could do at the moment about her dusty apron. She definitely did not look her best.

Brett stopped at the open door and she smiled at him, trying to appear normal. "What's wrong?"

So much for looking normal. "It's been a long day."

He gazed at her, searching for the truth. "Did Aunt Dovie give you a hard time about oversleeping?"

"No, nothing like that."

"What then? You can tell me, Honey," he said in that soft voice, as he grasped her shoulders in his gentle hands. When she didn't answer, he took the broom from her and motioned toward the door. "Let's go to my room and talk."

Honey grabbed the feather duster, placed one foot in front of the other and stepped through the doorway. At the end of the hall, she opened a closet, took the broom from him and hung the cleaning tools inside, then let him escort her to his room.

“Here, have a seat.” He held the chair for her. “Now, what’s this all about?”

Honey knew she had to tell him. She wished she knew how he would react. She had no way to keep him from doing exactly what he wanted to, even if that meant confronting her uncle. She had a sinking feeling that was exactly what he would do. He wouldn’t let this go, so she might as well get it over with.

“My uncle came by and told me to give you a message.”

“Your uncle?”

“Yes,” she said, a lump forming in her throat.

“What message?” he asked softly.

She almost broke down right then from his gentle manner. She swallowed. “He said to tell you to stay out of his business or else.” She didn’t think now was a good time to repeat what her uncle said about her relationship with Brett.

“Thank you for telling me.” Muscles in his face clenched. “Did he hurt you?”

“No,” she lied. “What will you do?”

“My job. If your uncle feels like I’m a threat to him, that’s not my concern. I’m here to find and arrest outlaws that have plagued the surrounding ranches, stealing cattle and terrorizing folks.”

Suddenly, Honey needed to know where she stood in his life. “Then what? Will you leave Loving for the next assignment?” She found it painful to think of living without him.

He hunkered down in front of her. “Honey, I’m a Ranger. It’s what I do. I hunt outlaws and bring them in. That’s as far in the future as I can think right now. I’ve got a job to do. I don’t know what will happen or where I’ll go from there. I can’t make any promises.”

She rose, her question answered. She needed to escape. She couldn’t let him see her tears if he felt so little for her. “I have to go now. I’ve accepted an invitation to have dinner with someone.”

She turned to say goodbye and found him staring at her. “You just told me you have nothing to offer me,” she said.

His hard eyes never left hers. “After I saved you from being raped, I thought our friendship meant more.” His hand slashed through the air. “You obviously don’t care anything about that.”

Staggered by his cruel words, she spun away from him as tears stung her eyes. He offered her nothing after she’d given her virginity to him. How could his feelings change so easily? “I think it would be best if we don’t see each other again,” she rasped, choking on a sob. She ran from the room before she broke down.

Reaching her small bedroom off the kitchen, she locked the door and collapsed on the narrow bed, smothering her sobs in the pillow. She'd stay in her room tonight, even though she'd probably never see Brett again. What was the point? He was through with her. The thought of never experiencing again what they'd had together left her feeling hollow.



The following day, Honey was leaving the room at the end of the upstairs hall when she saw Grady come out of a bedroom where she heard a woman's angry protests earlier. Honey stayed where she was, waiting for him to go downstairs.

Instead, he knocked on Brett's closed door. When there was no answer, Grady looked down the hall and saw her. As he started toward her, Honey braced for a confrontation. His heavy tread on the floor emphasized his stocky bulk.

"Where's Masters?" Grady demanded.

"How should I know?" she countered, fury building at the way he'd manipulated not only her but Brett the other day. The memory of Brett caressing her most private woman's parts while Grady watched, filled her with loathing for him.

"Tell Masters I've hired on with your uncle. If he comes near Carrington's property, I'll be forced to take action. Tell him it won't cause me any grief if I have

to shoot him, but he might not like what happens to you afterwards.” His lips pulled back in an ugly grin.

Suddenly, he grabbed hold of Honey’s shoulders and yanked her against him. Stale whiskey and his unwashed odor assailed her nostrils. She pushed at him, struggling to break free. But he was too strong for her and his mouth clamped over hers, bruising her lips, his teeth hitting hers.

She fought frantically to get loose, her fists shoving at his chest and shoulders to no avail. He prevented her from escaping his painful clutches. She kept her teeth clamped together against his thick tongue. Jerking back, he raised his hand and hit her cheek hard. She gasped. With one arm closing around her neck in a strangling hold, he grabbed her jaw, his fingers punishing. His mouth hurt her lips as his tongue stabbed deep, gagging her.

She battled him through a haze of terror. He released her jaw, but pain exploded in her breast as he squeezed brutally. She wrenched her body from side to side and kicked at him. He shoved her against the doorframe.

“That’ll be just a sample of what I’ll do to you. Tell him what I said,” he spat, and turned away, heading for the stairs.

Honey panted for breath. Then she staggered inside the room she’d just cleaned. Aunt Dovie kept a bottle of sherry in this room. Honey found it in the dressing table cabinet. Unscrewing the top she took a mouthful and rinsed away the horrible taste Grady left. Then she spit it out in the brass spittoon beside the

door. She wiped her hand across her face, trying to rid herself of the memory of Grady's mouth.

