

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



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Rayne Dance

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RAYNE DANCE

Mlyn Hurn

Prologue

The files had finally arrived. Shannon Riedel, head of the Psychic Sensory Investigations Agency stared at the computer screen with a sense of resignation. The email cover letter said it all. File contained. Information, re: The Elementals. Executive clearance required.

“Computer, open file,” she commanded softly.

“Executive level clearance passcode, please,” the computer asked with its hollow monotone.

She typed in the first part of the code. “Pass code: Dream walker, seventh order, warrior rights. Zebra, seven of the sixth key.” The oral passcode gave her level of clearance, the typed code gave a set of number and letters unique to her. The third key was her own unique voice, combined with the infrared eye scan that suddenly activated and her thumb scan from the small pad at the side of the flat keyboard.

She waited only seconds for the file to open. She felt her chest tighten in remorse when it did. Another death warrant, she wondered? There was nothing she hated worse than preparing evidence against a psychic. If they were psychic.

There were three young women rumored to be Elementals, the grandchildren of Tyre, a demon whose psychic abilities had nearly destroyed the world fifty years past. If these three women truly possessed Tyre’s powers, then there wasn’t a chance in hell she could save them. The Agency would demand their execution. Unless their powers could be neutralized by the PSI agents. Which was rare. Very rare.

She read through the information, frowning at the brevity of it, the lack of conclusive evidence. If the women held the most feared of psychic powers, then there was little evidence of it. The most damning fact was the evidence that Maile, daughter of the Tyrea, had claimed the girls as her granddaughters, though each child had

carried different surnames. Different fathers? She rubbed at the tension settling in her brow.

Shannon sighed wearily. Psychics had once been a benefit to the world, now any good they could do was immediately reviled for the very power that could accomplish it. The horror of the psychic wars was too well remembered. Many cities within the U.S. were still rebuilding from the rubble that had been left in the wake of the final battle.

It was now Shannon's job, as director of the PSI agents, to evaluate the power the women held and make a determination of life or death to be passed to the Council. No mistakes could be made. She had risen among the ranks to take her seat as Director of the PSI Agency because she didn't make mistakes. And with these three women, her very life would be on the line. If she determined innocents should die, then her conscience would destroy her. But if she allowed such three powerful threats freedom, then the world could pay for her mistake.

She had to move carefully. If their powers could be controlled by the PSI agents, then there was a chance of saving their lives. But only a chance, and only if. She pushed her fingers through the short fall of her black hair and narrowed her eyes. It wasn't feasible to destroy them all. It wasn't humane.

As yet, there was no conclusive proof of psychic power, no reports of the women conspiring or socializing with known or suspected psychics. But, neither had they turned themselves in to the Psy-Guardians as the law required. A mark for them, a mark against them. She bit off a curse as she stared at their pictures once again. They didn't look like rebels or conspirators, but how many of that sort resembled the evil of their plans? Tyre had been one of the most handsome men known to be born. But his soul had been a cesspool of evil.

She drew in a deep breath. She needed more information. She couldn't condemn three women who had done nothing to warrant such extreme measure to death, without first being certain. She would have to send out three agents capable of learning

this information for her. And of course, all restrictions on the ways they gained their knowledge must be lifted. There could be no doubts.

Chapter One

“It was a dark and stormy night.”

Rayne threw the mystery novel across the room. It was too damned hot to be inside reading, especially since power usage was still so closely monitored since the end of the psychic war. Walking back to where her book had landed, Rayne picked up the maligned text carefully. Books were an expensive commodity these days, as was just about everything, unless you happened to be gainfully employed and non-psychic. Going over to her front door, she looked outside through the screen.

“Bullshit! I’d give just about anything if it was a stormy anything.”

Rayne walked outside and over to where her well had been successfully drilled a few years ago. She was luckier than many of the small farms around her. Her plants were still growing healthily, which was primarily due to her daily watering schedules. The buckets she filled twice a day and toted sometimes half a mile, took an hour to fill some days. By the time she finished filling them, the sun would be low enough in the sky for her to begin watering.

Finally, she had enough water to begin. Picking up two of the buckets, Rayne started the slow walk to the most distant of her precious plants. There was a watering can at different points along the path where she could fill them to water several rows and avoid carrying the buckets as far each time. Beginning with the first row, Rayne wondered how her sisters were getting along. That was one of the things about watering her delicate herbal plants and floras with a bucket—it gave her lots of free time to think.

The year was 2150. Since his assumption of power in 2048, Tyre Leyton had ruled with an iron “psychic” fist. He had established a system of overlords, who ruled over large cities, or regions. These overlords followed Leyton’s laws, which were passed by

his selected legislators. The psychic overlords that the rebels finally defeated had destroyed what was once a unified world economy, using their paranormal ability to dominate the globe and control resources for their own greedy use. While the top overlords centralized the world government in the North American continent and lived in splendor, the rest of the world's nations had to use profits from their GNP to pay for such necessities as water.

The overlords had systematically destroyed as much infrastructure of the North American continent as they could when they knew they were about to lose to the rebels. Since the peace accord, most of the world had been striving to rebuild the heaviest damaged areas during the Final War of 2100. Rayne worried about her two sisters when her hands were busy, leaving her mind free to worry. While she was unaware of her sisters' exact locations other than which state each lived in, it was probably wisest for their safety.

Moving on to the next row, Rayne realized that she had not heard from either of her sisters for over a year. She couldn't help but resent the fact that they had to be separated for their protection. And sometimes she wondered if living in such isolation was worth the supposed safety it provided.

Rayne had finished the second row and now needed more water. It was getting darker and soon there would be no light at all. She hated watering in the dark. It seemed like she was always taking a wrong step and slipping in the shallow mud. Many times she returned home covered in mud. She resumed the watering as quickly as possible, reminding herself to focus on the plants, not her family or friends.

Of course, she missed her grandparents and often wished she could return to be with them once again. She didn't, though, because to do so could expose Maile and herself to detection by the government's police force designed exclusively to investigate, track and, when necessary, remove psychic citizens. Maile had sensed the three young girls' powers early on and secretly trained them. But she had come upon them once practicing a ritual that went back so far no one was completely sure of its

origin. It took great concentration, and it was assumed that only equal psychics could truly accomplish such psychic connections successfully. Rarely was there more than one psychic child born into a family. But with the girls' history of direct psychic lineage, one could only guess at their true powers.

Rayne shook her head, hating to remember the fear in her grandmother's face when she had found them that day. Along with the fear came the pain of being forced to leave her grandparents forever. Her sisters had seemed to understand better, or they were just better at concealing their pain at leaving the only home they had ever known. Unfortunately, she didn't know exactly where either one was but sometimes the urge to find them was almost irresistible.

* * * * *

Rayne was dead tired as she made her way back toward her house. She still would have to make something to eat for her menagerie of pets. From the look of the dry earth, she might have to water during the night once again. Just the thought of that made her groan out loud.

"Good evening."

Rayne would have jumped out of her skin if she could. The deep masculine voice shocked and surprised her, coming from her front porch as it had. Obviously a visitor had made himself comfortable waiting for her. Abruptly, she stopped a few feet from the steps.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" Rayne snapped at the unseen stranger. It was pretty much unheard of for newcomers to move into the area. Therefore, newcomers—strangers—were usually viewed with suspicion. Almost everyone farmed land and some raised animals as well. A stranger in the area stuck out like a sore thumb and word spread quickly about them.

"When you saw no one was home you should have left!" she accused him with her next breath. Her heart was racing, especially since she couldn't see him. It took several

deep breaths before she calmed enough to “turn on” her psychic abilities. Despite the darkness, she had already guessed he was alone.

Suddenly there was the strike of a match and it flared brightly in the cooling darkness. Rayne blinked quickly, trying to focus on him in the small flicker of light. As she watched, he lit a pipe and took several long draws on it. The sweet redolent scent wafted through the air toward her. Smoking of any kind was pretty much wiped out these days. There were still kids who thought it was fun to smoke marijuana just to try it. But pipe smoking had become something only the very wealthy could afford. Tobacco had to be imported from South America, and since the war, prices had continued to skyrocket.

The flare from the match also served to momentarily highlight the stranger’s face. He glanced in her direction and the man’s startling hazel-colored eyes struck Rayne as quite unusual. His face looked sculpted and tanned. He came to his feet and was highlighted from the light behind him, inside the house. There was no missing his broad shoulders, tapering to narrow waist and hips. Something about this man was setting alarms off in her head, her psychic consciousness and her stomach. She couldn’t deny that butterflies were beating like crazy and she still had not yet seen the man clearly. In the light, he might be downright irresistible —

Rayne stumbled at the first step of her porch. When she could get a better look at her visitor, he would also be able to see her more clearly. Tonight she had seemed to be particularly klutzy. She felt like one big mud pie.

The stranger crossed towards her quickly, extending his hand to her. Rayne pulled her hand away from the wooden handle bar, not completely sure that touching him would be a wise idea. She wasn’t sure whether her reticence came from a desire not to get him muddy, or was it something deeper and more elemental that was sending warning signals to her brain. Her grandmother had told her once that some people could sense a psychic just by touching them. Maybe she could buy herself some thinking time by sending him into the small living room and she’d sneak around back,

rinse off and then dart upstairs to do a decent clean up. Showing him her muddy hands, she spoke again.

"Sorry, I'm all muddy. If you want to go in...wait! Who are you and why are you here?" she added quickly, belatedly realizing that she was being much too accepting. Living in the small, easy-going rural area was definitely affecting her level of caution and usual alertness.

"I am Sean McDougal. I've heard nothing but compliments about your farming techniques and how you seem to be able to grow the healthiest plants in spite of the drought. I wanted to meet the lady with the green thumb."

"My thumbs are normal and why are you interested?" Rayne asked him promptly. Everything he had said was true. All the farms around her had come to see what she was doing differently. Her neighbor, the Jackson's oldest son, had even come several times to help her water since he'd first visited with his father.

"I just purchased the Scott farm."

"Oh," Rayne answered quickly. "My neighbor's son had mentioned last month that the place had finally sold. If you want to go in and sit down, I'll join you in a few minutes. And if you wouldn't mind going into the kitchen first and flipping on the outdoor light I would appreciate it. Thanks," she added before taking off around the side of the house.

* * * * *

Sean watched the woman scamper away into the darkness before he went inside to follow her instructions. Flipping on the outside light, he could hear water running. Unable to resist, he quietly moved out the back door, following the noise. As he came upon the pool of light, he felt like he had been gut punched. Standing under a running outdoor shower, a young woman clad only in a white, armless T-shirt and cotton panties stood, getting completely drenched to the skin. To the side he saw the outline of jeans and what looked to be another shirt tossed aside.

His eyes moved over her body slowly. He knew looking at her was only going to raise her barriers even more once she saw him. But there was no way in hell he could turn away from the soaking wet woman in front of him. As he stared, her arms lifted and her hands sleeked her long, waist-length hair back from her face. This lifted her breasts beneath the wet and clinging shirt, highlighting her hard nipples. Those breasts looked the perfect size for his hands. And her nipples promised to tease his tongue once he captured the taut bud in his mouth.

He could still leave silently. She had not yet seen him or sensed that he was even there. That did surprise him since she was supposed to be psychic —

It was too late a moment later. She was now facing him and her eyes had opened slowly. Taking a moment to focus, there was no effort on her part yet to cover her body. Sean, being male, took advantage and looked down at the apex of her thighs, concealed only by the thin, cotton fabric—now wet and nearly see-through. Expecting to see a lush, black forest or even a trimmed bushy garden, Sean was surprised to see flesh and the indentation of —

Abruptly Rayne turned away, turning off the water. She walked the few steps and picked up her clothes. Sean could see the tension in her face and opened his mouth to apologize.

“No, please, Mr. McDougal. Don’t say anything. I think you should leave, though.” Rayne took a step past him, not lifting her eyes to meet his.

“I apologize. I heard the water and I didn’t think —”

“It’s all right. Please, just go, though!”

Sean nodded slowly, reluctantly starting for his truck. “I’d like a chance to talk with you —”

Rayne shook her head. “Please go!”

Sean decided that retreat would be best at this point. He had obviously embarrassed her, and to continue might only serve to alienate her. The last thing he needed was anything that would hinder his final investigation for the Psychic Sensory

Investigations Agency. Walking around her house to where he'd parked his vehicle, he admitted that he was grateful to finally be getting out. He was sick and tired of using his psychic ability to track innocent people down, and possibly destroy the life they and their families had made.

Driving back toward the large farming concern he'd purchased, Sean knew that he was possibly luckier than his fellow agents were. Thanks to his father's foresight and cleverness with money and investments, he had money to purchase land and start a new life...completely divorced from the Agency. In the early years following the war, he believed that the Agency and its policing agents were needed to track remaining psychics still loyal to the Leyton legislature and its overlords.

Unfortunately, some of the agents Sean had run across during his time with the Agency didn't quite agree with the views of the new government administration plan for tolerance. The goal, these days, was to identify and track psychics. The hope was to prevent the past from recurring and show that all people can live together peacefully.

One of the greatest problems was that some people still thought all psychics were evil and that they wanted to rule over all non-psychics. The pervading belief was that psychics could read anyone's mind, which naturally leads to fear. Sean had been taught almost from his first conscious thought to master his powers so he had complete control, not the powers. After college he had been looking for some excitement and danger, and ended up crossing paths with a PSI agent, Trevor Thomas, who had then recruited him.

His recruiter was now a department head of the Agency and working hard to get programs to educate about psychics and what kinds of talents and abilities they can have. Trevor believed that only through education could society achieve healing as a people. With education would come understanding, acceptance and tolerance, and hopefully would lead to friendship. When Sean had told Trevor he was leaving, he'd been offered several interesting management-level positions. Sean refused because even though it had been the excitement that had drawn him in the first place, he was tired of

the subterfuge and delving into people's pasts. The last few years everyone he'd investigated had been harmless.

"Harmless" for psychics meant the individual was a level three or less. Tyre Leyton had been a five, and most of the overlords had been recorded, or speculated to be level four. Sean had tested to a level four when he joined the Agency, but since he was working with them he was perceived not to be a threat. And over the last few years, the remaining psychics from Leyton's time were living peacefully with the new government in power and were closely monitored. Many were aging or their grandchildren suffered from a chemical dependency to the drugs some of the overlords had used to enhance their powers.

Sean had been instrumental in bringing down the largest known band of psychic holdouts to date. Several of the men he had become friends with over the years through the Agency had infiltrated the band until they could gather enough information to know the location of them all and finally arrest them for re-integration into society. If it appeared after several years of conditioning therapy the person could not be safely reintroduced into the public, a permanent incarceration would occur.

Chapter Two

Sean stopped thinking about the past as he turned down the gravel road that ended at his farm. Pulling the truck to the side of the house, he turned off the ignition. As he climbed from the cab of the truck, he could hear the barking of the two dogs he had gotten as a bonus with the purchase of the farm.

A moment later the two large multi-colored, mixed breed dogs were there to greet him. Squatting down, Sean gave each of them a few pats and rubs.

“Keep that up and they’ll be putty in your hands, Sean.”

Sean stood and saw his sister, Colleen, standing on the wrap-around porch of the house. She had her arms crossed but they were resting on her big belly. Her thick auburn hair had been cut short since they’d moved here, making it easier for her to care for. Her green eyes were usually smiling and she wasn’t afraid of the sun, as evidenced by the freckles sprinkling her cheeks and forearms. Sean’s hair was several shades darker than Colleen’s and his skin tanned easily. Whenever they were together, people always guessed they were siblings.

“Shouldn’t you be sitting down somewhere with your feet in the air?” Sean asked as he walked toward the front of the house to join her. As he started up the front porch steps, another voice answered him.

“I believe it was that position which got her into—”

“Bob!” Colleen admonished her laughing husband, ignoring the grin on her brother’s face. Pretending she was not blushing, she sat on the porch swing beside him. As she adjusted into a position of comfort, she could hear her younger brother joining her husband in the laughter. “Keep this up much longer and the two of you will be cooking your own meals.”

Bob stopped immediately. "I'm sorry, darling. Have I told you how lovely you look today?"

Colleen ignored her husband's belated attempt to smooth things over as she replied, "No, but you had best continue to tell me several more times today to make this feeble attempt at sucking up work."

Sean laughed and sat down on the top step. The dogs lay down near enough hopefully to get an occasional pat or rub. As he relaxed and started to enjoy the fact that he was a farmer, his sister interrupted his thoughts.

Colleen spoke softly. "How did your little trip work out for you tonight?"

Sean frowned as he turned to glare at his sister. "Who told you about my visit to the neighbor's?"

"I did," Bob answered sheepishly. "This woman should be working for the police. She could interrogate anyone."

Sean laughed and shook his head. "Just you, Bob. And you sound like you knew all along things would not go as I had planned."

Colleen shrugged. "Call it a woman thing, if you insist. But I was pretty sure that you couldn't just walk up to Rayne and get her to tell you her deepest secrets. Why should she in the first place? She has all the 'gentlemen farmers' knocked on their collective asses by how well her small farm is doing. Did she laugh in your face when you asked for her secret recipe?"

Sean glared at his sister. "Let's just say that I'll need to try again."

"What happened?" Bob added.

Sean knew that his brother-in-law was curious to know why the lone lady farmer was the talk of the town. The gratitude Colleen and Bob felt that Sean had hired him to work as his foreman here was unnecessary in his opinion. Bob had worked on different farms and ranches since his teen years. The last fifteen had been as manager or foreman, and since coming here he'd expressed his desire to make this place the most successful

in the area. Between this place and the tiny concern bearing the name of “Green Gardens” there was really no accurate basis for any comparisons.

His trip to “Green Gardens” had only come about because he had received a visit from a neighbor—a fellow rancher and farmer—and his son. Upon his retirement, which his superiors had not wanted to accept, he had shared his plans. “One last assignment” was how they had put it. A rumor put a great-grandchild of Tyre Leyton in the area of his new home. The report had only recently been filed and they needed it checked out. Reluctantly Sean had agreed. This evening he had planned on filing his report through the secure uplink his computer still maintained with the Agency. In spite of his observances and subtle conversations, he had not found anyone that had required further investigation.

Yet this afternoon, walking Ralph Tandy and his son back to their truck, Bob had struck up a conversation about a particular kind of fertilizer, so he had deliberately held back and soon he was strolling more slowly with Billy, Ralph’s teenaged son.

The young man was in high school and obviously worked out, so Sean had asked if he was participating in sports. It had seemed like a safe topic. The sad look that covered his face told Sean he’d made a mistake. Quickly, as the kid was shaking his head, Sean asked him something else.

“What do you do with your free time?”

Billy’s grin had flashed so quickly Sean wasn’t sure he’d seen it. “I’ve been helping Ms. Waters lately.”

“Helping her with what, Billy?”

Billy had stopped walking, glancing toward his father. He grinned at Sean. “Just around her place. She’s alone there and I thought she might appreciate a helping hand.”

Sean had looked at the kid’s face and he had known that Billy was keeping all of this from his father. “She’s an older lady and you’re helping her out,” he had offered, thinking that teen boys must be getting nicer. When he was seventeen, helping elderly women would have been nonexistent in his scheme of things.

There had been no mistaking Billy's grin as he winked at Sean. "She's twenty-five and I'm hoping to help myself into her hot little shorts."

Sean had tried to hide his surprise, but he'd known he'd failed as Billy's grin widened. "I've heard older women are the best! You don't have any of the bullshit girls my age want to hand out. I imagine a few more times of helping her carry water and so on will have her ready to strip naked and fuck in the garden!"

"Hey! Billy! We need to get going."

Sitting on the porch now there wasn't a single doubt in his mind that Ms. Waters had the hottest body he'd seen in quite some time. As he'd stared at her firm full breasts and rounded ass revealed by wet knit material, he could see exactly why Billy was falling all over himself to help the lady. He easily replaced the scenario that had been replaying in his head that starred Billy banging some older trollop. It was now his naked body joining her in the cold water, and his hands running eagerly over her wet flesh, shoving clothes out of his way.

"Sean!"

"What? Sorry, Colleen. I didn't hear you."

"I'm aware of that. Do you want me to reheat your dinner? If not, I'm going to bed so I can get an early start for tomorrow."

Sean paused for a moment to ponder his sister's words, but then decided he couldn't have missed too much. "Go to bed, Colleen. I can forage for myself, and thanks."

He sat quietly thinking about the beautiful Rayne Waters. His attraction was powerful, yet he still knew that he would check a little closer before he could explore anything at all with the seductive siren he'd observed tonight.

* * * * *

Sean came down the broad staircase reluctantly. He was dressed in a suit to satisfy his sister's demands. It didn't make any sense why Colleen was insisting on all of them

dressing up for dinner tonight. He paused for a moment at the foot of the stairs as he heard voices coming from the living room. Since moving in here, the only time Colleen had made them use the living room before had been when their parents had come for a visit.

Stepping into the room a moment later, he understood his sister's odd behavior. The woman he had seen nearly naked and who had starred all night long in one after another of his erotic dreams was now seated on the sofa his parents had insisted on buying him during their visit. Her black silky hair was caught up into a haphazard knot, leaving tendrils of hair across her neck and ears. As she turned to see what her hostess was looking at, Sean realized she was wearing a pale pink dress. The cloth was cotton, and probably not considered sexy by most. Obviously they had not seen the soft material draping over this lady's curves.

"Oh, good! Here's my brother now, Rayne." Colleen walked toward Sean and linked her arm with his. "He never seems to remember what time supper is."

Sean kept his eyes glued to his guest as she slowly turned. There was not the surprise in her eyes that he had expected. Perhaps his sister had only kept him in the dark about their guest.

"Hello, Ms. Waters," Sean spoke softly. He watched as her eyes looked away from his gaze as she spoke.

"Good evening, Mr. MacDougal. I accepted your sister's invitation to save you from coming back to my place."

Sean started to offer his hand but she had already turned back toward his sister. He let his hand fall to his side as he listened to her speaking to Colleen.

"Thank you again for your kind request."

Sean watched as the raven-haired woman resumed her seat on his sofa, smiling as Bob joked about his wife's cooking. He had wanted to touch her hand, he realized with a jolt of surprise. Deciding he needed a drink, he turned toward the drinks cabinet in the living room.

"Would anyone care for a refill?" he asked as he poured himself a shot of bourbon. Pausing, he considered tossing that one back and refilling his glass. It only took a moment for him to conclude he needed all of his faculties this evening.

Colleen called out to him from across the room. "No thank you, Sean. Rayne and I are having tea."

Before he could turn away, his brother-in-law was at his side. "Pour me one like that, Sean. I have a feeling this is going to be a long evening."

Sean frowned and glanced at Bob while he poured the requested drink. Passing it to him, he asked softly, "What makes you say that?"

Bob took a quick drink before he spoke. "Don't take this the wrong way, Sean. I love Colleen and I never...well, hardly ever, look at another woman. But sitting across from that woman is going to be tough! She is so fucking hot!"

Sean stared at his brother-in-law in disbelief. Bob fell into that classification of the "never stray" kind of husband. It was totally out of character for him to even make a comment like that. Looking at Bob, with his slightly thinning brown hair, Sean guessed that women would probably still find him attractive. Quickly, he opted to skip confessing how he had seen their dinner guest last night.

"She is pretty," he muttered as he picked his glass up to finally take a sip.

"Ack!"

Sean grinned at Bob's response to hearing Sean's words. The look in his brother-in-law's eyes spoke volumes, which was reinforced by his next words. "Pretty! You are either insane, Sean, or you've gone blind."

"Bob! What are you two doing over there?"

Sean watched as his brother-in-law grimaced behind the napkin he used to wipe his mouth a moment before he answered his wife.

"Just getting a drink, honey."

Sean followed Bob, but his gaze was focused on Rayne. She was even more beautiful when seen in good lighting. The dress she wore really did more to conceal than reveal her sensuous figure. Granted, he was comparing it to last night, which wasn't fair to the dress. He walked over and stood at the far end of the sofa where Rayne was seated. As he watched her talking with his sister, he concentrated on trying to perceive as much as possible about her.

The idea that psychics could read minds was only true in some cases. What he did was to open all his senses, focusing on the subject. Channeling all of his energies into his powers, he opened himself to receive whatever output possible. Over the years, Sean had learned that he usually got what he wanted within a few seconds from most people. It took him a moment to realize that the only input he received was coming from Colleen and Bob! Turning his eyes to rest only on his guest, he did something he rarely did...channel all of his concentration and focus on Rayne.

Once, several years back, he and a friend through the Agency went on a camping weekend. After too many beers, his friend, who was a level three psychic, suggested they try their abilities out on one another. Sean had long suspected that his power was greater than level four, but had disguised and not used it for so long that he was stunned to discover that his friend was able to block his efforts. He was equally surprised that he blocked all the tricks his friend had up his sleeve as well. In the cold light of morning, they decided to keep this secret from the Agency.

An alarm sounding drew his attention abruptly back to the present. He saw that Colleen was getting up.

"Dinner is ready."

Rayne quickly set her drink down. "Let me help you, Colleen."

Colleen quickly shook her head negatively. She wiggled her fingers at her husband instead. "Bob will help me. You stay put and we'll call you both when we get everything on the table."

* * * * *

Rayne shifted uneasily on the sofa and picked up her glass. Hurriedly, she took a sip and then another. Suddenly her throat felt dry and seemed to be closing off. She didn't want to do anything else stupid in front of this man. While his eyes had been devouring her last night, she had seen him clearly. His stone-chiseled features, warm hazel eyes and sun-streaked reddish brown hair had struck her immediately with intent, deep and overwhelming desire. The rush of emotion had left her feeling raw and vulnerable. Her reaction had been knee-jerk when she'd asked him a moment later to leave. If she'd been completely honest with herself, she would have admitted that was the last thing she wanted.

This morning, as she first heard Colleen's dinner invitation, her gut reaction had been, "yes!" Then she'd be able to see the handsome man who had sent her normally logical and sensible brain into limbo while her body took over. Last night she'd slept barely one solid hour. Each time she awoke it was with the impression of this man's face in her head. Her heart would be racing and she was completely aware of the fierce need she felt deep inside herself. The last time, at dawn, the erotic dream had still been alive in her mind and easily entered her consciousness.

In the dream, as the water coursed down over her head and shoulders, she had lifted her hands to rub sensually over her breasts. The hard nipples had jutted eagerly in her palms as she pressed and then massaged her big tits. She'd shivered and opened her eyes. Like slow motion, Rayne watched his eyes move down and back up her wet body, thinly veined by the scraps of cotton.

Walking toward her, the handsome man had jerked his shirt off and tossed it aside. Her heart jerked wildly as he stepped under the water with her. One of them took a step forward, or was it his hand touching her arm? A second later their wet bodies pressed tightly together. Wet mouths met and slid against each other. The meeting of their tongues was not a gentle, questing exploration. Hot, fierce and demanding, Sean's

tongue battled with Rayne's. With Rayne caressing his shoulders and neck, Sean cupped his large hands beneath her breasts.

Her groans and her body pressing into his grasp had signaled her eagerness. She had barely noticed when his one hand dropped down and cupped her mound possessively. Rayne eagerly welcomed the fingers that eased under the cotton and massaged her clit. There was no stopping him nor did she want to, as first one, and then two fingers slid easily into her slippery pussy. The curling and pressing of his fingers denoted his level of experience as he had controlled and mastered her motions.

There had been no thought other than acceptance as her body jerked forward into his body the first time. And the contractions and spasms of her cunt around his fingers a few seconds later were unmistakable. Limp and clinging to his shoulders, she'd not said a word as he moved her toward the house. But he wasn't taking her inside. Instead, he had pressed her flat against the side of the house. Standing almost immobile, Rayne had savored the feel of the shivers dancing along her nerve endings while his fingers were no longer resting dormant within her body. The stimulation of her clit had seemed almost too much as she heard dimly the sound of his zipper sliding down.

In her dream, Rayne had lifted her thigh to give him more access to her body. But he was already pushing her tiny panties aside. The thrust of his cock into her body had forced the air from her lungs. Gasping and feeling dizzy, Rayne had wrapped her arms around Sean's neck and held on. Sean's hands were lifting both her thighs as he impaled her with his staff. His last jab had sent another cycle of orgasms through her completely spent body. The only things keeping them upright were his strong, muscular thighs.

As the sky turned pink, Rayne knew the wetness between her thighs had only been her body's juices. Sitting on the side of the bed, she'd reluctantly acknowledged that it quite easily could have been his cum leaking out of her right now. Never before had she felt such intense reactions, asleep or awake. The intensity frightened her more than the

fact that even though it was only a dream, she'd not given any thought to the fact he was a stranger, unknown, and had totally forgotten about using a condom!

Rayne sipped her tea eagerly, needing to cool herself and calm her emotions. A flush stained her cheeks, though, as she recalled what was in the pocket of her dress right now. During the heat of the afternoon, she'd gone into town and purchased, for the first time ever...condoms! She'd been so embarrassed, not really knowing what kind to buy. Still, none of that had stopped her from completing the purchase and putting one in each pocket of her dress. Telling herself she was being foolish, Rayne had walked the one-mile path between their properties.

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"I am sorry for last night."

Rayne looked up into Sean's hazel-colored eyes. The desire she'd felt last night, and all through the daylight hours today, came rushing through her once again. Her breath caught in her chest as she realized how strong it was with him so close. He had walked silently to stand less than three feet from the sofa, directly in front of her.

"My mother would wonder what happened to the little gentleman she raised."

Rayne had to smile at his words. She didn't doubt his sincerity. But this self-deprecating humor only heightened her attraction. A moment later, without warning, her body reacted to the image that popped into her consciousness. It was from her dreams. Sean had pushed her back against the wall. His hand curled around the leg she lifted, pulling it higher. Rayne wrapped her hands around his neck and then felt the thrust of his cock splitting her flesh.

It was crazy, but she jumped and her hand jerked, as she seemed to feel the thrust of his cock into her cunt. It was as if her body had truly felt the impact. Tea spilled and Sean acted immediately by offering her his napkin. Taking it, she wiped her hand and then blotted the spot on her dress.

Still looking at the spot, Sean's finger entered her field of vision. She looked up, not sure what he was doing. "What?"

"You missed a spot. I'd offer to dab all you want..." his voice trailed away as he moved his finger a little closer.

Rayne glanced down and saw the large tea spot on the bodice of her dress. If she asked him to dab, his hand would be directly over her nipple. Immediately she regretted her last minute decision to skip underwear. Her nipples were definitely making their presence known, especially the one beneath the wet spot. Heat washed over her cheeks as she realized Sean must have been aware of their arousal when he first offered his napkin. Pulling the fabric away from her skin, she tried to press the wetness out. The napkin was too damp, making it worse.

"Let me," Sean whispered a moment later.

Rayne looked up and saw that he had another napkin, this one pristine. Ignoring that conscientious and cautious voice in her head, she let her body's desire act for her. She nodded her head and lowered her hands. It would have been better to let him take hold of the fabric and duplicate her motions. Instead, the fabric flattened once again across her full breast and peaked nipple. Pushing back the logic telling her to take the napkin, she nodded her head in agreement once more.

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Sean had been watching Rayne closely. Her second nod fired his desire, which was barely held in check as it was. The thought of his sister returning was the only thing preventing him from seeking a kiss from her full lips. Each lick of her tongue sent his temperature a degree higher. But he did ignore his mother's voice telling him to pick the fabric up and away from her skin. That would be the logical and smart way to do it. He held the napkin flat to his palm and pressed his hand lightly over her breast and nipple. Slipping his hand a little lower, his hand curved around the globe. It was

impossible to resist the lure of lifting the breast and just holding it for a moment. The sound of her breath catching forced his eyes upward.

Rayne's eyes were closed and her lips parted. A moment later, her tongue licked across her lower lip. Sean's cock responded promptly and he couldn't resist closing his hand in an unmistakable squeeze, followed by a gentle massage.

"Oh my God."

Rayne's cry told him her reactions to his touch were mirroring his. He shifted his hand, allowing the napkin to fall to the floor. This time as he cupped her breast he felt her hard nipple poking in his palm. Massaging her flesh, he wiggled his hand side to side. This still wasn't enough. His hand moved lower and he stimulated her tender bud further by rubbing his fingers back and forth across the distended peak. His cry drowned out hers.

"Yes!" Rayne whispered.

"God! You feel so sweet, Rayne. I want to suck this nipple into my mouth. Can you feel me drawing the bud between my lips? Suckling you deep inside before I flick my tongue over and all around this sweet morsel. Damn it! I want to carry you upstairs and take you on my bed right now."

Rayne slowly lifted her heavy eyelids. Desire and arousal were raging inside her, demanding attention and satiation. All she had to do was say, "yes." Even a simple nod of her head would probably be enough. Just nod her head and she would experience what she was sure would be pure rapture in his embrace. Her head dipped downward, nodding her agreement.

"Dinner's ready! You can pour the wine, Sean."

* * * * *

The table was quite large, but Colleen had arranged the four place settings at just one end, two on each side. Sean was next to Rayne and he held her chair for her to be seated. As she sat down, Rayne took several long, deep breaths to try and cool her ardor

down. She'd never felt anything like the fire burning through her belly a few minutes ago in the living room. If Colleen's voice hadn't interrupted them, Rayne had no doubt she'd be upstairs ripping Sean's clothes off him right now.

Shivers chased one another up and down her spine. It was probably the excess adrenaline. She was shocked that she could be so easily seduced by this stranger's touch. It didn't matter that technically he was no longer unfamiliar to her. And she wanted to get even more familiar with him! Breathing deeply, she called on her usually well-disciplined control to take over and get her through this evening. Lying to herself, she wished she'd never met Sean MacDougal.

Chapter Three

Sean had looked down at Rayne for a few moments before he turned to do as his sister had requested. He immediately noticed the way her dress was now clinging to her breast and distended nipple. Without thinking it through, he took the napkin she had started to open and placed it to drape down over her shoulder. Looking up he saw that Colleen and Bob were both staring at him. Acting nonchalant, he shrugged his shoulders.

“Do you have an extra napkin, Colleen? I was a klutz and caused Rayne’s tea to spill on her dress. Dinner smells delicious!”

Sean stepped over to the wine, opening it easily. He then moved around the table, pouring a generous glass of wine for each of them. As they began eating, conversation seemed a little easier. As host, he went out of his way to keep everyone’s glass filled. He tried not to stare, but his gaze seemed to keep returning to Rayne’s profile.

Her skin was lightly tanned and there was a soft flush on her cheeks. Thick eyelashes looked almost too long to be real, but the fact that he could see no eye shadow or lipstick caused him to assume that everything was natural. Her lips were full and each time she opened her mouth to take a bite his thoughts kept wandering down erotic avenues. Last night his dreams had all involved her luscious breasts and those long legs. But now, watching her mouth as she ate, or replied to his sister’s unending questions, he knew that tonight it was going to be her lips starring in his dreams. Imagining the taste of her mouth, the softness of her lips and even how her mouth might feel around his —

“Sean!”

He looked over at his sister who was glaring back at him. Grinning he reached out and took a sip of his wine. "Sorry, sis. I was getting ready to tell Rayne that I had just learned about the festival that is held once a year. It sounds like a lot of fun."

Sean shrugged, having been caught daydreaming among company. He felt like a guilty kid, unable to respond to his sister since he had not been listening to the dinner table conversation, as a polite host would probably do. The simple truth was that he was more interested in looking at Rayne than he was in idle, superficial chatter. His gaze drifted down to where the napkin he'd tucked in earlier still concealed her breast. Falling for his surveillance subject wasn't something he'd ever done before. Abruptly he stopped eating, mid-bite.

What the hell! No way was he "falling" for any woman. He didn't have time for that in his life now. He was a man who had a plan for his life, and was determined to keep to the plan. Now that his life was becoming his own once again, order and peace was something he wanted. Women were expected now and then, but a certain type of single woman was not a good idea. Some women seemed to automatically know the rules, and others like Rayne...she was different. He didn't want to be deterred or deflected from what he'd set as his course for his future life.

Setting his fork down, Sean finished his glass of wine in a single gulp. Bob's voice penetrated his consciousness a moment later.

"That's no way to treat wine this good! Not to mention what it costs for a bottle these days either."

Colleen laughed softly. "That's true, Bob. So few good wineries survived the war. We're lucky that our family's cellars had been dug centuries ago and that they stored away a certain amount each year."

"I meant to comment on how good the wine was tonight. Were you thinking of restarting wine production with the land here? I understand before the war this was all very good for grape vine growth," Rayne said softly, in between bites.

Sean shook his head, forcing himself to focus on the conversation. "For now I'll leave the wine growing to my father and younger brothers. I'm not sure I'm cut out for that kind of life." Standing, he moved around the table, refilling everyone's glass. He noticed that Rayne had taken barely a sip or two from her glass. Taking his seat, he turned to smile at her. "Are you not much of a wine drinker?"

Rayne shook her head negatively. "I'm not much of a drinker of any kind. There was never any around as I grew up, and when I left home...well, I was never big on the rebellion thing."

Colleen laughed softly. "That was me as well, Rayne. My siblings did plenty of rebelling for my parents, with Sean leading the pack usually. Were you an only child, Rayne?"

"No, I have two sisters."

Sean was sure she started to say more, but something had made her stop. As he watched her, she resumed eating slowly. It was then he realized that even though his sister had been asking probing questions most of the evening, Rayne had managed to divulge very little facts about herself. Frowning, he concentrated on eating for a moment as he thought. Perhaps she was interested in him and was applying the old adage about men and mysterious women. More likely, he acknowledged with a fair amount of disappointment, was that she had probably figured out he had worked for the Agency. If that were true, he should move forward quickly before she disappeared.

* * * * *

Rayne walked along the dark path slowly. She had excused herself as soon as she felt was polite after dinner. It had taken a firm determination to refuse a ride home, insisting that she wanted to walk the shortcut back to her place. Throughout the delicious meal she'd had the distinct feeling that Sean MacDougal was watching nearly every move she made. It embarrassed her, considering what had occurred before dinner. Just remembering how aroused she'd been with only his hand upon her breast

was disturbing her usually placid, quiet life. Pausing for a moment, she closed her eyes. All too easily could she recall every scent, touch and emotion she'd felt as his hand caressed her breast.