She couldn't prevent Brett from doing his job. It was inevitable he'd go after Grady at her uncle's ranch, but she feared what would happen to Brett.

She mustn't let him go before she told him how she really felt about him. After seeing his hurt and anger, she wanted to relieve that burden from him. She wanted to make up with Brett if possible. He'd need a clear mind to confront Grady and her uncle.



After scrubbing in a bath, and donning clean clothes, Honey went in search of Brett. It wasn't long before she heard the front entrance open and close and his boot steps on the stairs. His confident stride was distinctive. After checking her appearance in her dresser mirror, she made her way upstairs and knocked on his door.

"Yeah?" he answered from across the room.

"It's Honey. I need to talk to you."

His quick boot steps covered the distance to the door in two seconds and he opened it. He gazed down at her.

She searched his eyes and saw hope in them. "I came because I want to make up with you." Before he could say anything she rushed on. "I lied to you about

having a dinner invitation. I'm sorry. I don't know why I said that except I was troubled by our discussion yesterday. I..." How could she tell him what was in her heart when she was standing in the hallway where anyone could overhear? "May I come in?"

He stepped back and gestured for her to enter.

"Thank you. I know you must be angry with me, and probably never want to see me again. But I have to tell you—that I'm very fond of you." She turned to see his response to her brave declaration.

The joy in his face brought tears to her eyes. She hadn't expected him to warm to her ever again.

He let out a big sigh but met her gaze. "Honey, I'm the one who needs to apologize. I selfishly made love to you, took your virginity, even though I couldn't promise you anything. Taking a chance on making you pregnant but afraid to leave you a widow, I was wrong. Can you forgive me?"

"Brett, I..."

He took one stride and enfolded her in his strong arms. "I'm fond of you too, Honey. I have to finish this assignment—and I hope it will end soon. Will you wait for me?"

"Oh, Brett, yes." Tears of joy filled her eyes and overflowed down her cheeks. "I will."

He wiped her tears away with his thumbs. "We'll have time to get to know each other better, after this job is done."

"I'll look forward to it." She looked into his eyes and smiled.

He lowered his head and took her lips with his, softly at first and then more firmly. She parted her lips and their tongues met. They stroked every sensitive surface of the warm, moist interiors. Finally she broke the kiss. "Make love to me, Brett."

His eyes warmed as he unbuttoned her blouse and pushed it off her shoulders. She shivered beneath his intense gaze. Quickly, he dispensed with every piece of her clothing and swept her into his arms, lowering her to his bed. Then he tore off his clothing. His aroused member jutted, thick and hard.

He joined her, snugging her into his side and covering her legs with one of his.

She touched his face and smoothed her fingers through his hair. She wanted to touch him all over and hug him close, never let him go. The thought of him not coming back made her anxious. She wanted him inside her. Wanted to be one with him. Absorb him so he'd never leave her side.

"Brett, if something happens, I want you to know..."

"Hush." His lips brushed over hers and then he ravaged her mouth, demanding she respond. She tilted her hips against his erection and lost herself to heated aches deep in her belly.

He seared a trail with his mouth across her cheek and down her neck. Leaning back to cup her breast in his hand, he tweaked the rigid nipple. She arched her back, offering herself to him. He didn't disappoint her, and took first one nipple and then the other into his mouth, then smoothed his moist lips and tongue lower to her waist and finally to her curls. His warm breath caressed her. He parted her most sensitive flesh with his fingers and tempted her with soft kisses.

"Do you like that?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, breathless. She wanted him between her legs.

He smiled at her, and with a soft growl, he nestled between her thighs, but not close enough.

"Brett," she rasped, "I want you..."

"Where?" he asked. "Show me where exactly you want me."

She pointed a finger near where she wanted him to stroke her.

"Show me exactly, Honey. Touch yourself."

Oh, God, she was so embarrassed. Slowly she moved the tip of one finger closer to the area where she'd felt the most intense desire at his touch. "Here."

"Here?" he asked, grinning, as he touched his finger to the side of where she wanted him. "Next to your clit?"

"No." *The beast*. He forced her to touch herself in the most intimate way in front of him. Her face flamed as she lowered her finger to her aroused folds, but it

wasn't exactly the right place. She tapped her finger over her moist skin, searching for that most needy spot.

He parted her thighs a little more and bent her knees, all the while intent on watching where her fingers searched. Blushing with fiery heat, she touched the wet entrance to her woman's core but that wasn't exactly it.

"You want me to caress your sheath?"

She shook her head and lightly moved her finger over her moistened nether lips, touching, feeling. Finally she found it, and groaned, the sound low and guttural. "Here. I need you here the most." Triumphant, perspiration covered her.

"Yes, ma'am, I think I can rectify that," he growled, moving upward. "I'll be happy to pay more attention to your clit."

"Clit?" So that's what it was.

"Yeah." But he didn't touch her with his fingers. He took her clit between his firm lips and tweaked it with his tongue.