Opening her eyes again she continued the walk toward her home. Her head was telling her it was just sexual need. Like all the hierarchy of human needs, the sexual one required occasional attention. This feeling was nothing more than the basic need for...

"Damn it!"

She'd stubbed her toe. Stupidly she'd worn open-toed sandals, showing off that she had taken extra time to paint her toenails that afternoon. Just another example in her mind of how foolish and childish she was behaving. Looking up at the sky, she raised her hands, palms upwards and fingers outstretched. All she needed was some rain so she wouldn't have to keep up this nightly watering ritual every day.

Rayne lowered her hands to her sides. That was the problem, she decided. Lack of rain. That was causing her to be up at night, watering her precious plants. She wasn't getting enough sleep and that is why she was acting so strangely! That had to be the explanation for all the unusual feelings and desires.

"That's it! Whew! At least now I know why I've been so nervous and jittery. I'd be having the same reactions around any male. It's sex, pure and simple," she said out loud, as if voicing the words would make the thoughts and feelings more concrete in her head.

Rayne continued walking until she reached the last turn before home. From here, late at night and if you stayed perfectly still, you could hear the sound of the ocean waves lapping the sandy shores. Many times she wished she had sought out a place closer to the water, but funny things tended to happen when she was around open water. It was better to be here, safe and growing her garden of interesting things. Maile had recommended the girls avoid places they might easily stand out and be identified as being different. In this small, sleepy community Rayne was sure she was safe.

Turning reluctantly, she walked the last couple hundred feet to her place. Coming around to the front, she was stopped abruptly.

“Hi ya, Rayne! I thought I’d come over and help you water tonight. Wow! Don’t you look beautiful tonight!” Billy’s voice ended on a note of amazement.

Rayne smiled at the young, virile and muscular teenager. She’d been aware of his infatuation almost from the very beginning. For a while she’d argued with herself about accepting his help, but sometimes she was too tired so she’d accept. She worked hard at keeping everything friendly and casual between them. Often she’d make remarks about his age and the differences separating their lives. Once, though, he’d gotten a little too poetic, writing a song about lover’s strife.

“Hi, Billy! That is awfully sweet of you. Don’t you have school tomorrow?”

“That’s no problem. I could always bunk down on your sofa and hop a ride with one of my friends at the end of the lane.”

Rayne knew her eyes must have popped wide open at his words. Sleep on her sofa? That was the last thing she needed right now – a lovesick teen in her living room. Damn it all, she thought quietly. Now what?

“Hello, Billy!”

Rayne and Billy both spun around at the deep voice speaking from the end of her porch. Breathing deeply, Rayne couldn’t decide if she was angry that he’d followed her or relieved that he was here to deal with the problem of Billy. She ignored the little voice in her head whispering that after the teen left she could end up with an even more difficult situation to handle. Her heart started pounding as she saw that Sean had changed into jeans earlier and removed his shirt at some point while following her. At some point she would have to deal with the fact that she’d not heard him once the entire time, which was more than just a little unnerving.

“Isn’t this nice, sweetheart!” Sean smiled at Rayne as he came up beside her. Casually, as if he did it all the time, he wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her close to his side. “With Billy here to help me, we’ll have this watering done in no

time flat. Then we can get to bed early tonight. You haven't been getting enough beauty sleep lately, most of which is my fault."

Rayne couldn't believe what was coming out of the man's mouth! In just a few words he had claimed they were sleeping together and made it sound like it had been going on for some time now. The reputation she'd worked so hard on of staying apart from the people around here, beyond friendship, was blown. Men! She thought disgustedly and looked up at Sean, glaring fiercely.

"Great idea, Billy! I see you've already drawn most of the water, so this shouldn't take too long at all." Sean turned her easily toward him and kissed her full on the mouth. "You go on in and take a shower, babe. I'll be in as soon as we get done here."

Rayne watched as Sean good-naturedly patted Billy on the back, indicating for him to proceed. Ignoring her glare, Sean grinned back at her and then had the audacity to even wink! Disgusted, Rayne turned and stomped into her small house. Inside she threw a few pillows in disgust before she realized that one of them, either Sean or Billy, would end up watering the farthest corner of her small field. Scurrying around for her sneakers, she put them on and ran out of the house.

Running down the rutted path, she found the two men were working their way toward the back, rather than toward the house. Immediately she could tell that Billy was bowing to the Alpha male. What was it about this man? She was sure Billy would be angry and truculent, at least! Her ego was a little bruised as she watched them joking around, unaware of her approach at first. She grabbed one of the buckets of water and started toward the back.

"Hey! I thought you were going to get ready for bed."

Rayne didn't turn at Sean's words. She didn't want him to see her vulnerability, on any level. The need to protect herself was running high inside her at the moment. "I'm not tired, so I'll do the back rows myself. I know them better and there's less chance of me crushing anything in the dark."

She took off down the narrow lane as quickly as her feet would carry her without actually running. At the last row, she filled the long spouted can from one of the pre-filled buckets of water. Taking a moment to thank her earlier oversight in leaving a partially filled bucket, she quickly watered all the delicate plants that were partially shielded by the windbreaks she'd constructed. This was the only plant that was growing in her field that was so rare most people thought it was extinct. But with careful tending, she had encouraged the small cutting she'd stolen to grow into about twenty healthy plants. With time, she could probably have grown enough for it to be reintroduced, but she didn't want that to happen.

Finally, she finished and replaced the barriers. Turning, she saw that Sean was standing a few feet away, watching her. Picking the watering can back up, she moved around him. Since her rows were narrow it left only enough space for one person, not two. Her body pressed against him and he took advantage of the moment to grab the can from her hand.

"I sent Billy on home. There are really only a few more rows to do. That kid is fast."

Rayne moved on down the row, aware that Sean was watering the plants she'd not done in her rush to reach the others first. She filled the other can that Sean must have left when he'd followed her with the last of the water in her bucket. Quickly she moved into the next row, working carefully, but with speed. Dawdling tonight didn't seem like a good idea. A few feet along she heard Sean begin the row in front of hers.

"I imagine you aren't used to this old-fashioned way of doing things," Rayne spoke quietly, surprising herself by speaking at all. Part of her head was convinced the best idea was to say nothing, while the rest of her body was reminding her about that very human need she'd been thinking about during the walk home. No doubt about it—sex with Sean McDougal would be pretty amazing. The sight of his naked chest, in the moonlight, was enough to get any woman's engine racing. And hers had been primed since the first time she saw him. All day long she'd been fighting thoughts of him, or

thinking about him. Reminding him of how different they were had worked with Billy, so why shouldn't it work in this case as well?

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"There is nothing wrong with doing things an older way if it works. From what I've heard in town, you seem to have more than the proverbial green thumb. Rumor has it this land was worthless for growing anything until you took over for back taxes." Sean spoke softly, hoping that by revealing what he knew she might open up to him. They had certainly made a connection earlier before dinner. He'd followed her after she refused a ride, only because he was worried about her walking alone at night. But she'd obviously done fine, except when she'd stubbed her toe the one time. He'd nearly revealed himself then to offer his help.

"I've done nothing special."

Sean watched while Rayne finished her row and they walked back to the beginning together. Picking up the other bucket, he topped off his can, and added some more water to hers. "Not much more to do," he murmured softly.

"You can leave if you want," Rayne spoke quickly.

Sean turned his head and lifted one eyebrow as he met her gaze. "It goes more quickly with two."

"I know, but I can manage this easily. I figured you'd want to get back home and to bed."

Sean grinned and shook his head. "Actually, I'm not at all sleepy tonight. This should help tire me out some. Maybe I'm just feeling wired or something. It's possible something got me all stirred up earlier in the evening."

Rayne's watering can slipped from her fingers. Water splashed up onto her dress and legs. She quickly picked it up without another word and started dousing the plants. She'd only done two when Sean's hand came out and took hold of her wrist.

"Slow down, Rayne. Drowning them won't help."

"Damn, I wasn't thinking," she muttered and resumed her task once he'd released his grasp upon her slender arm.

Sean watched her quietly for a few moments and then continued as well. After he'd gone a few steps he heard Rayne speak again.

"If you hadn't chased off Billy, I'd have all the help I needed. He probably won't be coming back at all after your caveman display at the house."

Sean grinned in the darkness. He had wondered if she was going to comment on that or just let it slide. Without stopping his work, he replied, "Billy wasn't helping you altruistically. That randy young boy had just one thought on his mind and it involved getting into your panties."

"I knew that, but I enjoyed having some help once in awhile. I could handle a seventeen-year-old boy. Besides, there are no 'panties' for him to be getting into."

Sean shook his head and scoffed doubtfully. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I'm not wearing any!"

Sean's watering can slipped from his fingers as he heard her words. He spun around and looked at Rayne, his eyes lowering immediately to her waist and below. When he lifted his gaze to hers, she looked away from him hurriedly. He was sure she was wishing she'd kept her mouth shut just now. And he rather wished that she had not informed him because now all he could think about was her sitting at his dinner table without her panties on! God! If possible, he wanted her even more now. Deliberately he picked up the can and finished the row. Without waiting for Rayne, he walked back and refilled. As he began the last row, he was aware that Rayne had nearly finished hers.

He held his tongue until she finished and was passing him. He knew his voice sounded harsh as he spoke quickly. "I hope to God you didn't talk like that around that young puppy. With the slightest encouragement, a kid that age is like dry tinder."

"I am not stupid, Sean. I could have handled Billy. Now he won't be stopping by to help anymore. I'll let you finish since you have been so eager. Good night," Rayne said sharply, turning quickly. She muttered back over her shoulder, "And thanks."

Sean watched her until she was swallowed by the darkness of the night. Illogically he thought that it had sounded nice, hearing her call him by name. Up until that point, it had seemed as if she were avoiding any direct notice of him. Almost as if by not speaking his name, she could avoid giving him form and substance, or a place in her life. With a jolt of surprise, Sean acknowledged that she was going to have to get used to the fact that he was definitely in her life from now on. He knew then that no matter what he discovered about her, their lives were going to be intertwined for some time to come.

Chapter Four

As she stomped back to her house, Rayne told herself to go inside, turn off the lights and lock all the doors and windows. That would be the safest thing to do at this point. She didn't need complications in her life. Her life was comfortable, despite the hard work. Why should she let turmoil in? Hell! She was inviting it in!

Sitting down on her front steps, she slowly began taking her sneakers off. In a moment she'd take them around back and wash the mud off. Even though she could think of other things she'd rather do, it was better to do some things now to save more work later. A smile curled her lips upward as she recalled the many times their grandmother had tried to get her and her sisters to clean up after themselves. They were always more interested in hearing about the past and testing their psychic powers. Grandpa had disapproved of using any psychic power to help with their day-to-day lives.

Rayne had never longed to return to the days when the psychics ruled as overlords. The world was a much better place, according to Maile, since the rebels had overthrown the psychic government. But with her grandmother's warnings echoing in her head, she never forgot to hide her psychic abilities from everyone. One never knew who might report someone to the government as a possible psychic. They could arrive on one's doorstep or at a place of work and whisk him or her away with a psych search warrant. Sometimes people never returned.

Lowering her head, she covered her face with her hands. Dear God, it must have been terrible for people—psychics—right after the war. Their grandmother might have scared them too much with her stories, but she'd wanted the girls to be prepared. In the end, it hadn't mattered because the sisters had been forced to leave their home much too early as it was.

"You look worn out."

Rayne lifted her head and saw Sean walking toward her. He was still shirtless and he now had some mud on his boots and jeans. "I'm fine. I waited to offer you the use of the outdoor shower to rinse the mud off, if you want."

Sean sat down beside her before she could move, putting his hand on her forearm to restrain her when she did start to get up. "Seems to me the only reason I'd want to wash the mud off now would be if I were going inside. If I'm walking back to my place, then I might as well wait."

It was the way he lifted that one eyebrow, she decided. That one simple little action seemed to be the answer she needed. Or maybe it was just hearing him say the words out loud. In that moment, she knew there was nothing in the world she wanted more than for him to come inside. The grip on her arm had relaxed and she stood up.

"Then I think we both should wash the mud off."

She didn't wait but started around toward the back of the house. If Sean was interested, then she guessed he'd follow her to the shower. Hoping that he had come after her, she didn't look back as she pulled her dress up and over her head. She reached her hand out to pull the chain cord that would release the water. A larger, more tanned hand covered hers a moment later. She felt the heat behind her a second before the chilly water came crashing down over her body.

"Ooh!"

One hand encircled her waist, pulling her back against him. Immediately, she felt his hard cock pressing insistently against her butt. There was no way she could stop the wiggle of her hips pressing and rubbing across his flesh. She felt his lips against the side of her neck as he kissed his way to her ear lobe, which he paused to nibble for a few seconds.

"I want you so much right now that there is no way that cold water is going to cool me off."

Sean's deep, husky voice sent shivers through her body. The hand around her waist moved down over her flat belly and cupped her mound. He slipped two fingers into her cleft and rubbed lightly.

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"I should apologize for last night, but I can't. I've never seen any woman look as beautiful or desirable as you did with your clothes dripping and clinging to you." His mouth moved to the side of her neck, kissing and then sucking on her skin. One part of him wanted to mark her as his woman and he didn't give a damn if it was macho, chauvinistic or caveman at the moment. All he wanted to do was to show the world that she belonged to him – she slept in his bed and it was his children she would bear!

The primitive thought shook him to his core. He'd never really thought of himself as getting married or having children. That was something he would leave to his siblings. They could worry about carrying on the family name. But right now, it was Rayne he wanted to see pregnant, her belly swollen with his child. His hips jerked forward, grinding against her soft ass at the vision of a tiny black-haired child suckling at her breast.

God! He'd never thought a women breastfeeding was erotic. The image in his head of Rayne tenderly holding his child while it nursed eagerly upon her breast was making him harder by the instant. His fingers moved more and wiggled between her soft, completely shaven pussy. He wanted to give her pleasure. The need to arouse and satisfy was strong and driving.

"I want to be inside you, Rayne, but I don't have a condom. Let me pleasure you with my mouth and fingers tonight."

Rayne turned in his arms. "I have one in the pocket of my dress."

Sean pulled her close and kissed her mouth hard. He stepped away and grabbed the soft fabric, looking for a pocket. Upended, the pockets disclosed the packages she'd tucked inside. He managed to catch one but the other fell to the grass. Fumbling for a

second only, he turned back toward her. His breath caught in his chest as he looked at her wet, naked body. She had slicked her hair back off her face and was standing with her arms down. In that instant, his heart seemed to skip a beat. Shaking his head, he stepped back to her.

“Do you want to go over to the grass?” he asked her softly.

Rayne shook her head. “No. I want you to take me standing up, against the house. That’s how it was in my dreams last night. Please.”

Sean’s head jerked once, in agreement. He was kissing her a second later, savoring her lips before delving more deeply with his tongue. His hands skimmed over her skin, feeling the heat only partly cooled from the water. One second he cupped and massaged a breast, the next he was stroking her thigh or slipping in between to sample the secret sweets awaiting him.

When or how he did things to her became a jumble in his hurried rush to be inside her. Finally, his hands were lifting her upwards and pressing her against the house. And then he thrust into her body, hard and fast.

“Uhh,” Rayne grunted as his body slammed against her.

Sean paused, though it wasn’t easy to hold back his desire just then. “Are you okay, honey?”

Rayne nodded. “I’m fine...please...go on.”

“Yes!”

Sean started thrusting faster, shorter strokes. He was stunned by how tight and hot it felt to be inside her. Damn! It felt so good he wished they were lying down so he could make it last longer. Doing it this way was hard and awkward...but he had been taught by his mama to please a lady. Although he was sure she had not considered this when she was talking about pleasing.

“Ooh!” Rayne cried out once, and then again, with her voice an octave higher. “Ooh...oh my God!”

Sean felt her climax even as she spoke. He tried to hold back but it was too much for the first time. Holding her tightly, he thrust quickly to his orgasm. Over and over he shot his come into the condom protecting their bodies. The regret that swamped his senses was intense and shook him deeply. He pushed the thoughts and feelings away as his body quieted and he relaxed his tight grip upon Rayne's body. Slowly, she slid down and he stepped back once she was steady on her feet. He wanted to say something, but he wasn't sure what was the right thing to say right now. This had never happened before. Women he'd had sex with before had been from work, or acquaintances whom he'd known for a while.

Rayne stepped away from him. As he watched her, she walked over to where he'd dropped her dress. She didn't pick the dress up. Instead, as he watched her pretty ass jiggling a little, she picked up the other condom package that had fallen from her pocket. Still without saying a word, she started walking back toward the front of the house. When she had gone about ten feet, she looked back to where he seemed to be glued in place. The smile on her face jolted him instantly, arousing him again—to his surprise.

"I have more inside, but I don't want to waste any." She wiggled the package in her fingers, almost like a wave toward him, and then kept on walking.

Sean MacDougal was no dummy, nor did he need to be told twice. Grabbing his jeans, he took off after her.

* * * * *

Rayne was standing by the bed when Sean rushed in a few seconds later. From the single light she'd turned on, the bed was dimly lit and she could see the scattered condoms across the bed from where she'd tried to decide which to take earlier. Suddenly she felt her cheeks heating in embarrassment as she recalled how bold she'd been acting since she'd met this man.

Like yesterday, never before had she showered with just her camisole and panties on. And certainly she'd never done it with anyone in shouting distance. Her behavior with this man around was inexplicable. Maybe he was making her go insane? That might explain her crazy actions—nervous, jittery and skittish like a wild mare. Just like a mare around a stallion, was her next thought.

She saw Sean toss his jeans into the corner and walk toward her. He looked so strong and good that she shivered in reaction. How or why he was affecting her like this didn't make any sense. Eagerly she went into his arms, kissing him hotly. She copied his motions and slipped her tongue into his mouth. When one of his hands cupped her breast, she groaned softly. Soon they were stretched out across the bed, lying on top of the prophylactic packages.

"That's quite a rainbow collection," Sean whispered as he picked one up.

"I didn't know what to buy, so I got the assortment." The words came out in a rush as she caught her breath. "It was the first time."

Sean lifted his mouth from kissing his way toward her right nipple. "I'm glad you thought ahead. A modern man is never sure whether he will be presumed to be too forward if he has one, or thoughtless if he doesn't."

Rayne giggled at his honesty. It made no sense why she felt comfortable with him. The same as it was inexplicable the way his warm breath flowing across her damp skin aroused her so deeply. Or the way that he had so easily invaded her dreams and they scarcely knew each other.

Suddenly, she remembered her grandmother telling her once that psychic women needed to be very careful with whom they fell in love with. The old woman refused to say why, just that her granddaughters needed to be cautious about whom they gave their hearts to. Rayne lifted her hand and caressed the side of Sean's face, trailing her index finger slowly across his lower lip. He surprised her when he opened his mouth and sucked her finger inside. She wanted to look away but she couldn't. After a few seconds, Sean's hand pulled her finger away.

"That's how it feels to be inside you, only a hundred times better. Hotter, tighter and sweeter." He sucked her finger back into his mouth, sucking in a quick rhythm. When he let her finger slip free, he smiled at her. "Of course, there is another way I can show you how pleasurable making love with you is."

Rayne held her breath as Sean lowered his head until his mouth hovered above her breast. His breath blew over the hard tip, raising goose bumps in the surrounding sensitive flesh. When his tongue licked around her nipple, it was like a child's tongue eagerly circling an ice cream cone. Rayne could feel her nipple getting harder and tighter, the skin puckering more with each second. When his mouth finally opened and suckled her nipple gently, she cried out softly. As he sucked and tugged with his tongue and mouth, Rayne felt the resulting pull deep inside. It felt like a string was attached to her pussy and each resultant lick or suck sent shards of excitement straight to her groin.

"Sean!" she moaned his name, lifting her hand to curve around the back of his head. "Yes! I want you inside me again!"

Sean pushed up against her hand a few seconds later, but tugged her nipple still enclosed in his mouth with him. Finally he released it with a loud, wet squelching noise. His fingers had slipped down and were working magic between her wet pussy folds. As he pressed and then wiggled his index finger around her clit, Sean pressed kisses from one nipple to the other.

Rayne could feel her body tensing, needing...with each touch of his mouth or fingers, heightening her arousal. Sweating and writhing upon her bed, she began pulling at his shoulders, his arms, and finally trying to push his hand from between her thighs. But he resisted her completely.

"I want you, Sean." She paused to lick her lips. "I want you inside me."

Sean smiled down at her, but shook his head slowly. As she stared up at him, he slipped two fingers inside her channel. She could feel them wiggling around, searching for —

“Oh God!”

Rayne cried out as he found her G-spot, pressing and massaging the area with his fingers. She closed her eyes, but just as quickly opened them as his rhythm changed. Every time she felt herself almost reaching the pinnacle, Sean switched how he was touching her. Or he alternated the way he massaged deep inside her. She knew she was crying when she dug her fingernails into his skin, demanding release.

“Soon, my sweet. Let go...stop fighting me and just flow with the feelings. You are trying to anticipate my moves. Just let your breath flow with the feelings.”

His words soaked into her brain. She couldn't do what he wanted. To let go like he wanted might possibly release the power inside her. Fear of being discovered had governed her life for so many years. How could she relax her guard? She barely knew this man. Could she trust him?

Torn between her emotions, her body's demands and the chaotic thoughts in her head, she was startled to feel Sean's hands on her thighs. Opening her eyes she saw that he was moving down her body —

“No!” she moaned hoarsely, her voice cracking. She reached down with one hand and threaded her fingers in his hair. Pulling a little, she tried to pull him away.

“Hush, sweetheart. Shh.”

Rayne told her hands to push him away...or was it pull? Then it didn't matter. His mouth was on her flesh and his tongue was making a magical spell. She swallowed once, getting ready to tell him to stop. That was her plan. Then she felt his fingers deep inside her once again, all while his tongue was deepening the thrall which held her. One deep breath and then she'd tell him —

“God! Oh my God! Sean!”

Her climax slammed through her body like a sledgehammer. There were no more thoughts that made any sense. Everything was sensations, feelings and emotions. Her body shivered and jerked rhythmically. Nothing had ever been this overwhelming. Not

even when she discharged psychic energy. One moment she was still in control, but then with just one deep, relaxing breath her body took over.

Chapter Five

Sean moved slowly away from Rayne's body. Something had just happened that he had never experienced before. The problem was that he was not sure what it was. The air around them had suddenly felt charged with electricity. His own senses had been so heightened that he had very nearly lost his control as he witnessed Rayne finally orgasm without restraint. He couldn't be sure. Still, he thought he'd heard the clap of thunder.

Looking down at her face, Sean thought she looked so peaceful. She could be the poster child for relaxed right now. But he couldn't shake the feeling that what had just happened was not out of the ordinary. Even more than that, he realized in surprise that he wanted it to happen again and again. He wasn't used to being this aroused on more than just the physical level with a woman. Perhaps he should just leave—

"Sean."

He turned his head slightly and saw that her eyes were open and watching him. For a moment he wondered how long he'd been lost in his thoughts. That certainly didn't fit into the realm of proper bedroom etiquette at all. A woman usually expected all of the man's attention, based on his past experiences.

"Sorry." He stopped as the usual phrases he normally referred to women he'd known in the past didn't seem at all appropriate. "Is something wrong?"

Rayne shook her head. "Aren't you going to...you know?"

Sean smiled and lifted one hand to smooth an errant strand of hair back from her face. "I wasn't sure if you'd fallen asleep. You looked so peaceful that I hesitated to interrupt."

"I wasn't asleep." She paused and shifted around a little. A second later she pulled a crinkled condom package from beneath her. "Still have enough to go around." Grinning she held the prophylactic up with her fingers.

Sean reached out and took the packet from her. "Just what all did you want me to work my way around?"

"Me?"

He paused before answering, having heard the catch in her throat despite the boldness of her reply. Lightly, he pressed his lips to her forehead, the bridge of her nose, and lastly her chin, completely skipping her lips. From there he kissed her right cheekbone, and then the left. Moving a little on the bed, he kissed her breastbone. Another light kiss and he was between her breasts.

"You know, if I kiss you all the way around that could open up some interesting...positions."

Even in the dim light Sean could see the bright flush staining her cheeks. Perhaps it was too soon to explore some avenues. Kissing her parted lips, his tongue caressed its way inside and explored the softness within. His hands began caressing her body, from her breast to her thighs and back up. As far as he was concerned, he was ready and about as hard as he'd ever been. But he wanted to arouse Rayne once again. Often he'd satisfy a woman first, and then enter her cunt, to come inside her tight, wet body. With Rayne, though, he wanted her to climax with him inside of her. He also wanted her to come as hard as she had earlier.

It didn't take long once he shifted one hand between her thighs. While his fingers began to entice and seduce her, his mouth lowered to capture her nipple once again. Soon he matched the sucking motion to that of his fingers until her hips were writhing and her legs scissoring restlessly. He sensed she was nearing her peak so he quickly grabbed a packet and ripped it open.

Rayne's hands lifted to help. "Can I do that?"

Sean shook his head quickly. "Not this time, Rayne. I don't have that much control." He gently pushed her down and moved above her. She was already moving her legs apart, lifting one leg. He paused and positioned her legs, prompting her gently with his words. "That's it, my sweet. Ready?"

He waited until she nodded in agreement and then he eased forward, instead of thrusting. Moving slowly, he pushed forward until he was fully embedded in her hot channel. Bracing with his arms, his hips began moving. With measured strokes he went in and out. He had the thought that he would draw this out as long as possible, but that was before Rayne's orgasm began. As before she seemed surprised, but he felt the beginning muscle contractions, soon strengthening and quickening. Each one of her muscles seemed to be grabbing and sucking on his cock all of a sudden. The air around them felt alive with electricity again.

"Oh God!" Rayne cried loudly, her arms and legs wrapping around his body, trying to hold him close.

There was no holding out any longer for him, though. With a single shout of release, Sean's hips jerked in and out of her body, with much quicker strokes. He felt her body beneath him, around him, and he was in heaven. Above them he thought he heard the thunder crack through the skies once again. As he released his seed, everything charged with static electricity. When he looked at her, there was an aura surrounding her. His hips jerked forward again for the last time.

Sean leaned down and kissed Rayne's mouth. Her lips were curved upward in a gentle smile. A sudden surge of pride filled him. He had satisfied this incredibly beautiful woman. In truth, while pleasuring a woman had always been a priority for him, feeling that it was the most important part of lovemaking was a shock to him. He started to shift away, but her legs tightened around his hips.

"I'm too heavy," Sean protested quietly. "I don't want to crush you."

The grin on her face made his chest swell. "What a way to go, huh?"

Sean laughed and when she lowered her legs he moved off of her body. "Shall we get under the covers?" he asked softly.

* * * * *

Rayne nodded and moved reluctantly. Quietly she swept the remaining packets together, and set them in the drawer beside the bed. When she glanced up, Sean was removing the used condom. Quickly she turned away, wondering how a person handled things like this. Before she could think about it seriously, Sean flipped the covers back. He climbed into her bed as if he'd done it a thousand times before. Her breath caught in her chest at seeing his broad shoulders and tanned skin against her white sheets with the tiny pink roses. Her eyes lifted and saw his head resting on the bright pink pillow she'd chosen as accent color for the bed. Hurriedly she got under the covers as well.

Lying beside him, with the sheet tucked under her arms, she folded her hands. Reality was hitting her hard in the face at the moment. What was supposed to happen now? Idle chatter? Could she possibly sleep in a bed with a man she hardly knew? Suddenly she wished she had discussed this kind of thing with her sisters, or another woman. But she'd been living on her own for so long that the subject had never before come up. So now what? She chewed her lower lip as she pondered.

Slowly, she started circling her thumbs around one another. Going one way about ten times, and then stopping and reversing direction. After her fifth change of direction, Sean's hand covered hers, stopping the restless movement.

"What's wrong?"

Rayne didn't turn to look at him. "Nothing is wrong. Why should anything be wrong? I'm fine."

"Do you want me to leave?"

It shocked her that he had so easily gotten to the hub of her dilemma, which unsettled her deeply. It should have made her feel relieved that he was bringing the

subject up so she didn't have to, right? But it wasn't relief she felt. God! Had he brought it up because he really wanted to leave, but wanted to leave it to her to make the final decision? Was he wishing that he could skip out and never see her again? This was making her crazier than she normally was!

"Is that what you want to do? Uhm...is that what you usually do...in situations like this?" She spoke softly, hated the unsteadiness in her voice and hesitation.

Immediately the bed shifted beside her. A moment later Sean was pressed to her side and his hand was turning her face toward his. The anger on his face gave her another unexpected surprise. God! This was turning into a night full of unexpected emotions and happenings.

"Let's get a few things straight, Ms. Waters."

Rayne heard the affronted tone in his voice. She wasn't sure if she was supposed to reply, but then it became a moot point as he continued.

"Number one—this is a first for me. I have never, got that, never had sex with a woman I've only just met. Not even in my wilder days. That isn't me. Understand?"

Rayne nodded, but Sean wasn't really waiting for her acknowledgment as he continued.

"Second—if you don't want me to spend the night just say so, damn it! You don't have to handle me with kid gloves. I've got a tough skin."

Silence followed his words. Rayne waited for at least a minute for him to go on, but he didn't. Finally she spoke up. "Third?"

"Third? What makes you think there's a third?"

Rayne shrugged her shoulders. "I just assumed from the way you were going that there had to be a number three."

"All right! Third—don't ever twiddle your thumbs after we've made love. If I bored you, or I didn't measure up to your expectations, then just tell me to my face, lady! Don't sugar coat it, sweetheart, or play bored. I won't act like your boy toy that leaves

your bed immediately after he's performed his tricks." He turned away and laid down, flat on his back. "And if you chew your lower lip, I'm going to kiss you every time."

Rayne felt her mind reeling under all those telling revelations. Obviously this confident and assured man was feeling some of the same things she had. It certainly made her feel better to know she wasn't the only one feeling like a fish out of water here. She started to twirl her thumbs again, but stopped abruptly, separating her hands and placing them palms down on the sheet covering her stomach. Her lower lip crept between her teeth unconsciously before she realized it, but stopped that quickly as well. She wasn't stopping because of Sean, though. And she'd tell him that, in a minute.

"You shouldn't be using the pink pillow," she said a moment later. The minute the words left her lips, she knew how stupid they would sound. Beside her, she heard Sean chuckle softly.

"Pink isn't my best color? Is that what you're saying? Or are you one of those people who think redheads shouldn't wear pink or red?"

Rayne couldn't stop the laughter that bubbled out. Giggling, she sat up, holding the sheet in place. "You don't have red hair, but Colleen does. She'd look beautiful in any color. And I only said that because I didn't know what else to say at this point."

Sean sat up beside her, reaching behind her back and exchanging her sage green pillow for his pink one. "How's that?"

"Better," she told him softly, intensely aware of his masculinity suddenly. "I've never done this before, either, so I really didn't know what I was supposed to do. My grandmother didn't cover this, so if there was a proper etiquette-way to handle it, I never learned it. I know I screwed up the whole condom thing. Oh, and the chewing my lip thing would make number four."

Sean smiled at her, reaching out to casually push her hair back. His fingers brushed her shoulders and she felt the frissons of desire course through her again. "You won't hear any complaints from me. I thought you handled it quite well."

"Thanks, I guess. This was a first for me too, and I didn't know...anyway, I always chew my lip or twiddle my thumbs when I'm nervous and don't know what to do, or say. I wasn't bored. I couldn't be bored. It was amazing."

Sean grinned and lay back down, this time with his hands behind his head. Rayne looked at him over her shoulder and decided that he looked the epitome of a satisfied male, on several levels. She wasn't angry and a moment later scooted back down in the bed as well. Taking a deep breath, she ended up yawning.

"I'm getting rather sleepy myself. Do you want me to go, or stay?" Sean asked.

Rayne pondered for a moment, yawning again as she did so. "You can stay, please. Uhm, I do have a question, though."

"What is it?"

"If you stay, do you think you'll want to do it again? Tonight, I mean."

Sean grinned, but he didn't answer her right away. Instead, he tossed the covers back and went over to turn off the single light. Despite the darkness, he still made his way to her bed without bumping into anything or stubbing his toe once. As he climbed back into bed, he shifted around and rearranged his pillows.

"If you insist, I could probably manage to do it again tonight. But I am rather tired as well, so if you could wait until morning—"

Rayne punched his arm.

Sean cuddled up close to her warm body. "Besides, there is nothing like morning sex. All warm, relaxed and still drowsy. Now go to sleep, Rayne. I'll wake you if anything important comes up."

Rayne fell asleep with her head pillowed on his chest, cradled in his arm.

Chapter Six

Dawn was just lighting the sky as Sean approached the front porch of his house. As he walked along, idly he'd kick at rocks. This was pretty much the last place he wanted to be right now. But discretion had told him to get back home before his sister was up to begin cooking breakfast. He also wanted to be cleaned up and ready to face the day before Bob, or any of the workers, started their morning chores.

"Look what that mangy cat dragged home."

Sean's head jerked upward. In spite of the dim light, he could see Bob seated on the porch. Trying to think quickly, he opted for delay tactics.

"What makes you say that?"

"Perhaps it's those scratch marks."

"Damn!" Sean realized that he'd forgotten to slip his shirt on before he reached the house, but he'd been too lost in his thoughts to remember. "So you didn't know that I'd left the house last night?"

"Nope, and I doubt Colleen does either. But you should probably get cleaned up before she comes down. I got the impression that she is quite fond of your new 'friend' even though she doesn't know her well yet. She might have a hard time choosing loyalty to her brother, if you should screw this up."

Sean pulled his shirt on, buttoning it up halfway. Walking up the steps, he paused to lean against the post. "What makes you think there is something for me to 'screw up,' as you put it?"

Bob grinned at his brother-in-law. "Hmm, from what Colleen has told me, and since I've known you, you have never had a long-term relationship with a woman. Granted, you may be suffering from temporary impairment of your senses, but Rayne is the kind of woman a man commits to. Don't get me wrong here, Sean. I love Colleen with every

fiber of my being, and I love her more every day we're together. Still, I'm not dead. I can understand the attraction."

Sean couldn't explain his reluctance to discuss Rayne, or his relationship with her, with anyone. He knew Bob only had his best interest at heart, but that didn't change the strange feelings he'd been experiencing since he'd first seen her. It was more than just being physically drawn to her. There were things beneath the surface beyond his last job for the Agency to check her out. Last night he'd felt more than arousal and satiation. In fact, his feelings were deeper than any he'd ever experienced before, and he was angry that he was feeling anything at all.

Hell! All he'd wanted was to leave the Agency and enjoy his life in quiet, without danger and intrigue waiting around every corner. From their advance check, everything had indicated that even if Rayne had some psychic power, it wasn't a great deal. Most psychics used their powers to further their financial gain whenever possible. Seeing the modest house, and the miniscule farming concern, it was obvious she wasn't bettering herself in any way other than the old-fashioned way—hard work. So his involvement, if that is what it was, couldn't be construed as anything else.

Sean stopped as he realized he wasn't making any sense. Was it possible that she had robbed him of logical thought? Maybe she was a modern Delilah and she could steal his "strength" by having sex with him.

"Aren't you two the early birds? What in the world are you both doing up at this hour?"

Both men rushed to answer her at the same time, but then Sean gestured for Bob to answer first.

"You were so restless, honey, that I just surrendered and got up."

"Just restless, I guess."

Colleen looked at him for another second before she nodded once and crossed the porch to take the chair beside her husband. She folded her hands atop her belly. "We had planned that conference call for tonight at nine. I assume you'll be around for it."

Sean absent-mindedly nodded his head in agreement. The word “night” had him imagining another night in Rayne’s bed. How he’d get through the day without seeing her was beginning to loom as a major problem. He knew he was acting as randy as a virgin bridegroom on his honeymoon. It didn’t matter what else was going on, where they were or how much money they’d spent—all he really wanted was to be in bed, with his new wife.

“I’m going to shower. We’ve got a lot to get done today.”

“And the call?” Colleen asked again with determination, evident by the tone in her voice.

“I will do my best to be around for the big call with the rest of the family.” Sean held his hand up in the traditional Boy Scout honor signal before turning toward the door. As he ran upstairs, he heard Colleen expressing her doubts to her husband.

“I’d better work on a good excuse for why Sean couldn’t be home for the call.”

“Don’t fret, love. Sean will do his best...”

* * * * *

Later that day, when Sean was so distracted he almost caught his hand in the blades of the machine he and Bob had been working on, he excused himself and went into his office to do the never-ending paperwork. He didn’t get anything accomplished because his attention kept wandering. All he had to do was close his eyes to recall every second of last night with Rayne. Each touch, caress and kiss was re-examined throughout the afternoon as he sat alone, staring at the computer screen.

Somehow he made it through dinner and excused himself to go back to his office again. He sat there until Colleen and Bob joined him for the call with the rest of the family. It surprised him that during the entire call his thoughts were focused more on a woman he hardly knew instead of on the lively family discussion. Once the call ended, Colleen and Bob informed him that they were going to bed early.

A few minutes later he wandered out to the front porch and sat down. As he propped his booted feet on the porch railing, he thought that the night was still warm and he couldn't help but wonder if Rayne was watering now. Glancing at his watch, he saw that it was still a few minutes until ten, which was the time she told him that she usually started.

If he drove to her place, he would be there in about seven minutes. His boots hit the wood a second later and he was jogging to the truck. The keys were in it and he was driving almost too damned fast toward Rayne's about a minute after he'd finished the thought.

* * * * *

Rayne looked up as the truck lights started up the short gravel road to her place. Even though she wasn't expecting anyone, there was no doubt in her mind whose truck it was. She turned her attention back to the old-fashioned water pump, continuing to fill her assortment of buckets. A minute later, a pair of boots came into her peripheral vision. Without looking up she spoke softly.