"Oh my." Her head fell back as she rested on her elbows. All strength left her with the wonderful feeling of fireworks out of control. "Oh, yes." She writhed beneath him, but he didn't stop.

He swirled his tongue over her, stroking lower and delving into her woman's core. She almost came apart. He moved back to that swollen nubbin, while he inserted a finger deep inside her needy flesh. His finger stroked slowly in and out, making her frantic.

The opening to her sheath stretched when he inserted two fingers. He pushed them deep, pressing against that intensely responsive area within. He sucked on her clit relentlessly. A high-pitched cry rose in her throat. He drove her higher, the heated ache between her thighs swelled, causing her to buck as she shivered, her back bowing until she climaxed with exquisite delight. Her convulsions rocked her until they lessened to faint pulsations.

She collapsed on the bed and slowly raised her eyelids to gaze down at Brett, still between her legs. "That was astonishing."

His lips curved up in a satisfied smile.

She held out her arms to him, and he came up over her, positioning himself with his hard erection pressing at the entrance to her sheath.

"I'm not through with you yet. I'm going to slide inside your hot, wet velvet."

Threat or promise, she wanted him. She smiled as the daring thought came to her to use the name for his male member. "I can hardly wait for your cock to fill me."

He grinned, and Honey wrapped her arms and legs around him as he pushed slowly inside her. He groaned, and her arousal increased with each slow thrust. Perspiration mingled, and his scent filled her as the musk of their lovemaking surrounded them. He held her tighter, his body growing wet with sweat as he increased the tempo of his thrusts. When he tensed, she hugged him to her breasts and tilted her hips to take all of him.

From deep in his chest, a feral growl rumbled. The pressure of his surging erection and the spurting of his seed against her womb drove her over the edge a second time.

When she floated back to reality, she felt his body relax. She held tight, loving the weight of him, hating to let him go. They had the remainder of the afternoon and tonight, but she didn't know what tomorrow would bring.

"I love you," she whispered.

He rolled to his side and pulled her tight against him. "You're beautiful," he murmured.

She wished he'd said he loved her too. With her head on his shoulder, one hand on his chest, one leg between his, she prayed she'd have a chance to make that wish come true. Fearing to tell him about Grady's message, she hugged Brett close, afraid of losing him.

Chapter Four

They'd overslept. Honey crept out of bed to dress in broad daylight. Brett roused behind her.

"Come back, sweetheart," came his sleepy rumble.

Oh no. She knew where that would lead. She had work to do even if she wanted to stay in his arms forever. Though she'd much rather return to him for another round of lovemaking, she was a bit tender between her thighs. When the evening light had disappeared into darkness, he'd turned up the lantern and made love to her in warm lamplight. He'd made love to her in ways she'd never imagined possible.

Her sensitized nipples teased her as she pulled her chemise on. He'd made love to her almost as if there were no tomorrow. She turned to study his face. He was relaxed now, watching her like a satisfied man who'd feasted too long.

A sudden frown creased his forehead. "What is that shadow on your left cheek?"

Oh, no. She covered her bruise with her hand. "Nothing."

He climbed from the bed and grabbed her hand. "Let me see."

She let him pull her hand away from the bruise left by Grady the day before.

“How did this happen?” he demanded, his tone stern.

Honey considered lying about it, but figured he’d know she was lying. “I ran into Grady in the hall yesterday.”

Brett’s muscles clenched in his jaw as his hands fisted.

She might as well get this over with. “He tried to kiss me. When I protested, he lost his temper and hit me.”

“Damn him to hell.” Brett spun away from her and grabbed his clothing, yanking it on as she watched in horror.

She might never see Brett again. “No! It’s a trap! Don’t go.”

“Where is he?” He buckled his holster and turned to stare at her, fire in his eyes. “He must have told you where I could find him.”

Oh, Brett. She gripped her hands together as fear stabbed her heart. “He said—he’d be at my uncle’s ranch. He said to tell you to stay away, or he’d be forced to take action and you wouldn’t like what would happen to me afterwards.” She trembled with worry for him.

He spun the cartridge case on his revolver and added a bullet from his belt. “Stay here. Lock the door. Don’t let anyone in until I return.” He grabbed his hat and strode for the door.

She followed him. “Brett! Be careful.”

He turned and covered her mouth with a ravaging kiss, broke away and slipped out the door. “Lock it.”

Honey did as he said, shaking with fear for him. She pressed her back against the door as the loud sound of his booted strides faded. How could she wait here and do nothing? She must not do anything to endanger Brett, but surely it would help to tell the sheriff. She doubted Brett would take the time in his current state of mind.



It was after high noon by the time Brett reached the end of the canyon and the ranch house belonging to Fred Carrington, Honey's uncle. Brett hoped to finish this up with Grady and return to town before nightfall. He tied his horse to the hitching post in front of the house.

The door opened before he reached it. Carrington stepped onto the wood-planked porch with a rifle in his hands. Brett held his hands away from his sides to show he didn't intend to shoot Carrington, although he wouldn't mind smashing the bastard's face in.

"What do you want, Masters? Didn't you get my warning?"

"Where's Grady?"