"Hello, Sean."

"I came to help you water. With the two of us, it won't take as long."

"That is true, but you don't have to help me. I assume you came over for sex." As the words left her lips, they didn't sound as uncaring and casual as they had when she'd practiced being nonchalant and light-hearted. She didn't want to reveal how deeply her emotions were running already for this man. Caring for him would be to break all of the rules. It would be risky and she was not a risk taker. Maybe her sisters could do it, but she wasn't strong enough to cope with the circumstances. That's why she kept separate from others, to keep her heart safe and whole.

Years earlier, when it came time for her to leave home, she had asked her grandmother if she could have an old trunk in the attic. As expected, Maile had nodded her head, never asking which trunk or if it held anything. Nestled deep inside were

some very old keepsakes. The most valuable, in her opinion, was the diary she'd found buried at the bottom of the trunk. The diary had belonged to her great-grandmother and contained facts that Rayne doubted had been recorded anywhere else.

Suddenly, her thoughts were interrupted as Sean grabbed her forearms and pulled her up as he stood. Facing him, she could see the anger on his face. "I'm sorry if my honesty offends you, but I thought if that's what you came for..." she paused and shrugged her shoulders, "then we could go on in and do it before I water. After you leave, I'll come back out and finish."

For a minute, Sean didn't reply. Rayne could see that he was struggling to control his anger. Knowing that keeping her mouth shut probably would have been the wisest choice she went on talking.

"I just mean that I don't expect you to help water before we have sex. That is too much, it's almost like having you pay me for sex."

"Shut up, damn it! Good God, woman, do you have a death wish or something?" Sean relaxed the hold on her arms, slowly releasing them completely.

Rayne could see he was breathing rapidly. She was lucky, realizing belatedly, that he had not struck out at her. She guessed he had every right to be angry. Basically she'd accused him of treating her like a prostitute, except instead of money the payment for sex was work. Not that she'd ever think he would have to do that. He was too damned good looking for that.

"I guess I should apologize," she spoke quickly, rushing the words. "I didn't think about it from your point of view. I didn't mean to insult you. Gosh, Sean, anyone looking at you would know that you didn't have to pay for sex, or bribe a woman either. I mean...well, you are probably the best looking man I've ever seen. And, well, to be honest, I just wasn't sure what would happen after last night. Nothing was said about seeing each other again. All day long I kept thinking...anyway, that's what I came up with...that perhaps if you came back, it would only be to have sex."

Sean's hands grabbed her shoulders. "Shut up, Rayne," he muttered a second before his mouth covered hers.

While his mouth and tongue mastered hers, his hands began roving her body. When his hands discovered her unbound breasts beneath the thin cotton T-shirt, she felt his groan rumble in his chest. She moved her hands down his chest and did something she'd wanted to do since the first night she saw him. One of her still-wet hands cupped his manhood, pressed demandingly against the zipper of his jeans. His groan was even louder that time, but when she began to stroke and squeeze his hard cock, he suddenly moved away from her.

"What's wrong?" Rayne asked quickly. "What did I do wrong?"

Sean shook his head at her, and ran one slightly shaking hand through his hair. "You did nothing wrong, Rayne. But if you'd continued for much longer, I'd have taken you right here in the mud."

Rayne felt the warm feeling inside her start to grow and brighten, like a small candle. She couldn't stop the grin that curved her lips. For the first time she felt power as a woman, a sexual being. She was very fit and strong, as a human being, but she'd never had any confidence in her appearance or her womanly wiles.

"Okay," she forced the words out, her stomach in a jumble. "I'll start over. Hello. Nice evening, isn't it?"

Sean grinned at her words. "Yeah. There is still some warmth from the day, but cooling off enough to be comfortable sleeping weather." He moved over to the water pump and began filling another bucket. Without looking at her, he went on. "I didn't get much sleep last night."

"Me either," Rayne told him softly, preparing another bucket to be filled. "I've never shared a bed before." Immediately as the words were said she realized how naïve that made her sound. It was true, but that didn't mean she wanted to shout it from the rooftops. Hurriedly she added, "Except for my sisters. We shared a bed growing up, at different times."

The last bucket was done and Sean picked up two of them. He started walking down the row, leaving one every other row. Rayne grabbed two herself, the water sloshing slightly as she hurried to reach the next two rows. Sean met her and told her to start the watering and he'd take the buckets down the line. Nodding her head, she started with the first row. Near the end of the second row, Sean was starting on the third. It took even less time tonight.

Nearing the last row, Rayne quickly moved to it, skipping two in between. "I'll do this last one, if you don't mind. If you get done before me, I'll meet you at the house." Turning quickly, she saw the odd look Sean gave her before he followed her directions.

Behind the protective netting, Rayne used the small flashlight she kept in a plastic box to check her precious plants for damage, insects or anything else. They all looked very healthy, though, and she was soon walking back up the lane. She could see that Sean was seated on the porch swing, looking quite relaxed and at home. For a moment she let her thoughts wander about the two of them living here, in her small house. But logic soon took over. With the huge white house on his property he'd have no reason to ever consider her place as anything but a shed at best, or an outhouse at worst.

As she took the first step, Sean patted the empty seat beside him. "Join me?"

Rayne nodded and sat down while he stopped swinging for a moment. Once she was seated, he began the gentle motion again. It was easy to close her eyes and let her body relax. All around were the gentle sounds of the night and the soft wind barely moving the leaves of the bushes and trees. Behind her she felt the warmth of his arm, which he had lifted back up after patting the seat. It was so easy to let her head ease back and rest against his arm. She couldn't remember the last time she'd felt this relaxed and peaceful...actually it was not since she'd left her grandmother.

"Do you sit out here often, Rayne?"

She nodded her head without thinking that he might not be able to see in the darkness. Then she remembered she was leaning back on his arm. She lifted her head. "I'm sorry to lean back like that. I just...I don't know. It felt right."

Sean smiled and she could see the flash of his white teeth for a moment. She turned her face forward again, looking out at the dark sky. "To be honest, Rayne, I was getting ready to gently nudge you into moving over and resting your head here."

Rayne watched as he patted an area on his upper chest, near his shoulder. "I would, but I think I stink, from working all day and then again tonight."

"Here I was thinking I would be the one. We could go back and use that shower of yours."

"Are you thinking about using my shower and leaving? Or did you have something else in mind?"

Sean stood and pulled her up beside him. "I'll be willing to do anything else you have in mind, pretty lady."

They walked around the house to the shower. Rayne paused, not completely sure how to continue...gracefully. She kicked her sneakers off, leaning over to tug the muddy socks off. When she looked back up she gasped in surprise. So much for going slowly...Sean was already stripped to his shorts and watching her.

Her words slipped out without thinking.

"Oh my!"

And her eyes seemed to be fixated on his aroused cock.

Sean came closer. "You know, that is the first time anyone has ever said that when they've seen me nearly naked."

"Have there been a lot of 'anyones' in your life, Sean?"

Sean was unsnapping her jeans and beginning to push them down over her hips. His fingers caught under the elastic of her panties and dragged them along as well. Her T-shirt, which had been tucked in, was long and fell to the top of her thighs. She slid her hands to the bottom edge, starting to pull the shirt up. Sean's hands stopped her.

"Not yet," he whispered to her softly. "I have a little fantasy, if you don't mind."

Rayne shook her head, aroused and a little scared. Then she realized that she trusted him not to hurt her, no matter what might happen. He would never lose control and harm her in any way. She couldn't explain how she knew this, but it seemed instinctual, this trust in him. When Sean shifted her toward the shower, she went with him. He reached out and turned on the water.

"Eek!" Rayne cried out as the cold water rained down over them. As she became wetter, she lifted her hands and slicked her hair back, off her face.

"God! You are so beautiful, Rayne!"

She heard Sean's voice a second before his hands cupped her breasts. Her nipples were hard points jabbing into his palms, covered only by the thin white cotton. His hands massaged and rubbed her full breasts. His voice was hoarse as he spoke.

"This is my fantasy. Seeing you that first night...and now! That night I hardly slept for the erotic dreams I kept having—all of them starring you." Sean lifted his hands to her face. His thumbs gently rubbed across her cheeks. He moved them up and slicked her hair back once again. "Tell me, Rayne, did you dream of me? Or was that first time all my emotion?"

His honesty in revealing his emotions surprised her. She couldn't hold her own words back. "I dreamed of you, Sean. You took me outside, up against the house. We were both soaking wet."

"Like this?"

"Yes, except that...you didn't wear a condom." She stumbled over the words, surprised that she had allowed that detail to creep out.

Sean groaned at her revelation. "Rayne! I wanted to feel your flesh against mine, but the risks these days are too great. Please believe me when I say that I've always been very careful. I would never do anything that might put you at risk."

Rayne nodded her head. She could tell him how she felt, about her inexperience. Instead of speaking her emotions, she moved her hands down his back, slipping under the elastic band of his shorts. She curled her fingers into the tight muscles of his ass for a

moment before continuing their downward movement, dragging his shorts with them. Freeing his cock, she let the shorts fall on their own accord. Her hands curled around his hard rod, exploring his flesh while the water still rained down over them.

Sean reached his hand toward her, managing only a few light strokes across her lips before she stepped away.

“Turn the water off, Sean,” Rayne asked him quietly. She didn’t wait for him, but walked away, over to the small patch of grass. Dropping onto the grass, she duplicated his earlier motion. Except instead of wood, she patted the soft green carpet.

He shut the shower off, walking the short distance. Looking up at him, Rayne appreciated his masculine differences. Obviously he had left his shorts behind before crossing over to her. She could see his doubt before he spoke.

“Maybe we should go inside, sweetheart. It might not be a safe time of the month for you.”

Rayne shook her head negatively while she pulled him down beside her. Once he was down, she pushed him until he lay supine, on his back. His surprise was evident on his face as she straddled his thighs. Her hands explored his chest, pausing to tease and toy with his hard nipples. Slowly she worked her way down, past his waist. Scooting farther down, she took his hard manhood into her grasp. One hand didn’t circle his shaft as she stroked upwards. Her other hand lightly stroked his smooth, shaven groin area.

She looked up as she spoke. “Why did you shave?”

Sean grinned up at her. “I used to shave all over, when I swam all the time. But feeling how wonderful it was last night...well, I couldn’t help but think about what it might be like if we were both smooth.”

Rayne smiled, not knowing what to say. “Thank you” seemed trite. Instead she shifted off his legs for a moment, rearranging her body. He moved his legs to give her better access. Rayne started to stroke and caress his cock with her hands. It was obvious

that she was eager, but inexperienced. Sean sat up suddenly and lifted Rayne's face. Kissing her lips, he smiled gently.

"I'll show you what to do, but I don't expect this."

"I know. Somehow I knew that you would not, but I want to please you as you did for me last night. I would like to share what I felt when you touched me. I'm sorry I don't know more and have more experience."

Chapter Seven

Sometimes in life you know a life-altering event is about to take place. Or you know what just happened has changed you forever. Sean knew it right then, as Rayne confessed her lack of experience and her desire to please him. He was in love. Head over heels, crazy in love with this woman he hardly knew. It was too late to pull back, even if he wanted to do that. He didn't want to pull away from Rayne. From this point on he wanted to live his life with Rayne.

Unable to speak for the knot in his throat, Sean directed Rayne's movements with his hands at first. But soon he didn't need to do anything but lie back and accept the onslaught her inexperienced hands were wreaking upon his senses. One minute her hands were caressing his cock, hand over hand. Then she shifted her attention to his balls, pulling, lightly squeezing. When she lowered her head and he felt her wet hair sweep across his thighs, he groaned loudly.

Her breath whispered across his flesh a moment before he felt her soft lips against his cock. As her mouth opened, Sean forced his head upward so he could watch. He saw Rayne lick her tongue around the ridge of soft flesh, pausing to flick at the joining of skin on the underside. As her mouth opened farther, Sean watched as she took the head of his cock in her hands. A few seconds passed, or maybe it was longer, before the wet heat of her mouth enclosed him. He fell back to the grass, the vision of her giving him pleasure burned in his head.

After that Sean lost track of every little thing she did, but she was constantly busy and moving from one area to another. Kissing, touching, squeezing, stroking until he thought he would go crazy. He was so hard he thought he was going to explode any moment when he felt her move even lower and begin to play with his sac and balls. When she began to use her mouth, he shouted into the quiet night.

“No more, love! I can’t take anymore.”

Rayne nodded and moved her body quickly to straddle his hips. He realized that she was going to take him inside her. His hands grabbed her waist, stopping her movement.

“We can’t, darling. It’s too risky, isn’t it?”

Rayne shook her head from. “I’m sure it’s safe. Please, come inside me this time. Let me feel your flesh in mine. I want to know your essence remains inside me, even after you have left.”

Sean shook his head negatively but his hands were already assisting her. Slowly he eased her body down. The sensations were incredible as he felt his cock spreading, separating and finally pushing past her puffy pussy lips. She was already quite wet, and her flesh enclosed him quickly, completely. Once she was completely astride him, Sean lifted his hands to her breasts. The shirt was already drying.

“Take your shirt off for me, Rayne, please. I want to watch your pretty breasts bounce. Will you do that for me?”

Rayne nodded and pulled the shirt off, tossing it aside. She slid her hands forward to brace on his chest while she moved her hips. A groan escaped her lips.

Rayne followed his directions and he watched her body move and react. He flexed his hips and saw the surprise on her face. Her breasts bounced and jiggled as she moved faster. He slid one finger between her wet lips until he found her clit. Using what he’d learned about her body and responses from the night before, he stimulated her quickly. Her orgasm came slowly, building from deep inside. Sean could feel her tensing, squeezing him tightly. But when she finally came, it caught him by surprise.

The air around them seemed to spark with electricity. As her flesh began its spasmodic contractions, Sean could hold back no more. He let his climax wash through him. Except this time, the electricity seemed to be going through him, not just in the air around him. Above them in the skies, he was sure he heard the clap of thunder several times. The air felt heavy with moisture, like it wanted desperately to rain.

Sean realized he was experiencing his climax on more levels than ever before. This was much more than just the physical release. It was as if his body was a part of the earth for a moment. As he dropped his last barrier, he seemed to flow into Rayne's body and they were one person and yet still part of the earth. Over and over, his body jerked in response to the onslaught of physical, emotional and—could it be—psychic reactions?

He was finally aware of Rayne collapsing upon his chest, lying on him like a limp noodle. She mirrored his own feelings right then as he closed his eyes. If he didn't move, he could still feel the fine tremors deep inside her body. At that moment, Sean knew nothing had ever felt that good in his whole life. Breathing deeply, he listened to the rhythmic flow of Rayne's inhalations and exhalations. A second later he was sound asleep.

* * * * *

Rayne awoke alone in her bed the following morning. She could tell it was late by the amount of sun streaming through her windows. Damn! She'd missed her morning watering. Rushing around, she pulled on a cotton dress and ran outside without any shoes.

Outside, she crossed the open lawn area to the pump. Grabbing the first bucket, she was surprised to see it was still wet inside. It didn't seem possible that it had rained last night and she had not heard it. She always knew when it rained, even if she was sound asleep. Stepping carefully because of her bare feet, she walked to the first row. She didn't need to bend down to see that they had already been watered that morning. Turning suddenly, she stumbled down the lane to the last row. Moving the protective windbreaks, she looked in and saw that even her special plants had been watered.

Her legs gave way beneath her and Rayne collapsed onto the ground. She knew in that moment that she was in love with Sean. He had never told her how he felt, and it didn't matter. Without words he had shown how much he cared for her. By watering for her, he had demonstrated that he was willing to care for what she cared about. Did

she need to know anything else about him? Through one act he had shown her that he was a good man. He had undoubtedly been as tired as she, if not more. Two more times last night, after stumbling into her bed, Sean had proven how much stamina he had by making love to her. Thinking about it now, she grinned. What a stud muffin!

Taking a deep breath, she rubbed her fingers over her cheeks to wipe away the tears. Suddenly there was a deep need inside her to see him. She wouldn't have to speak to him, but she had to see him, even if from a distance. Jumping to her feet, she walked briskly back to the house. If she cleaned up quickly, she could take the rear pasture path and be over there in an hour. Once she was at his house, then she'd worry about a good excuse for why she was showing up without an invitation.

"Good morning, Miss Waters. I'm glad to have caught you."

Rayne froze in her tracks. A man was standing on her lawn. Parked a short distance away was a modern skimmer, sleek and bright red, which always seemed a better fit for the old world, rather than the destroyed world that now remained following the rebellion. Many people still used vehicles from long ago, in spite of the dependence on fossil fuels.

Her gaze traveled over the tall, slender man. He had blond hair and was quite tanned, but she couldn't see his eyes because of the reflective style sunglasses he was wearing. His clothing screamed money and affluence. Rayne realized she hadn't seen someone dressed this finely since...she'd never seen anyone with clothes, or a skimmer, so expensive. All of her senses went into overdrive right then. She didn't know his name, or why he was here, but she knew that he was trouble. Closing her eyes for a moment, she gathered all of her thoughts and emotions into one place in her mind. Sean's name screamed through her consciousness. God, she wished he were here right now.

"Yes, I'm Rayne Waters. Are you lost?"

The blond man chuckled softly but took a couple of steps in her direction. He stopped when she backed up. "No, I'm not lost. I was hoping we could talk, if you have

the time. Actually, I'm feeling pretty parched." The man stopped for a moment, rubbing his throat. "Could I get something cold to drink?"

Rayne had been raised to be polite to everyone, even though she was feeling uneasy. She nodded her head. "Sure. You can sit on the porch swing while I get it ready."

* * * * *

In her small kitchen, Rayne began preparing a tray of iced tea. Hearing her grandmother's voice in her head, she even set out a few of the cookies she had made yesterday. She had planned on offering them to Sean, if he had come to call last evening. As she stirred the tea, she couldn't stop the smile that curled her lips upward. He certainly had come to call! Yes, sirree! Even though it wouldn't have met her grandmother's strict standards for a gentleman caller, Rayne had no complaints.

Still, she wished she'd had more time this morning to have taken a shower and put more clothes on. No one, or at least hardly anyone, ever came to visit in the middle of the morning. Most people around here were hard at work, trying to get their morning chores done. This was the kind of life that never really changed, no matter what might be going on in the world. Sure, there had at one time been lots of experimental hydroponics studies being conducted on modern farm sites. But since the rebellion, so many things had returned to the simpler way of doing things. Life was more elemental, on many levels.

Rayne finally picked the tray up and started toward the living room and the front porch. Just inside the living room, though, she stopped abruptly. "Ooh!" she gasped and lost her grip on the tray. Everything teetered for a moment and then came crashing back on her. Glasses fell, cookies dropped, china broke in the abrupt accident. Rayne was suddenly wet with tea. Taking a step was the wrong thing to do, though. Her shoeless foot came down on wet, slippery wood and then found a piece of broken glass. In less than a minute, she was on the floor.

The blond-haired man was still standing by her sofa, where he had been looking at the few photos she had on the wall and end tables. He had not heard her entrance, but took a step forward now.