"He's doing his job, guarding my property," Carrington snarled.

"Carrington, I want Grady now. Point me in his direction and stay out of it. I'll arrest you if you get in my way."

"The hell you will. Get off my land."

“I’ll ask one more time, where is he?”

“Lookin’ for me, Masters?” Grady’s voice came from behind Brett. He had to squint against the afternoon sun to see Grady.

What he saw hit him in the gut and almost knocked him to his knees. Grady held a gun to Honey’s head, her hands tied behind her, a gag over her mouth. They stood at the edge of a cliff fifty yards away overlooking the ranch yard. If she slipped, she’d fall at least thirty feet to the boulders below.

“Let her go, Grady. This is between you and me.”

“Maybe I’ll let her go or maybe I’ll shoot her,” Grady shouted.

His mind focused on Grady and Honey, Brett was still very aware of Carrington’s location behind him. If her uncle decided to back Grady up, Honey’d be in worse trouble. “What do you want?” Brett shouted back.

“I want you out of the way, Masters. But before you leave this earth, I’m going to let you watch while I enjoy Honey. Just like you did for the pack the other day.” He cackled and lowered his hand from Honey’s waist, brushing his fingers over her mound.

Rage filled Brett as he watched her try to squirm away, but she couldn’t fight back on the edge of the cliff.

God damn him to hell! Brett fought back fear for Honey. That wouldn’t help her. Grady was crazy. “We’ll settle this by pack law, Grady. Fight to the death. Winner takes all.” Brett was faster. It was Honey’s best chance.

“So come on, Masters. Just the two of us.”

“Release Honey first.”

“Hell, no. You come here and drop your gun.”

Brett unbuckled his gun belt and holster and draped them over his saddle. Looking around, he noted Carrington had disappeared. Brett ran toward a path that led to the top of the cliff. Under cover of the narrow, curving trail, he started to shed his clothing to shift into his wolf form. By the time he reached the summit, he'd be ready to fight.

Brett would have the advantage if Grady hadn't changed yet.

The raging fury at the sight of Honey in that bastard's clutches started his shift to werewolf, his skin prickling with fire in the onslaught. His body ached all over as if he had the worst sickness, and in a way it was a sickness. At the same time it was a power and confidence so strong it couldn't be of this world.

His shirt loosened as the wolf in him took form. He kicked his trousers and boots away as they tangled around his ankles, snatched his drawers in his already sharp animal teeth to pull them off and toss them away. In his final wolf form, he glanced upward, searching for his prey.

He reached the summit and growled menacingly, his every sense sharp and alert. Grady still held Honey captive. On four feet, Brett stalked closer. Grady forced Honey down flat on her stomach. He unbuttoned his shirt with one hand, holding Honey's hands behind her back.

Her eyes wide with fright, she must think a wolf was about to devour her. She wouldn't be the one devoured.

Two wolves. Grady's change happened so fast that his clothes burst open at the seams. Brett stalked closer. Grady shoved Honey's hands up toward her shoulders, and she screamed. Brett snarled in rage. He wanted to rip out Grady's throat.

"Come any closer, and I'll kill her," Grady growled in his deepening wolf's voice. "Like I killed your folks."

Brett's heart slammed in his chest with Grady's confession. *Grady* was their murderer! Visions of his parents' mutilated and bloody bodies, the fear of Grady doing that to Honey, exploded in Brett's mind.

Raging fury, the cold desire to kill Grady drove Brett into a maddened thirst for Grady's blood. A wild snarl escaped Brett. It grew to a roar. His sight pinpointed the animal he must destroy, the wolf holding Brett's mate captive.

Grady kept a clawed foot on her back, forcing her to stay down. He crouched to attack Brett, but bent and slashed his canines across Honey's wrist.

Her pained cry enraging him, Brett sprang for Grady and knocked him off Honey.

He had to kill Grady fast, or Honey wouldn't have a chance. There was still time to save her. With a deafening snarl Brett launched himself—in his wolf form—at Grady. Their bodies slammed into each other, both of them grappling in

lightning speed for the throat. Brett closed sharp canines on Grady's neck. Blood gushed and splattered in a wide circle. Grady twisted, trying to rip out Brett's throat. Brett held his advantage, kept a death grip on Grady's throat. The bigger wolf yelped and fought, but Brett's jaws were more powerful. Grady slashed Brett's torso with his long claws.

Brett clamped down hard. As blood poured into Brett's mouth, Grady's acrid scent and the taste of his blood mingled. At last, Grady's strength ebbed. Brett's animal sensed death, shook the other wolf like a rag doll, dragged him to the edge of the bluff, and threw him over the side.

Panting, blood dripping down his jaw, Brett finally spun toward Honey. She looked dazed, her eyes wild with fear. He wiped the blood away, crouched down at her side and licked the wound on her wrist. She whimpered but held as still as her shivering body could. Brett knew she felt the burning pain of the wound. His werewolf blood had already started to heal his own torn flesh.

She'd come to mean so much to him in the short time he'd known her, and he wanted to hold her in his arms. His werewolf body began to change as love for Honey flowed through his veins. Black wolf fur disappeared, and his bones took on their human shape once again.

"Brett!" she cried. "I must be going crazy. You're naked! Am I seeing things?"

"No, you're not, Honey." His voice was hoarse still. "I'll explain later. Right now, I need to get you away from here." The change would happen soon for her if

he didn't prevent it. If he could take her somewhere private, no one need ever know what had happened to her.

Suddenly there was an explosion from a rifle below. Honey screamed.

Brett covered her with his body and turned his head searching the area. He couldn't see anyone.

"Kid, you still alive?" her uncle called from the base of the cliff.

Brett crawled to the edge and yelled, "She's fine. We're coming down." He turned back to Honey, trying to keep his voice calm for her. "When we get down there, I want you to ride my horse with me back to town. We have to leave as soon as we mount up. No argument."

"Thank you, Brett. I hate this place. I don't understand all this, but it was the most horrifying moment in my life. I'm never coming back."

"You'll never have to ever again, if I have anything to say about it. Let's go." He swept her into his arms and strode from the scene of battle. When he found his clothing, he lowered her to her feet on the path while he put it back on.

In front of the ranch house, Brett lifted her into the saddle and mounted behind her.

"I'll talk to you later, Carrington," Brett promised. It seemed that Carrington might have at least a smidgeon of care for his own blood. Grady's wolf form lay over a boulder, head a bloody mess. The rifle shot they'd heard was Carrington making sure Grady was dead.

Brett reined his horse toward the road to town and gave him a good nudge with his spurs. "Hang on," he said to Honey.

Halfway back to town, Brett slowed his mount and reined him away from the road. The sun was low in the west. He found a level clearing and dismounted. After helping Honey down, he tied his horse to some brush. Then he escorted Honey to the shadowy side of the thick brush. *How to tell her what he needed to?*

"How's your wrist?"

"It's quit bleeding," she said, her voice shaking.

"Let me see."

She held her hand out to him. He could see it had stopped bleeding.

"What you saw happen on that hill is what happens between werewolves when one challenges the other to a fight to the death. When Grady touched you, his fate was decided. He thought he could best me and take you. I had to prove he couldn't."

She nodded, staring at him with horror filled eyes.

"In the process, he bit you. I didn't see it coming. I wish I could have stopped him, but I couldn't. You'll turn Were if I don't take action now."

"Oh God, why?" she cried. "Will I change into what you became up there?"

"Werewolves don't normally change unless hunting for food, or from rage when provoked. You could change because you've been infected by Grady's bite,

just as I was infected by the bite of one of the renegade werewolves that killed my parents.”

“I don’t want to be a werewolf. I want to be human. I’ll die.”

“No, you won’t die, and you shouldn’t have any reason to become Were. Love for another is the perfect medicine to heal and keep the werewolf nature under control. Making love is part of the healing and prevention. Will you let me make love to you?”

“Oh, Brett. I’m frightened.”

“There’s no need to be afraid, Honey. I’m mostly human and only in extreme situations turn werewolf. Let me make love to you and protect you.”

“But I can’t stop shaking and my skin is all prickly. I think I might cry.”

“Don’t cry, sweetheart.” Brett wrapped his arms around her. He swept her up and felt her arms steal around his neck. She hugged him tight as he sat down and lowered her to his lap. He took off his shirt and spread it on the ground for her head.

After moving her from his lap, he stretched out beside her. He knew her skin was crawling and too sensitive for the usual caresses. But her major pleasure points would be even more responsive than normal from the onslaught of the werewolf venom.

He lowered his head and kissed her. She wrapped her arms around his neck tight as she parted her lips and tangled her tongue with his. He broke the kiss,

unbuttoned her blouse and removed it, loosened her corset and pulled it and her chemise over her head. Finally, he unfastened her skirt. After forming a pillow for her with her blouse and chemise, he untied her drawers and worked them down her legs.

He removed his own clothing and rejoined her, sliding an arm beneath her head. He kissed her again, delving deep, cherishing her sweet taste. Fondling her nipples but not her breasts, he broke the kiss and took a nipple into his mouth, drawing hard on it.

She moaned and writhed with her heightened response. Easing his hand between her trembling thighs, he sought her feminine core. There would be no sweet, slow lovemaking this time.

Her moist flesh welcomed his touch. He slid a finger deep within her. She was ready. Settling between her thighs, he guided his cock into her heated sheath. He groaned as velvet wet heat almost made him come. If he was going to be successful in helping her, he had to wait until she found her release.

He dare not move, the friction would only make her more uncomfortable than she already felt. The pressure of his engorged penis would bring her to climax. He took her nipple in his mouth again, tweaking the pebbled bud with his tongue. Perspiration covered her.

“Brett,” she gasped. “I’m on fire.”

“I’m sorry, sweetheart. Go ahead and scream if you feel like it. No one can hear.” He knew she would cry out when he sucked hard on the bite at her wrist and forced healing fluid into the open cut.

He needed to know the exact moment her climax began in order to lessen the pain. He knew from experience, an orgasm numbed the body to feeling for a long enough period of time to make pain bearable. And with her relaxation afterwards, the memory of it shouldn’t be as traumatic.