Outside her open front door Rayne heard tires squealing, quickly followed by the slamming of a door. "Rayne! Damn it all! Rayne! Where are you?"

Rayne looked up from her bloody foot and saw Sean leaping up the front steps of her porch. A second later the screen door banged open and he raced through it. She saw his eyes go from her, to the area around her and then to the man in the room. As his attention returned to her, Rayne tried to smile.

"I'm fine. I just had an accident and I fell."

* * * * *

It had been only a few hours since he'd left Rayne. He had been working the first two hours or so, but then upon his return to the house, Bob had been seated on the wide verandah, listening to the man who had come to sell him...damn! What had the guy been selling again? He'd been listening to the guy for twenty minutes and he hadn't remembered a thing the man had said.

Hopefully, Bob, who looked like he was paying attention, had gotten the gist of what he'd need to know for an informed decision. Right then he realized once again just how lucky he was to have Bob working with him here!

"I'm sure you can see how this would benefit a place this size, Mr. MacDougal."

Bob nodded his head. "I think this could definitely make a difference. What do you think, Sean?"

Sean turned his head and saw that both men and Colleen were watching him and obviously waiting for his answer. He opened his mouth to reply when suddenly his mind had filled with Rayne's voice screaming his name. Shaking his head, he looked around, but she hadn't been anywhere that he could see. That proved that he had not physically heard her voice, but rather it had a psychic sound reverberating in his brain.

Hurriedly, he jumped to his feet and ran down the steps, looking in the direction of her place. Nowhere did he see Rayne, which was proof that it was not his ears that heard her voice.

Turning back toward the porch, the sudden need to see her was overwhelming, literally swamping all of his senses. He couldn't stay here. The compulsion to see her was too great. Pausing to shout at Bob, he turned abruptly.

"I trust your decision, Bob. I'll be back as soon as I can." Two seconds later he was running towards his truck.

The trip to Rayne's, that had taken seven minutes yesterday, had only taken him four today. Luckily the sheriff and his deputies hadn't been around as he careened down the gravel lane to her property. He slammed on the brakes as he saw the bright, new-looking skimmer. This was the first one he'd seen since he'd left New Frisco. Seeing one at her house didn't do a single thing to allay his concerns.

Running up the porch steps, he didn't know what he expected to find. He only knew that his gut feeling demanded he rush over. Unbidden had come the thought that he was her knight rushing to her rescue, but he pushed it away quickly. Throwing open her front screen door, the scene inside her living room wasn't what he'd expected, but then he hadn't really stopped to consider anything before charging over to her house.

* * * * *

Sean took a step toward Rayne, trying to take in the scene before him, and just what the hell was going on here!

"Grrrr!"

"Wroof! Wrooof!"

"Mmrrreeooowwww!"

The room was suddenly full of animals, the likes of which he'd never seen in his life. Two of them looked like dogs, but they were bigger than his large working dogs. And from the sounds they were making, they were in protective mode. Sean didn't

move as he looked at the four-foot tall dogs. He wasn't sure that he liked the idea of such powerful animals around Rayne. She might not be able to fend them off if they decided to attack her.

"Are you all right, Rayne?"

Rayne smiled up at him. "I'm okay, but I probably need a Band-Aid on my foot."

The blond man moved forward and Sean turned to look at him. Something about the man's expensive clothing and perfect haircut set his teeth on edge. He didn't know this guy, but already he didn't like him.

"It's my fault, I'm afraid. Miss Waters was getting us something to drink and didn't hear me in here looking at her photographs. I didn't mean to startle you, Miss Waters." He pulled a pristine white handkerchief from his pocket and started forward to offer it to Rayne. After just two steps he stopped as the dogs began growling again.

"It's all right. Sean, what brought you over here?"

Sean ignored Rayne for a moment, glaring at the other man. "Who the hell are you and what are you doing here?"

"My name is Anton DeVeau. I just stopped by to discuss something with Miss Waters. I'm sorry for having caused you such distress. Is there anything I can do to help?"

"We're fine. Maybe you should come back some other time, though."

"Thank you for the offer—"

Sean and Rayne spoke at the same time, but her voice faded away first. Sean was glad when the stranger excused himself and left quickly. Sean followed him to the door, waiting until the sleek skimmer had traveled cleanly over the gravel, barely disturbing the dust. Something about the blond man set his psychic senses on alert. Mentally he noted to call into the Agency's base in New Frisco. Turning, he found that Rayne had wrapped the white handkerchief around her foot. The dogs were concentrating on eating the cookies and lapping up the tea.

"I didn't know you had...dogs?"

Rayne smiled. "I like pets. And they usually stay outside until I call them in. I didn't do that because you...well, they like to sleep with me. I didn't want to push the Alpha male issue. If you'll pick up the glass, then I'll get up with your help. Oh, thank you for watering for me this morning."

Sean crossed the room and squatted down slowly, still feeling leery of the dogs. Luckily the glass hadn't shattered and was only in just a few big pieces. He placed them on the silver tray. Shifting, he set the tray to the side.

"Grrrrmmmmeeeeooooooooaaaaaarrrrrrrrr."

Sean spun back at the odd sound, but the dogs were now seated complacently. He looked at Rayne. "What is that?"

"Another pet," she said, smiling. "I have several. Could you help me up? I think my foot will be fine if I just put some gauze on it."

Sean followed her into the bathroom, watching for a moment before he spoke. "Why don't you take a quick shower and then I'll run you into the hospital? We can wrap a towel around it."

Rayne looked back at Sean, over her shoulder. "Are you telling me indirectly that I stink?"

"Good God! Of course not, honey. I'm worried about your foot. It's obvious you've been out in the dirt without your shoes on, and now you've cut your foot. If nothing else we should go in and update your Tetanus booster."

"Okay, but please go to the kitchen and bring me one of those towels. I don't want to mess up one of the bathroom towels."

Sean was back in about four minutes, pausing to wipe up the remaining tea and set the glass fragments and tea tray back on the counter. The dogs merely watched him, but as he entered the kitchen, he thought he saw the tail of another animal disappearing around a corner. Somehow he knew the story about her pets would be an interesting

one. Everything about Rayne was proving to be out of the ordinary and quite intriguing.

In the bathroom, he sat on the closed toilet, watching her dim reflection through the full-length shower door. He watched her washing her hair, rinsing it, and then as he saw her picking the bottle up again, he spoke.

“Come on, Rayne. You don’t need to wash it twice, or condition your hair. I feel we have a more pressing need.”

She turned suddenly and leaned her face close to the door. Then she stuck her tongue out, before returning to her shower. Still, she merely finished washing her body, which turned out to be a rather erotic show as well. As the door opened, her hand came out and grabbed for a towel. She held it in front of her, wrapping it around her body, but then had to slide it around to tuck the ends for security.

Sean grinned. “Sit down and let me wrap this towel around your foot before we have blood everywhere. Stay put.” He added a moment later, “I’ll go grab something for you to wear.”

Chapter Eight

Rayne was sitting on her front porch with her foot elevated. She had refused to move in with him. Colleen didn't need more stress in her life right now. Her stubbornness had surprised Sean, but he had let it drop. What he wouldn't listen to was her tackling the watering.

"Just wait until I get back. Surely you can do that."

"I'm missing one whole watering, though."

Sean turned his eyes from the road toward Rayne for a second. She could feel his emotions even though she was looking out the window of the truck cab. Lifting the soft drink in the large cup, she sipped it slowly. Sean had bought them lunch for the ride back home. That was when he had told her he wanted to stay, but he had to hurry home and change clothes. Tonight was a meeting of local business owners, and of all nights, this one included dinner and he'd agreed to give a short talk. He would have sent Bob, but Colleen had reminded him three times yesterday and twice this morning after his return that they had Lamaze class tonight. It was the longer one, with the video and tour.

"All right," Rayne told him quietly a few moments later. "I'll wait for you."

"Promise?"

Rayne turned to look at him, surprised that he seemed to know her that well. "Yes, I promise."

Sean grinned at her. "No toes, fingers, legs and eyes crossed, right?"

She couldn't resist him, even though she hadn't gotten her way.

It was nine o'clock now, which was the time she liked to start filling the buckets. She couldn't remember how many times she wished she'd spent the extra money she'd

gotten on an irrigation system, even if hadn't covered the whole area. And it hadn't become a problem until she'd received the warning to be wary of people poking around. The PSI agents had gotten a tip a couple of months ago. That was when she had had to resort to conventional watering methods. No more "rain dancing" until the commotion settled down once again.

As a very young child, she had discovered her powers over water. She could move it, as in making waves in her bathtub while nothing moved. When she was five, she made waves appear suddenly in a completely placid lake when there wasn't a breath of wind. At age eight she got to see the ocean for the first time, and the last as far as her grandmother was concerned. It was a very wet group that piled back into the old car for the trip home.

It was only after they had to leave their grandmother did Rayne begin studying other things, among them casting spells and Native American lore regarding the making of rain. At age thirteen, she brought a light sprinkle, and it only covered a really small area. But at eighteen, there was a spectacular thunderstorm, with lightning galore. She soon discovered the big storms were easy, it was getting the rain to fall in a small isolated area that was hard. Only after listening to a friend from near her grandparents' farm complaining about the rainstorm that seemed to be traveling across the whole breadth of the country did she realize that while it might be fun, her powers definitely had consequences.

Thus it was when the drought started a few months earlier, Rayne had thrown caution to the wind, and started "making rain." When she was in town one day, she heard people complaining about how the weather station couldn't explain some unusual cloud patterns. Combined with the warning about the PSI agents, Rayne stopped her nightly dancing in her field. With immeasurable displeasure, she began the backbreaking work of hand watering.

"Do rain...do rain...do rain!"

Rayne turned her head to look at the brilliantly colored parrot perched on the bar she made for him so he had a good view on the porch. "Hush, Homer." Looking at the sky, she pleaded for either help with the bird or patience for her in dealing with the recalcitrant parrot. "Why is that the only thing he wants to say anymore?" A moment later she turned to the parrot. For a second she questioned in her mind whether or not the damned bird was grinning at her. "If you get me in trouble, Homer, I won't be the only one who gets screwed!"

Homer merely shifted his claws on the perch, and then bent his head to scratch with his beak. "Do rain...do rain."

Rayne shook her head, leaning it back on the cushion of the chair. "Shut up, Homer. I'm not letting a damned parrot talk me into doing anything!"

"Grrrrmmmmeeeeeeooooofff."

A second later she felt the brush of the soft fur against her leg. The swish of a tail batted back and forth, barely missing her drink resting on the table. "Hey, Mohan! You are going to knock something over with that tail of yours."

"Cccchhhhuuuuffff...ccchhuuuffff."

Rayne looked down at the animal anxious for her attention all of a sudden. For a moment she closed her eyes and offered up a prayer that Mohan had decided to stay away from the commotion that morning. Most people didn't react too well with a one hundred and fifteen pound Amur tiger. Well, technically Mohan wasn't pure tiger anymore. Shortly after she had settled here, she had gone to the nearest animal shelter, hoping to bring home some sweet pets to love. What she had found were the two puppies that now resembled small horses, an obnoxious parrot and an animal that wasn't identifiable—by sight anyway.

Looking into the small, white-and-black-striped cat's history, she had discovered that nearby had been a government facility before the war. Rumors had gone around about testing, using animals and so on. But at the end of the war, it was shut down, except for a minimal maintenance crew. After the animals all died, it was closed

permanently. Mohan was now full-size and was probably the result of crossbreeding a cat and a Siberian tiger.

Rayne was always careful around her, because no matter how house-trained an animal might be, a person couldn't erase millions of years of instinctive behaviors. She'd never seen Mohan show the slightest interest in hunting anything. If something smaller came into her vicinity, she was usually the more timid at the unexpected meeting. And luckily, all of her menagerie seemed to be amicable. The only trouble was Homer, who up until he'd adopted his newest phrase, had been particularly fond of phrases he'd learned at his previous owner's place of business, a strip club.

"Ccchhhuuuffff!"

Rayne rubbed Mohan's head as she rested it on her leg. She'd gotten used to the unusual sound, which she had learned was typical of tigers when greeting their caretakers. Whenever she looked into those sad, pale blue eyes though, she couldn't help but wonder at what terrible things they must have done to some of the animals at the research center.

Glancing back into the house through the window, she saw that it was almost ten. Sean had thought he'd be back here around nine thirty at the latest. She knew he would be exhausted by the time he did get here, and she hated the thought of him having to water before he could sleep. She was tired, so she was damned sure that he had to be exhausted. Since he'd gotten up earlier, he'd had even less sleep last night.

As she scratched behind the big cat's ears, she mused out loud, "If it did rain, it would have to be for at least thirty minutes to do any good. A downpour would only run off with the dry ground. Where as a nice, slow and gentle rain would have enough time to soak in and not cause any flash floods lower in the deeper sections of the valley."

Rayne stood slowly, pushing the big cat away. It wouldn't be easy to do, but if she were careful with her foot, and worked quickly, she could be done before Sean got there. He probably wouldn't believe her if she said she'd done the watering, but

perhaps she could say that Billy had shown up. That way Sean could get the rest he needed, if he chose to do it here. One part of her brain told her that it was the fact that he had spent the last two nights here that was the real cause of their lack of sleep. Still, Rayne sensed that if he wasn't here she would spend the night tossing and turning.

"Quite the conundrum," she murmured as she walked unsteadily down the steps. To concentrate the rainfall, she'd have to get into the middle of the field. Usually she didn't care if the rain fell outside the growing field, but if the roof was soaked, or the grass wet, Sean would definitely be suspicious.

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Progress was slow as Rayne walked, or rather hobbled into the field. To the man watching her from a well hidden spot a few hundred yards away, it was obvious the cut she'd sustained that morning must have been deeper than he had originally thought. Anton DeVeau lowered the specially equipped night-vision binoculars for a moment. There had been a moment this morning, looking at the photographs on the woman's living room wall, that he had gotten a distinct flash that told him Rayne was the psychic he'd been searching for this last year.

Anton was a direct descendant of the overlord Marcel DeVeau. Marcel had been a close friend of Tyre Leyton. Approximately fifteen months earlier, Anton had gone to Paris to close up his grandmother's home following her death. He had been astonished to find a personal diary that, even though it was not signed anywhere, had become obvious to Anton as he read through the old pages that the author was his grandfather. He was surprised to learn that his grandfather had been assigned a special task, which unfortunately was interrupted by the rebellion and the subsequent overthrow of the psychic regime.

The diary had revealed the story of a woman who had caught Tyre's attention in the year 2065. Because of association with Tyre, whether she was a natural psychic or not was never questioned. As time went on, Marcel wrote in the diary that the woman became known as Tyrea, adopting the name of her master when she became his

recognized concubine. By this time, Tyre had been in power for seventeen years. A law had been passed which prohibited two psychics of equal power mating, due to the circumstances that they might then procreate. It was unknown if that child would have greater power than the parent, and Tyre's government didn't want to find out.

Four years later, 2069, Marcel noted that suddenly Tyrea had left without word to anyone. Anton read that his grandfather had been surprised by the depth of anger Tyre expressed at being deserted by the woman. Marcel wrote that he had long suspected that Tyre felt much more for the woman than one usually saw between a master and his concubine. He suspected his sire's anger hid an aching heart. Tyre searched for the woman for several years, but as the rebellious outbreaks grew in frequency and depth, his attention was pulled away from matters of the heart. Then in the year 2100, only nine months to be exact, Tyre had given Marcel a task. Marcel was to do everything in his power to find Tyrea.

In the diary, Marcel recorded his arguments with Tyre over what he considered a waste of his precious time when the rebels were almost knocking on the palace doors. That was when Tyre had revealed the truth to his friend, and swore him to secrecy. Tyrea had been pregnant when she disappeared years earlier. Tyre had learned that she had died shortly after giving birth, but a child had survived. Marcel argued that he could be of much more use here, but his ruler had been insistent, finally revealing the truth. Tyrea had been a natural psychic. He did not know what level, but he suspected it was high, considering the concern Tyre was now expressing.

Anton read between the lines that Tyre had feared a son had been born, who could possibly defeat him by being a much stronger psychic. Marcel had noted all of his findings as he began his search, but the end had come too soon. Marcel had been in Paris, briefly visiting his wife, when word of defeat reached them. The diary ended with Marcel writing that he had not succeeded in his final task for his sire, but hopefully he would die nobly, thus honoring Tyre with his death.

Anton lifted the binoculars once again, focusing them on where he had last seen the beautiful woman. He had not been unaware of her beauty when he had finally met her. In the sunlight, she had been tanned, healthy looking and damned sexy. His immediate reaction to the woman's beauty surprised him still. He had been so devoted to rebuilding a strong psychic presence in the world for so long, that he had ignored a personal life for himself. Something about Rayne was making him have all kinds of personal, erotic thoughts.

Like that thin cotton dress she'd had on that morning. He could tell that she'd been naked beneath it by the way the sunlight had shown through the lightweight material. Standing in her living room, he had entertained thoughts of taking her on the floor. Anton didn't regard himself as a Neanderthal, but he was fully aware of his own attractiveness to women. There had been no doubt that a woman, living in the middle of nowhere, would welcome the attentions of someone like himself into her lonely existence, even for just a few hours.

The arrival of the other man had taken him by surprise. His surveillance had been completed a month ago, but then he had been required at the Center to discuss what he had found. No one acted without discussing their actions with the New Psychic Council and obtaining approval. The presence of this man, Sean something, had surprised him. The brawny teenager he'd seen from time to time had not worried him in the least. The minute Sean had burst into the living room, Anton had felt the change. With all of his psychic focus on discovering Rayne's identity, he had given no attention to the other man.

It unnerved him to think that the other man might have truly been a psychic, and in his temporary rapture with Rayne, he had missed the opportunity to psychically assess him. Telling himself to forget the past and concentrate on his assignment, he focused the binoculars on the porch. Scanning the length of the porch, he didn't see her so he shifted his gaze toward the lawn in front of the house. Still not finding her, he

wondered if she had decided to water the field after all. Starting at the front row, he began scanning the rows. He located her standing in the middle of the field.

“What the fuck?”

The binoculars revealed that the woman was twisting and turning, with her hands raised skyward. Granted, she wasn’t moving smoothly, or evenly, but he guessed she was dancing. Why the hell would she be dancing in the field at—he glanced at his watch—almost ten at night? Before he could formulate any further thoughts concerning Rayne, there was a loud clap of thunder overhead. Less than a second later, rain was pouring down on his head.

Cursing loudly, Anton fumbled to get the binoculars back to his eyes. Quickly he relocated Rayne. She was standing in the same spot, clapping her hands while the rain soaked her clothing. Her joy in the gentle rain drenching her, and her plants, was unmistakable. Logically, her happiness at having rain would make sense—after all, she was a farmer. Watching her, Anton lowered the night-vision binoculars to reveal her clinging clothes. Beneath the wet cotton dress, he easily saw the way her breasts were defined with taut nipples. Moving them down more, he lingered at her hips and thighs, enjoying how the material was caught between her legs as she moved back into the lane. From behind, her ass was perfect and heart-shaped.