Her breathing became labored. He reached between their bodies and pressed down on her clit. She bucked, causing his erection to swell even more.

She gave a high-pitched moan that didn’t stop but rose. If he healed her, it had to be now. He took her nipple between his teeth and squeezed and tugged. She cried out and her back bowed. Her orgasm taunted him with the first contraction. He pulled out of her and took hold of her wrist.

Closing his mouth over the wound, he sucked hard, drawing blood and Grady’s poison from her. Brett spit out the evil poison until his mouth was clean. Then he closed his lips over the wound and blew his healing Were saliva into it.

Raising on his hands, he watched her beloved form writhe with her climax. The setting sun bathed her beautiful ivory skin in color, almost golden, like her hair. Her body rocked with the prolonged orgasm and her arms wrapped across her breasts.

At last, she rested and looked at him. He caressed her arms. She arched her back and closed her eyes at his touch. When she looked at him again, he thought he detected a smile. He smiled back. "You're so brave, Honey."

He continued to stroke her. "I love you so much." He gathered her in his arms and sat down with her in his lap. She took a deep breath and relaxed as she closed her eyes.

Her long silky hair glided over his nakedness, tormenting Brett as it surrounded her like a curtain. Her hairpins sparkled in the sand. He rocked her in his arms and feathered kisses over her face.

"Brett, thank goodness you came to my rescue." She drew in a deep breath and looked down, checking her wrist.

She was taking this well. *Thank God she'll be all right.* She laughed with a little giggle. "I'll have to make sure to wash my clothes tomorrow so no one will wonder where I've been."

Brett found his handkerchief in his trousers and wrapped it with care around her wound.

She watched his hands as he worked. "Brett, why did Grady kill your parents?"

Brett thought of the night that became a living hell. He grimaced. "My parents owned a cattle ranch near the Medina River. It was calving time. The ranch hands reported seeing on more than one occasion a pack of wolves chasing

the cows, who'd given birth, away from their newborn calves. Then the wolves carried off the calves. My dad ordered the men to round up all his cattle and bring them in to ranch headquarters in order to guard them.

“One of the newborn calves had lost its mother to the wolves before the ranch hands could stop them. My mom insisted that calf be brought to the house for feeding.”

Brett smiled at the memory. “She fixed up a bottle with some sort of contraption that was like a mama cow’s tit, and that hungry calf took to it and finished every last drop. We put the calf in the barn with an easygoing draft horse we used for the wagon. I had a mongrel dog I’d named Red who was always by my side. He even slept on my bed, but he decided that little calf needed him, I guess. He left my room to sleep in the barn with the calf. I missed Red. Had a hard time getting to sleep.”

“How old were you?”

Brett swallowed the lump in his throat and looked into Honey’s wide green eyes. She blinked and he noticed moisture at the corners, reflecting in the pale light of dusk. “I was twelve, not yet a man but old enough to work alongside my dad and the ranch hands.”

“How did the calf like his new home?”

Brett smiled. “My mom fed that hungry little thing every time he bawled for more.”

“He must have grown fast with such good care.”

When Brett paused, Honey said tentatively, “What happened?”

Brett swallowed again and continued. “The wolves showed up at dawn the next day. When my dad saw how many there were, he sent me and one of the ranch hands to our neighbors to get help. I think really he sent me to get me out of danger. The wolves were relentless and the cattle were nervous. They milled around the corral. Some of them tried to break out or jump over the corral rails. It was dangerous work protecting them.”

“Your father must have loved you very much,” Honey murmured.

“We were a close family. I was their only child.”

“I was an only child too.” She rested her hand on his arm. “Were you able to get help?”

“When we returned with the few men our neighbors could spare, it was full dark. We smelled smoke. We urged our mounts faster, even though it was dark. When we saw red flames coming from the barn, we headed straight for it. I didn’t question that no one was around, that there was no bucket line formed from the well. I jumped from my horse and ran inside the barn to see if the animals were out.”

His voice roughened with the memory. “The flames at the other end gave enough light that I could see and fight through the smoke. The stall door was

open, the draft horse was gone and so was the calf, but my dog..." Brett stopped, uncertain if he could continue.

Honey squeezed his arm, and Brett met her tear-filled gaze.

"My dog was dead, torn apart, lying in a pool of blood."

"Oh, Brett," Honey whispered. "Your parents? Where were your parents and the ranch hands?"

Brett blinked away hot moisture in his eyes and cleared his throat. "The ranch hand who'd gone with me that day, Darrel Smith, dragged me out of the barn. When I caught my breath, I ran to the house. He tried to stop me, yelled at me to come back. But I wouldn't listen. I tore through the open front doorway. It was dark inside the house except for faint lantern light coming from the kitchen. I couldn't see clearly and I tripped over my dad's body in the living room."

Honey gasped. "Brett!"

He gazed toward the last of the evening light in the west. "When I realized he was dead," Brett rasped, "I yelled out to my mother. There was only silence. The ranch hand, Darrel, told me not to go in there when I turned toward the kitchen. I broke away from his grip and raced to the kitchen. The lantern light was faint, but it revealed my mother lying on the floor by the back door. Her dress was torn and covered with her blood."

Honey clasped his arm tighter.

“I knelt beside her and realized she was still alive. I yelled for help. She opened her eyes and looked at me. She said ‘I love you, Brett. Never forget.’ Darrel came in and she looked at him and told him her son was now ranch boss. Darrel nodded his head in agreement and promised her he’d see to it. He asked who attacked them, and she said, ‘Monsters, wolf men.’

“I told her we’d get the doctor, but she said she didn’t need him. She asked me where Dad was.” Brett looked down at Honey’s hand on his arm. “I had to tell her that he was dead. She didn’t say anything, just looked up at me, her eyes revealing all the pain of knowing Dad was dead. It was then her eyes filled with tears. She whispered how much she loved me, how proud she was of me, and-- then--she was gone.”

Brett rubbed his forehead, ran a hand over his eyes. “At that moment, I wished that the monsters, whatever they were, had killed me too. I swore to God then and there that I’d find the monsters who’d killed my mom and dad, and make certain they met their end.”

He paused again, a haunted look on his face. “I raced from the house, determined to find the killers before daylight.”

“But how could you follow them in the dark?”

“They’d left a dark trail of blood from whatever animals they’d killed and carried away. The moon was nearly full, and I tracked them. I found one of them before my ranch hand could catch up. I know how crazy it was, but I was beyond

reason with grief, and I attacked the devil at his campfire. I held onto his neck. He made a ferocious noise and changed from human to Were as I tried to strangle him.”

“Oh, Brett!”

“It was a monster, just like my mom had said. He forced me off and slashed my arm and back with his canines before he fled into the shadows. Then Darrel and the other ranch hands caught up with me and took me home. Except -- everything that had made it home was gone.”

“How horrible for you.” Honey wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him, pressing her tear-streaked face against his. “I’m so sorry.”

Brett hugged her back. “The ranch hands treated my wounds and they healed quickly, but none of us knew what the bites had done to me. I never gave up searching for the killers. A few years later, when I followed a lead and tracked down two of the rogue werewolves who had killed my parents, the rage inside me brought on my Were form for the first time.”

“You must have been horrified.”

“No, as a matter of fact, the power it gave me made me thankful for it.”

“Was Grady one of them?”

“He said today that he was. How else would he have known about it? But when he threatened you, his fate was sealed.”

“Are they all dead now?”

“Yeah. Grady was the last one alive.”

Honey wiped her teary eyes. “Is that why you became a Ranger?”

“Yeah. When I was old enough to leave the ranch on my own, I decided that being a Ranger would help me search for the Weres. I wanted to bring criminals to justice, but I wanted those werewolves too.”

“What happened to your parents’ ranch?”

Brett took a deep breath. “The ranch is doing well under Darrel’s care. He’s still my faithful foreman.” He was finally able to smile. “All I ever wanted was to return there once I found all the rogue werewolves who killed my folks.”

“What about the assignment you have right now?”

“That’s finished as of today.”

“Are you going to leave right away?” Her voice sounded shaky.

Brett jerked his gaze to her face and smiled at her. “Yeah. Let’s go home.”

“Home?” she asked, her eyes wide.

“Well, my bedroom at the hotel for now. But in a few days, if you’ll marry a retired Ranger who is sometimes a werewolf, go with me to live at the ranch my parents left me.”

“Oh, Brett.”

“Will you marry me, Honey?” His voice was rough with emotion. “I want to spend my life with you.”

“Yes, I’ll marry you.”

“I’ll love you forever,” he said and lifted her to her feet.

“I love you, Brett. I hope you never need to be a werewolf again, but if it happens you do, it’s all right with me.”

She wrapped her arms around his neck, and he lowered his lips to hers, sealing his promise. He stood quietly hugging her for a few moments. Then he helped her shake out her clothing and dress.

The return ride to town was leisurely as Brett told her of his plans for the ranch, and she offered some suggestions.

When they reached town, Brett left her at the hotel to gather some food for their dinner while he returned his horse to the livery stable. He walked back to the hotel, knowing there were outlaws still to be caught and brought to justice, but feeling less anxious to be the one to find them. The need to avenge his parents’ death had died with the death of Grady.

Brett decided someone else could take up the hunt for any other outlaws. He had a woman waiting for him to love.



Honey placed the cold food on the dressing table in preparation for Brett’s return. The brass tub was half-full. She’d add more hot water when they needed it from the two kettles she’d carried up the stairs. There was only room in the tub for

one of them at a time. But she thought she could wait that long before making love with Brett.

She'd never truly believed she'd find a man who would give her the home she dreamed of. But now she knew without a doubt that Brett was that man. He'd protected her and cherished her. She loved him more than she'd ever thought possible to love anyone. She'd learned so much from him in the past days, she wanted to show him her love.

A knock on the door and his soft, resonant voice announced his return. She opened the door for him. He took her in his arms and kissed her soundly, closing the door behind him.

She broke the kiss. "Did you finish your business?"