The appearance of bright lights shining up Rayne’s gravel road blinded him and he dropped the binoculars. Quickly he moved back under cover so the lights couldn’t highlight him watching Rayne. He considered waiting until the lights left again, but he didn’t like getting wet, and sitting here with water filling his expensive shoes wasn’t his idea of fun. It was an easy decision to head back toward the small town and visit the local bar. Maybe there he could find out what had changed since his last visit.

Chapter Nine

Sean slammed the door of his truck. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. At dinner he'd had a glass of wine, and before he'd had a whiskey from the cash bar. Surely that wasn't enough liquor to make him hallucinate, was it? In college, he drank a hell of a lot more at fraternity parties. Looking up at the sky, he verified that he was standing where he could see stars, and clear skies. Still, about thirty yards away, he could see that it was raining on Rayne's field. The same field that he had been thinking about speeding up a way to water it more quickly. When the field went fallow, he was going to have irrigation and watering installed.

And to be perfectly honest, he had always assumed it was an old lady's daydream. Then he saw Rayne walking towards him, out of the field.

His breath caught in his throat as he saw how beautiful she looked soaking wet. The rain obviously wasn't bothering her in the least. In fact, he could see that she was smiling. Something about her screamed erotic and sensual, but it seemed to be more than just the clinging dress to her body. These feelings were much deeper, more elemental than simple lust. She was part of the rain, even part of the nature that surrounded them.

Sean knew this woman was getting under his skin. When he wasn't with her he was thinking about her. The most alarming thing was the way he was thinking and planning in his future, including her in his plans and dreams. He was assuming she would be in his life, now, tomorrow and next year.

When he had decided to retire and settle down, marriage was not part of the picture. Women, plural, was what he had planned on, perhaps making up for the solitary life he'd led during his years working as an agent. Rayne was more than unexpected...she was a shock to his physical, emotional and psychological well-being.

Yet every time he thought of her, he felt something inside him awaken and move through him. Perhaps he was imagining this as well, but when he was with Rayne it seemed as if his psychic power was enhanced, or purified in some way he couldn't explain. His mind, though, kept shying away from acknowledging what was happening.

"You're early. I didn't think you'd be here for another hour or so."

Rayne's words didn't make a lot of sense just then, so lost in his thoughts had he been until her voice disturbed him. "So much for resting your foot and you following the doctor's orders. Did you think you'd start watering without me? Good thing it started to rain, huh?"

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Rayne wasn't sure if he was being sarcastic or not. Unfortunately, she'd stopped focusing once she saw his lights start up the gravel road. She could feel the rain lessening as she walked toward Sean, and it stopped when he crossed the lawn to meet her on the soft grass.

"Too bad it didn't last longer. I guess it was just a fluke."

"Let's go inside and get you dry. The ground looks damp enough to hold until morning. I'll water before I head back to my place." Sean moved before Rayne could react and swung her off her feet and into his arms.

"I can walk," she protested as he walked up the steps.

"And you'll walk even better tomorrow, once you've rested and elevated your foot." He walked to the bedroom, setting her on her feet. Without waiting for her to do anything other than take a deep breath, Sean was pulling her wet dress up and over her head. The wet dress hung over his arm as he walked to the bathroom. Less than a minute later he was back with a towel. "Start drying and hop on the bed. I'll get some more dressings and change that bandage now."

Arguing would be useless, so she sat on the bed, holding the towel in front of her. Pulling her hair forward, she started drying it with one end of the terry cloth. As Sean came back in, she spoke to him. "Maybe I should just take a pair of scissors and cut all this stuff off right now. It certainly would save time, not to mention water."

Sean sat down on the edge of the bed, lifted her foot and placed it on his thigh. He began unwrapping the old dressing, but didn't reply. Rayne watched as he tenderly took care of her foot. She was a little miffed that he had not immediately told her that her hair was too lovely to be cut or something like that. All her life people had made comments about her hair. There was also a niggling voice inside her head telling her she was being foolish and reminding her that she didn't play games like this, with people. She prided herself on being straight and honest.

"So, do you think I should cut it, Sean?" she prompted a moment later, watching as he finished applying the stretch netting to hold the dressing in place.

Sean looked up slowly. "I think you should do whatever you want. It is your hair."

Rayne had not expected him to say something so politically correct. It irritated her following her own silly word play. "You don't like long hair?"

Sean smiled at this point. He tossed the used dressing into the small trashcan, and then gathered the remaining things together. "I like long hair, and I think your long hair is beautiful." He turned and walked into the bathroom.

As he came back into the bedroom, Rayne's towel hit him in the chest. He grinned and picked the towel back up. "Should I ask why you threw the towel?" He set the towel on the bed, and then walked over to a chair in the corner of the small bedroom. Sitting down, after removing his suit jacket, he began unbuttoning his shirt. His skinny, western style tie already hung around his neck. When his shirt was hanging loose, he pulled his boots off before standing and dropping his dress pants. Soon he was naked and began walking back toward the bed.

Rayne frowned at Sean as he neared the bed. She wasn't immune to how sexy he looked naked. The fact that he was getting into her bed was still surprising to her. The

whole sex and relationship thing, if that is what this was, was confusing to her. The movies she had seen, along with the old tapes of television shows, were all she knew of male and female relationships. Despite the confidence she felt in her powers, and her body strength, this part was unknown territory.

"I'm not sure why I threw it, but I'm sorry for being so childish. I thought all men preferred long hair."

Sean grinned as he climbed into the bed beside Rayne. "I think your hair is beautiful long, but I have no doubt that it is difficult to take care of. I am equally sure that you would look fantastic with shorter hair. I think this was one of those 'no-win' situations that women like to get men into."

His accuracy was grating, and technically they barely knew each other. His logic was perfect, which didn't help her frustration either. Just what she had thought she would accomplish with this nonsense, she had no idea. In all honesty, since she had met Sean, she wasn't altogether sure of anything. The feeling of drowning seemed to be a near-constant state for her when he was close to her. Yet when he was not around, her ability to focus on anything except him was definitely impaired. Her insecurities felt overwhelming suddenly, and she felt the need to lash out again.

"You know, since I didn't need help with watering, there really wasn't a need for you to...uhm..." Her voice trailed away as she ran out of temper. It was kind of funny in a way. The words had sounded a whole lot better in her head than they did spoken. If he was in her bed just for sex, did she really want to know it?

Sean interrupted her thoughts as he finished her sentence. "Sleep over?"

Rayne nodded her head slowly. She felt completely at sea with her emotions and thoughts rising and falling like angry waves in a storm. Her life was calm and peaceful. It was nice, quiet and nothing bothered her. Deliberately she kept her success at growing things at a low level, getting by and not drawing attention to herself or what she was doing here. Until Sean stepped into her life. If only he had not come over that evening—

If only she had not asked him to turn on the light. Maybe she should have waited until he was gone. Perhaps it was that he saw her when she was tired, and letting herself become elemental with the water that first time. Stopping her dreams of him might have been helpful too –

“Nickel for your thoughts.”

Rayne turned and saw that Sean was now sitting upright beside her in the bed. Without consciously thinking, or planning it, she looked deeply into his eyes and for the first time really tried to read his thoughts. As a child, she had been very good at this psychic game. In fact, with practice, she had developed the ability to put suggestive thoughts into certain types of subjects’ minds.

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Sean could see that something was bothering Rayne tonight, and it went a lot deeper than the fact it had rained, or that he had left her alone for a meeting. Looking into her violet colored eyes, he knew instantly what she was going to do. On the one hand, he had hoped the Agency had been wrong about Rayne. The next instant he was angry that he had not been able to see her psychic powers until now. There was no disguising the look on her face as she stared into his eyes. She was delving into his mind.

In that split second, he made a decision. Only with time would he know if it was right or wrong, or the depth to which it would affect their lives. He made no effort to block her as she began weaving her way into his thoughts. As she began to delve more deeply, looking into his memories, he fought off the need to block her. It was instinctive to fight such probing, but perhaps she had to do this to trust him.

It was a risk, of course. What she would learn in the next few minutes could cause her to turn from him in anger and fear. There was an equal chance that she would see this gesture of his as a sign of his trustworthiness. By opening his mind to her, he was showing her she had no reason to fear him. He wanted her to see that even though his

initial reasons for seeking her out had been nefarious, from now on his goals were to protect her. There were no doubts in his mind that she might betray the government and turn to the psychic renegades. Sean hoped she would believe his thoughts and deepest emotions by seeing them in their rawest form, and without any words to hide behind.

He was surprised by her reaction, which came less than a minute after she started. She moved so fast he didn't have time to grab her either. Like a flash of lightning, she hopped out of the bed and across the room. Sean stopped to pull on his jeans before following her.

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Sean stopped on the front porch. Rayne was standing on the grass, looking out across her small planting. The moon was no longer full, but it still gave off enough light to reveal how beautiful she looked naked, her dark hair trailing down her back. Slowly he walked down the steps and crossed the lawn. He was a few feet away from her when she spoke.

"I never saw you coming, Sean."

"What are you talking about, honey? Why don't we go back inside? We can talk about anything you want. I'll answer any questions you have."

The short, staccato laugh Rayne answered him with didn't ease his worries in the least. He took a deep breath before he spoke to her again.

"I didn't hide anything from you. If you want to look again, I won't block you. I'm an open book for you to read."

"What if I say I'm bored and I don't want to read anymore?" Rayne questioned softly, glancing over her shoulder at him.

Sean didn't want to admit how much that possibility would hurt him. But he also didn't think she meant it. "I don't believe you. I think you want to know as much about me as I want to know about you."

Rayne shook her head negatively, and Sean watched the black silk sweep back and forth across her back. God! He thought without pause, she was the sexiest and most beautiful woman he'd ever known. And she seemed to be doing it without knowing or caring.

"Are you going to arrest me? Charge me with some kind of espionage or treason thing?"

"Of course not, Rayne. You aren't guilty of those things."

Rayne turned slowly to look at him. "What am I guilty of then? Why send a PSI agent after me? I have almost no contact with anyone. I live quietly and abide by the rules set up by the new government following the rebellion. Who am I to draw the attention of the Agency?"

"I am no longer with the Agency. I retired. I volunteered, sort of, to check you out." Sean knew the minute the words were spoken he should have kept his mouth shut, or picked different words.

"Have you 'checked me out' adequately for a full report to the Agency? Is there anything else about me you need to know? Have you been rifling through my drawers while I slept? Walking through my brain while I dreamed? Damn you!"

Rayne turned away from him once again and began walking toward her open field. "So, now what happens? Do you make a report on me and then I have to put up with someone checking on me all the time? Is this what happens for the rest of my life? Do you get some kind of special reward for having located certain psychics?"

Sean followed her to the edge of the lawn, where the grass gave way to her plants. "There is no reward, damn it! I haven't made any reports yet. The truth is that you blocked me so well I was beginning to think they were wrong. I still don't think you could be any relationship to Leyton, no matter what the informant had to say."

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Rayne froze in her tracks. He had just spoken the name she had hoped and prayed to never hear in conjunction with her sisters or herself. Hearing Sean say the bastard's name made it sound much worse than when she had considered possible reactions and consequences. If he knew the truth, she knew he would undoubtedly turn from her in disgust. Who wouldn't? Her great-grandfather had been the cause for the hardship and destruction of so many lives. Why would anyone want to be around her?

"Oh my God!" she spun around, wincing from the pain. "What about my sisters?" She stopped abruptly as she sadly realized that she had no way to contact them, to warn them!

Sean grabbed her upper arms, stopping her movement. "It's too late, Rayne. I waited in making contact with you. Since I was already so close to you and my cover was in existence, I delayed enough to give the others time to investigate."

"Damn it, Sean!"

"No, Rayne! You don't want to do anything to draw more attention. I can make discreet inquiries in the morning. I'll contact the others and see what they've found out in the morning. I know you are innocent and have no intentions of any wrong-doings."

Rayne heard his words but she wasn't sure that she could believe him. And how could he speak for the Agency? He was retired, so why should they do what he recommended? They would most likely send someone else to check her out –

Her blood ran cold as she remembered her visitor from earlier. Something about the man had set off alarm bells. Falling had distracted her.

"Rayne, listen to me, sweetheart. I will convince the Agency that you are not a threat, and will not be one in the future. There is nothing to worry about. I promise you."

She voiced her doubts. "Why will they listen to you, Sean? What can you possibly say to convince them that I am 'harmless,' so to speak?"

Sean pulled her into his arms, hugging her so close she could feel his heart pounding through his chest. His warmth seeped into her body, heating her from the

inside out, like a slowly glowing coil of fire. "Because I am going to marry you, Rayne! That is why they will believe me!"

Chapter Ten

The sun had been up for more than an hour before Rayne shoved the quilt off her stiff body. Sitting on the swing all night hadn't helped her feel better emotionally, or physically. Hearing Sean state he was going to marry her last night had obviously shocked him as much as it had her. She had seen his surprise the minute the words were spoken. Still he had not taken them back, despite the three opportunities Rayne gave him before he finally left last night.

Inside the house, she dressed in shorts, T-shirt and sneakers. Pausing only to grab an apple, she was back outside a few minutes later, beginning to fill buckets once again with water. If she hurried, she could be done before it got too hot. Then she could spend the rest of the day thinking and worrying. Maybe she could even take a nap!

"Good morning."

The voice startled her since she had been so wrapped up in her thoughts she had not heard anyone approaching. Looking up, she saw that it was indeed who she thought it was.

"Oh, uhm...hello Mr. uhm...I am sorry, but I've forgotten your name."

"Anton DeVeau, *mademoiselle*. You were rather stressed yesterday. I am glad to see that you have recovered completely?"

Rayne heard the questioning inflection at the end of his nice speech and nodded her head. "Ah, Mr. DeVeau, now I remember. Thank you. It wasn't too bad a cut after all. Everyone is fully recovered."

"Everyone?"

Rayne smiled, shrugging her shoulders. "The dogs, and others, have also recovered nicely. Sorry about the muck up and all. I never did hear why you had come to see me."

"Ahh, yes, I see. Your animals—a most interesting collection you have, Ms. Waters."

"Thank you, Mr. DeVeau. We're a family and we make the best of it." Rayne stood up and looked at the stylishly dressed man. His city polish certainly made her feel like the country bumpkin, but then she was happy being here so she didn't feel in the least bit intimidated by him. "I need to get busy, so what was it you wanted?"

"A straight forward woman! How refreshing!" Anton DeVeau took his pristine white handkerchief out, mopping his forehead. "I was hoping we could go inside and discuss this."

"Normally we could, but I need to get busy with watering. That is the thing about farming, neither plants, or animals, wait for us. I need to get this done before the sun gets much higher." Rayne picked up two of the buckets. "If you want, you can tag along with me, or wait on the porch. But if you follow me, pick up two of the buckets. No need to waste two good hands, is what my grandmother used to say."

Anton followed her down the lane, setting the buckets where she directed. Changing her usual plans, she started watering at the front today. She was halfway down the row when DeVeau drew her attention once again.

"I understood that your family was not farming stock, at all."

Rayne paused and her senses seemed to go into overdrive. Slowly, she began walking back toward the man. Letting her mind begin to work its psychic magic, she continued to water the plants but started to look inside DeVeau's thoughts. Reaching the end of the row, Rayne moved around him to start the next line. Idly, trying not to draw attention, she brushed her hand over his shoulder.

"Sorry, but you had a dragonfly on your shoulder."

Rayne's feet stumbled over one another as she realized this man was psychic. When she touched him, she got a direct link to his power. He was blocking her and trying to read her mind. The shock stiffened her back and she dropped the watering can. Why

the hell were two men with apparently equal psychic powers showing up on her doorstep? More importantly, if Sean was a PSI agent, then what was Anton DeVeau?

Anton's hand grabbed her arm. "I think we should go inside right now, Rayne."

Rayne walked beside him, wondering if she could break his grip. With her foot injured she would be off balance, and that could make her blows less accurate. She might not get a second chance.

As they reached the porch steps, Anton pulled a small, but very effective laser gun from his inner jacket pocket. "Don't try anything fancy. I am a lot stronger than you, and I believe that in spite of your little show last night, you are not as powerful as the others believe you to be. Tyre Leyton may have been a level five psychic, but I doubt your great-grandmother was of equal power."

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Inside the house, Anton pushed Rayne down onto the small sofa. He crossed to sit in the chair, which faced the sofa but had its back to the door. There was no fear in him about being interrupted. Before coming over here, he had stopped to make sure that Sean MacDougal and his men would be quite busy all day repairing the sudden leak in the main irrigation line, not to mention the broken fence which was allowing his prize cattle access to the main road. Smiling, he let his gaze travel over Rayne.

"I believe I made the right choice in choosing you over your sisters." He settled back into the chair, crossing one leg over the other, appearing the epitome of casual. His smile turned into a grin when he saw how tense Rayne became when he mentioned her sisters. "The others really wanted me to seek out Jezermiah, but somehow I knew you would be the most...malleable. Yes, malleable is the perfect word. The fact that you hand-water plants and take in strays told me everything I needed to know about you."

"What do you want? I don't have any money. I make just enough to feed the animals and myself. I don't own any jewelry worth anything."

“True. I’ve been through all of your accounts and those of your sisters. The council was convinced that either fire or wind would be the best choice. More powerful, more destructive, were how they put it. And on the one hand I can agree that the destructive force of either is astronomical. Still, I kept coming back to good old water.”

Rayne shifted on the sofa. “I won’t help the psychics regain power. I won’t help overthrow the government. My...” She swallowed hard. “Tyre Leyton was a bad man. He was very evil, and I think he was even insane at the end. Even if he were still alive, I would not have had anything to do with him. And I don’t want anything to do with the psychics who thought he was a great leader.”

“I wondered how much you knew about your past. How long have you known about your true familial history and no longer believed in the fabrication created by your grandmother?”

“Don’t call my grandmother a liar, damn it! Secondly, I am not going to do whatever it is you want me to do. You might as well leave because nothing you say will change my mind.”

“Getting upset won’t make any difference, Rayne. And you will do exactly what I want, or I will take one of your sisters in your place.”

Anton watched the color drain from her face. Finally she believed that he was serious about this. This was going better than he had anticipated, and the side effects, or “perks” as he’d started to consider them, were much better than he would have thought possible. Rayne was a beautiful woman and having her share his bed was not going to be the hardship he had been expecting. Eventually, once he assumed his rightful position, he might even let her be his concubine, just as her great-grandmother had done for Tyre Leyton. Together, Rayne and he would bring forth a new generation of super-psychics, which no one would ever be able to overthrow again.

“What do you want from me? There really is nothing I could do that would be of any help to you. You might not see it at the moment, but I am rather useless.”

Anton laughed softly as she spoke. He stood when she finished and began walking around the room. "For what I have in mind, no special talents are required. All you have to do is lay back and take it."

Her surprised gasp told him that she understood him this time. He turned from the pictures on the wall he had been looking at. "I believe you will be able to do the job. In fact, now that we've met, I'm actually looking forward to my task. You are more beautiful than I expected. Spending a few hours a day between your thighs won't be the onerous task I was dreading. This way the council won't have to listen to me complaining all the time."

"You didn't come all this way just to...sleep with a psychic." Rayne shifted uneasily on the sofa. "You aren't that unattractive that you must resort to forcing a woman to share your bed."