"Sure did. Sent my notice of retirement to Ranger headquarters. On the way over here I ran into Sunny and Blackie and told them about Grady. Now they're heading for the next town, hoping no one remembers them hanging out with him."

"What about you? You were with Grady," Honey said.

"Being a Ranger protects me from any suspicion," he said, grinning.

"I'm glad to hear it," she said, smiling. "I have some food put together for us and then we can each have a bath."

"Hmm. How about we have a bath first and then eat?"

"Well, I don't see why not. If I swoon from starvation you can revive me with a kiss." She gave him a mischievous smile. Crossing to the opposite side of the

room near the tub, she began unfastening her clothing. She noticed Brett started taking his clothes off too. She tossed hers over the dressing table bench.

“Would you like to go first?”

He gestured toward the tub. “Ladies first, ma’am.”

She stepped into the tub and moaned at the warm caress of the water. “That feels so good.”

“As good as this?” he asked, and leaned down to cover her lips with his. He explored every crevice of her mouth before breaking the kiss.

She sighed with satisfaction. “No, not as good as that kiss,” she assured him. She reached for the washcloth and soap and began to bathe herself, careful to keep the clean bandage covering her wrist out of the water.

“Here, let me,” he said, and taking the cloth from her proceeded to smooth it over every inch of her. She was moaning with pleasure by the time he was finished. He helped her from the tub and dried her with one of the large towels she’d brought upstairs.

“Why don’t you eat while I wash off,” he suggested.

“I think that’s a good idea. I’m famished.” While she ate, she watched him bathe as he rubbed the soapy cloth over his lean, strong muscles, even washed his hair. He rinsed it and squeezed it out then shook it, sending a fine spray of droplets across the room.

She laughed softly when a few drops landed on her face. *It feels good to be so carefree.* He stepped out of the tub and grabbed a dry towel.

Honey put down the cup of pudding she'd been enjoying and hurried to help him, anxious to get her hands on him. "Let me." She took the towel from him and smoothed it over his arms and torso. Then she brushed over his twitching cock and started on his legs. The scent of clean man surrounded her, along with a pleasant muskiness. She knelt to reach his ankles and feet.

When she looked up and smiled with the job well done, he stared down at her, his eyes dark with passion, his nostrils flaring. His erection had grown considerably, the skin stretched smooth. She took his hard shaft in her hand, exploring the velvet surface beneath her fingertips as she stroked from base to tip.

Just as he had pleased her woman's center, she wanted to do the same for him. She moved closer and touched her lips to the rounded head. She tasted the salty drop of moisture with her tongue and slid her lips over him, taking him into her mouth.

A growl rumbled deep in his chest. She loved making him groan like that. She swirled her tongue around him and released his shaft. Feathered her fingers up and down the sides to the base, then back to the head, cradling his balls in the fingers and palm of her other hand.

“Honey,” he panted, “I want to be inside you, now.” His hands slipped beneath her arms and lifted her to her feet. He took her lips in a ravaging kiss, swept her up and lowered her to the bed.

She spread her legs and held her hands out in welcome to him.

He climbed onto the bed and nestled between her thighs, entering her, thrusting deep over and over.

Honey moaned with her delight and love for him. He pressed kisses to her breasts, the valley between and finally her nipples. She moaned again when he found her nubbin of greatest rapture and circled it with his thumb, while he thrust inside her once more, bringing the burgeoning ache in her woman’s flesh to the edge of paradise.

Her body arched beneath him and she shivered, her climax carrying her over wave upon wave of powerful contractions. She heard his deep growl of pleasure roar as he joined her, his cock surging, his seed streaming inside her, touching her womb.

As the sweet tension left her, she tilted her hips and wrapped her arms and legs around him, holding him tight against her breasts. “I love you.” He covered her with his big body.

“I love you, Honey.” He brushed his warm lips along the side of her neck and nibbled her earlobe.

She stroked her hands over his broad back and shoulders, smoothing her fingers through his damp hair. “I could stay like this all night.”

“I know I could love you all night. Tonight and every night hereafter.” He rolled to his side and pulled her close against his damp warmth.

Honey stroked her fingertips over his chest and flicked his nipples. “I know you could, but wouldn’t you like something to eat first?” His shaft twitched and swelled.

“I think I’ll start with you,” he growled, and proceeded to nibble and taste her from head to toe.

Heaven. Honey knew that at last she’d truly found heaven.

The End

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Author Bio:

I've always wanted to write. My grandmother's storytelling was an inspiration which was strengthened by my mother reading to me and my siblings almost every afternoon when we were little. I won 2nd place in my first writing contest in grade school. A rebel and risk taker, I love to write all kinds of romance and have explored contemporary, western historical, and shapeshifter genres spiced with sinful pleasures. There's a rhythm to writing that is very much like music. For the stories I want to share, finding just the right words offers an exciting challenge and provides endless pleasure. I'm often surprised by the characters who want their adventures told. There's always unfinished stories waiting in a file drawer of my desk. Even now, they're spurring me on to discover even more exotic stories. I can hardly wait. So escape with my characters for a little while and enjoy the adventure!