Anton turned sharply to look at her. Slowly the angry look faded. "Nice try, my dear. But making me angry won't change a thing. What I want isn't a bedmate. What I want from you are children."

"No!"

"Oh, yes, my dear. As many children as possible, in fact. Our children will rule the earth. Surely that is inspiration enough! You will be mother to a new world. A world of powerful psychics, with lesser psychics and humans serving us. Can you say honestly that such a powerful position doesn't excite you?"

* * * * *

Rayne realized that Anton DeVeau was insane. There could be no other explanation for such wild imaginings. Ever since she had discovered the truth of her family history, through her great-grandmother's diary, she had not wanted to think about where she had come from. Her life began with her grandmother, Maile, and her grandfather. Before that, nothing mattered. She had powers that she had been taught from her first

breath to keep secret, and not reveal. Suddenly her life was unraveling and it appeared there truly was nothing she could do about it.

Breeding little psychics with this man was a nightmare of an idea. It was as crazy as this man was. And one that she could not allow either of her sisters to face. In that fact, this man was correct. When she looked at him, he no longer looked in the least bit attractive. Foremost in her mind was concern for her sisters, and Sean. It didn't seem at all fair that she was losing him. Not that she had ever really had him, but sitting on her sofa while the crazy man walked around, she realized that she loved Sean MacDougal. He'd gotten past her fences and around her walls. God! She wished he were here right now —

Abruptly she stopped that thought. She didn't want to take the chance that Anton might take a peek at her thoughts and be alerted. Her fear that he might harm Sean shocked her. It was hard to think at all, between her fear for Jezermiah, Carmella and now Sean. How could she protect them? Killing herself would only turn his attention toward her sisters, and she wasn't a quitter. She stopped thinking as she realized Anton was speaking again.

"We will take these photos with us, the ones of your grandmother as a child. And the one you have of Tyrea when she was younger. They will all prove archival when it comes time to record our royal history. Our children will appreciate knowing where they came from, of course."

Rayne felt her stomach cramp, hearing him talk so nonchalantly about the future and children. She'd never give birth to a child of his. But the truth was hard to face that she might not have a choice. He could force himself on her and impregnate her against her will. From the sound of the council, there already existed a network that would be working toward these goals. Finding help once they left here could very well be impossible.

When her stomach cramped again, Rayne stood. Anton turned immediately to look at her. "I'm hungry. I sometimes get low blood sugar. I'm going to make myself something to eat."

Anton nodded once. "Good idea. After that we will go to bed and get started on business. I'm looking forward to sampling your treasures. From what I've seen so far, you have a great body. I've always been a tit man, and you have some pretty fine boobs from what I've seen so far."

His coarse words were like a slap across her face. It reminded her of what she was up against, alone. Taking a deep breath, she forced herself to calm down. "Have a seat and I'll make us something to eat then."

"Don't bother trying to run, Rayne. I could easily catch you. My skimmer is close by."

"Don't worry. I believe what you've said, and I don't want my sisters to be hurt. I won't run, I promise. Just sit down and I'll get busy in the kitchen."

Anton nodded and moved over to the sofa. He sat down, putting the gun on the empty sofa seat beside him. Rayne turned and walked into the small kitchen. Quietly she began preparing a large meal. Pausing partway through the preparations, she went back into the living room, offering Anton a glass of sherry. She went to the pantry, and put the food just inside the door, leaving the door open a few inches.

In the living room, she found Anton lounging on her sofa, with the gun still beside him. "The food will be ready in about ten minutes. I need a shower to clean up first."

Anton nodded, his eyes watching as she walked down the short hallway. In the bathroom, Rayne quickly stripped her clothes off. Stepping into the shower, she slid the door closed. Turning on the water, she began scrubbing her skin, wanting to remove Anton's presence, if that was even possible. Rinsing her hair, she then turned off the water. Opening her eyes, she shrieked as she saw that Anton was standing in the bathroom door, watching her. In horror, she wondered how long he'd been there. It

made her feel sick inside to realize he had seen her like this. Worse though, she now saw that she had to open the fogged door to get her towel.

He was smirking as she slid the door open, reaching for the towel. He was holding it so she had to open it all the way. Shame filled her as he saw her naked body, and she had no way to hide.

"A shaved pussy! Now that is something I was not anticipating, Rayne. You are just full of surprises, eh?" He chuckled as she jerked the towel away from him, wrapping it around her body. "There I was admiring your big boobies bouncing and jiggling while you are washing your hair, and all the while the best treat was still to come."

Rayne pushed past him, but not fast enough, because he still managed to briefly cup her ass. Hurriedly she ran into her bedroom, and heard him enter the room a few seconds later. If this plan didn't work...quickly she stopped her thoughts, not wanting to betray herself too early.

"Put on something sexy," Anton told her a moment later. "I'd like to see you wearing something hot while we eat. Not that I need to work up my desire. I'm already hard and horny for you. I can't wait to plant my meat in your shaved cunt. A few rounds of hide the sausage, as my naughty German uncle used to say, and you'll be nicely fucked, and much more malleable."

Rayne shuddered at his coarse words. Perhaps the sherry had done its work better than she might have hoped. "I don't have anything sexy."

"Sure you do, all women have sexy clothes." He walked over to her closet. A few seconds later, he pulled out a white, wrinkled, cotton waist-length top and short skirt. She hadn't worn it since moving here, and it was too tight. "Wear this, and skip the bra and panties. I'm going back out for another glass of sherry. Come out when you are dressed." He walked to the bedroom door and then turned to look over his shoulder. "Put your hair up as well."

Rayne pulled the small top on, which strained across her chest, and ended only two inches below the full underside of her breasts. The skirt fit a little better, but it was still

too tight. Putting her wet hair into a topknot pulled the shirt up, and she had to tug it back down before going back out.

“I’ll bring the food out here,” she told Anton on her way to the kitchen.

Chapter Eleven

“God damn it all! What the hell is going on here, Bob? I can’t believe this shit! We just get the irrigation pipes fixed and now someone calls and says my prize bull is heading toward town! This is unreal. I think this goes beyond normal happenstance and things going wrong.”

“It does seem strange, Sean. But Colleen took the call. They said there was a hole in the fence.” Bob paused, taking out his handkerchief and wiping off his forehead. “Even Colleen said she thought it seemed too weird. She tried the main phone lines, which connect the barns and outlying buildings. When the phone didn’t work, she walked outside and found the lines had been cut—and in two places. I could see wear and tear, but not twice on the same phone line.”

Sean rubbed the bridge of his nose. He could feel a headache coming on and didn’t think it was going to get much better anytime soon. Last night had been pretty much a sleepless one, and his thoughts kept returning to Rayne. There was no doubt that he’d not handled the whole situation very well. Blurting out he was going to marry her had to rank near the top of the ten most stupid things to say to a woman you’d met just a couple of days earlier. The truth was that nothing about their time together could be called normal.

All morning he’d felt the need to see Rayne, and talk things over with her. First he would apologize, and then he would tell her that everything was going to be fine. Last night he’d put a call through to Shannon Riedel, the Agency Director. After giving a verbal report on Rayne, he asked for her to run a check on the man at her place yesterday. He was relieved to hear that her sisters were both fine.

“I’m confused, Bob. If the phone line is dead, how did Colleen hear about the fence?”

"The call came in over the radio. Then she called me on my cell phone. I was planning on taking Bill with me to catch the bull, and I've already got Jack and Johnnie working on the fence."

Sean nodded, wondering if it was safe to take off for Rayne's now or not.

"We'll be fine if you want to work in the office, or maybe go check on something, or someone else."

Sean turned slowly from his perusal of his land to look at his brother-in-law. He smiled ruefully as he saw Bob's grin. "I'll take my cellular phone. Call me if you need any help. I think I'll grab a quick shower and then drive over."

Bob started the engine of his truck as Bill climbed in beside him. "That sounds like a good idea. You might want to snatch a few flowers from Colleen's garden as well."

"Get out of here!" Sean told his brother-in-law with a grin.

* * * * *

Twenty minutes later he was halfway down the gravel lane to Rayne's when he saw the skimmer pulled to the side. A sick feeling came over him and he gunned the engine, speeding the last one hundred yards to the house. The truck skidded as he slammed on the brakes. He saw Rayne sitting on the grass, surrounded by her menagerie. Since she was facing her field, he couldn't see her face. As he came closer, she still didn't turn around to look at him.

"Rayne? Are you all right, sweetheart?"

The dogs had come to alert positions, moving behind her, facing him. They weren't growling, but he could tell that all of them were on edge. "Rayne?"

The dogs moved, preventing him from coming any closer than six feet. There was another animal, but he couldn't tell what it was from this position. "Honey, please call the dogs off. I need to talk to you."

"Sit!" Rayne commanded the dogs.

Sean came quickly around the side but stopped abruptly as he saw the huge animal with its head on her lap. He'd never seen one of them outside a zoo but he was sure he was looking at a white tiger. Most disturbing was the blood on Rayne's white top and skirt, and it was also on her arms and the animal's coat. Within a second he was down on one knee beside her.

"Rayne? Are you hurt? Where did all this blood come from?"

She didn't look at him as she answered, which only served to heighten his fear.

"I'm sorry, Sean. I was going to contact the sheriff soon. I had to do it. I didn't have any other options. I had to protect my sisters, the world."

Sean knew something awful must have happened. Why in the world would Rayne be thinking about the world, or how anything she might do actually have a worldwide effect? "Your sisters? Are they here? Has something happened to them?"

"No, Sean. He chose me because he knew I would give in to his demands. But I wasn't going to let him touch me. I couldn't bear the thought of him..." Her voice broke and she sobbed soundlessly.

Sean knew she'd feel better if she broke down and started to cry. This tenseness and self-control didn't seem at all natural, or healthy, following a crisis. His second thought was what the hell the crisis was? And foremost, what "him" was she talking about? Could that Anton guy have come back? There hadn't been information on him yet when he'd last checked in at the Agency.

"Rayne, honey, I need you to focus and tell me what is wrong. What happened? I passed DeVeau's skimmer on the gravel road. Is he here? Where is he now?"

Rayne took a deep breath, but it seemed to rattle in her chest as she exhaled. "He's on the sofa...or I guess, part of him is still on the sofa."

"Shit!"

Sean took off running for the house. He vaulted up the front steps and almost pulled the screen door off its hinges. Whatever he'd thought he might find, it couldn't

have prepared him for what he did find. There was a lot of blood, and Anton DeVeau, or rather part of him, was on the sofa. One glance told him the man was dead so his first call on his cell phone was to the Agency.

“Agent 0010,” he told the operator. “Special Red Alert call to security. Code three-three-alpha-two.” He waited while his call was immediately patched through to Shannon. “I need an emergency clean up out here, Shannon.”

“What happened, Sean? I had just received the information you had requested and was going to have my assistant fax it to your home. DeVeau is the grandson of Marcel DeVeau. He was an overlord closely tied to Tyre Leyton. Our Paris branch has been tracking increased psychic activity throughout Europe and the African continent. Anton was sighted in Paris, following his grandmother’s death. He obtained a number of items from a lock box at her bank. Unfortunately, he seemed to have gone back underground shortly after that. Rumor has associated him several times with the Psychic Continental Council, but nothing definite could be found.”

“Well, you don’t have to worry about him anymore, Shannon. The Paris branch can mark him off their watch list.”

“Damn! You mean he has shown up there? Does this mean the sisters are aligned with the council? You know what that would mean.”

Sean didn’t need to be reminded of what the directive from the Agency had been. If proof had been discovered showing the subject was indeed linked to the council, he had been sanctioned to eliminate the threat. After meeting Rayne, the thought of losing her had nagged at him for a short time. All doubts were dispersed after she’d come to his home for dinner. And the more time he’d spent with her, the more he knew there was no way that Rayne would ever associate herself with the psychics who had formed the council.

“There is no connection whatsoever, Shannon. I am a hundred percent certain of it. You know me, and I’ve hunted and investigated a lot of psychics for the Agency. Rayne would be happy as a hermit, living with her menagerie of weird animals.”

Sean was immediately aware of the heavy pause before Shannon answered him.

"Rayne, is it?"

Sean was sure she was smiling, despite her words. "Yeah, it's Rayne. I plan on marrying her, Shannon. You always told me some woman would knock me on my ass one day. I've met her."

"Ha! Now this woman I look forward to meeting. I'll let all the women on my staff know you have lost your bachelor status. I'd better send out for more Kleenex."

"Yeah, right. Anyway, I really need a clean up out here fast. I'm going to take Rayne to my place, and then I'll be back here to wait for the crew to arrive. It is a level three job, by the way."

"All right, Sean. I'll await your report and send the crew. Don't forget to send me my wedding invitation!"

"I'll send the report tomorrow, through the encoded channel. And if you can't make the wedding, I'll expect one hell of a big gift."

"You bet, you dog! Thanks for taking this last job, Sean. I owe you one."

"Clean this up for me, Shannon, and we are square. I'll be in touch."

* * * * *

It was nearly three in the morning the next day before Sean finally got back home. His first stop was his bedroom for a shower. It was more than twelve hours since he had carefully encouraged Rayne to help him pen up the "tiger-cat." He tied up the dogs, giving them plenty of food and water. The only pet that went with them to his place was Homer.

Colleen had immediately taken charge of Rayne, taking her away within a few minutes of their arrival. Sean put Homer in his gilded cage on the front porch. He gave him some food and fresh water before going to find Bob and let him know that he must go back to Rayne's and wasn't sure what time he'd return. The crew had arrived within

thirty minutes of his return. It never failed to amaze him how quickly they could get somewhere.

He had pretty much stayed out of their way, other than directions on making sure certain things would have to be cleaned to a near-normal state. Sean had been determined to make this the least traumatic to Rayne as possible. About two hours after the crew had arrived two other men had arrived with a large truck. Once he had signed some forms, the two men had departed to transport DeVeau's skimmer. Already there was a crew working on his hotel room and erasing his presence there.

Twice while the cleaners worked, he had gone out and watered Rayne's field. Using his computerized communication device, he had connected with the wireless remote to the Agency's database. He had searched and finally discovered what Rayne's secret plant was that she kept hidden at the rear of the field. They would definitely have to discuss the safety of growing this little flower, he decided with a wry smile.

Remembering how he had described Rayne to Shannon, he wondered how they would make a life together. With a deep sigh, he acknowledged that if she preferred to live at her house, then that is what they would do. That would eliminate the need for Bob and Colleen to build the small house they had planned to start a few months after the baby came. His sister and brother-in-law could stay in his huge, nearly perfect house and he would stay with Rayne.

Of course, there were a lot of improvements he could make at Rayne's place. And if he made them slowly, he was pretty sure he could talk her into accepting them. First, would be irrigation installation. Next, he'd see about making sure the house was sound. It probably needed a new roof. The shed she used needed a lot of work, and the truck he had seen looked like it came from the previous millennia rather than the past decade or so.

The whole time he spent watering Rayne's plants, his thoughts roamed freely over just about everything except DeVeau and the way the man had been mauled to death. He doubted the big cat was normally like that, but he'd have to talk to Rayne first

before its future could be determined. She might raise a stink about it, but if the animal was turning predatory then neither she nor her other pets would be safe around it.

Walking from the shower into his bedroom now, he consciously told himself to stop thinking about the past, or what he'd seen today. Focus on just now, he told himself silently while he idly dried his hair with the towel. He stopped in front of his dresser to comb his hair before applying some aftershave lotion. His thoughts on Rayne, he considered going to the guest room tonight, or just calling it a night and going to sleep.

* * * * *

Rayne watched Sean as he combed his hair in front of the dresser mirror. She was quite sure that he had not yet realized that she had snuck into his room and climbed into his bed while he was still in the shower. Admiring his muscular back and tight, hard buns, she knew she was in love with him. It really had nothing to do with his attractive body. The scales had tipped when he had taken charge today.

She had no doubt there would be lots of questions to answer, and his anger to deal with when he learned of Anton's plans. But it had been rather nice to be taken care of today. The shock of killing a man had pretty much worn off by early evening. She was by no means a callous person, but it had been a matter of survival. If she had left her home with Anton, the opportunity to thwart his crazy plans might never have come again. Today, they had been alone in her house.

She had carried the food on a tray to the living room, and Anton had eaten lustily. He had complimented her cooking abilities.

"I am surprised to find that you can cook."

"My grandmother taught me when I was quite young. Living alone gives one lots of opportunities to improve."

Anton had smiled at her. "Well, you won't have any of these daily drudgeries once we get to Paris. My family is quite wealthy and we will have servants to take care of these things." He had dabbed at his mouth before continuing. "In fact, all you will have

to do is breed and breastfeed. I should imagine one child every two years would be best. I'll admit, my dear, I am quite looking forward to breeding you. Of course, you lack culture and education, but these faults can be corrected. The thought of plowing your belly was rather depressing, until I saw you. I'll enjoy fucking you several times a day until you are pregnant."

Rayne had shivered in disgust at his coarse words. His confidence had cemented her decision. If she didn't want to end up living her life on this man's terms, the time for action was now. Standing when they were finished, she had told him to stay seated.

"I'll just set these in the sink. I have some nice liqueur for after dinner, if you would like."

"That sounds good. I doubt it will be as good as I am used to, but it will probably help relax you."

Rayne had nodded and taken the tray into the kitchen. Turning on the water of the sink, she had let it drown out the soft clicking noise she made with her tongue. The pantry door then opened and Mohan had walked toward her silently. Holding the tiger's gaze, she had paused to pray for forgiveness. Softly, her words distinct as she had practiced, she directed the wild animal that lurked below the surface of the domesticated cat.

"Mohan, intruder," she lifted her hand to point, and then gave the command. "Kill, Mohan!"

She had run out the back door, unable to listen to the sounds. Exhausted and stunned, she had collapsed onto the lawn, covering her ears with her hands. How long before the dogs came, followed by a blood-covered Mohan, she had no idea. Cradling the big cat's head on her lap, she had spoken softly, trying to soothe its frazzled nervous nature. Her guilt was massive. There was every chance Mohan might have to be put down after this. Once she'd gotten the taste of the kill, it might be impossible to keep her as a pet.

At one point, she had lowered her head to rest on the cat's bloody coat. Had she done the right thing by risking her beloved pet's life to save her own? She had murdered a man in cold blood, even if it had not been by her own hand. She would have to decide whether she was going to call the sheriff or take a chance and bury Anton's body. And she would have to get rid of his skimmer as well. Even though she had not seen it, she was sure it was parked only a short distance away. Also he might have rented a room in town. What if someone there raised an alarm and started inquiries? Or perhaps the council Anton had mentioned would send someone to find him.

When Sean had shown up, she hadn't known whether to be relieved or fearful. But then he had taken over and relieved her of any decisions. He had brought a change of clothing out, and then together they had gone around to the outdoor shower. As directed, she had gotten under the spray with her clothes on, and then removed them. Mohan had wandered back with them and even stood under the spray without any kind of fuss.

Colleen had made a fuss over her, but not asked any questions. She had taken a few aspirins along with a glass of milk. The sound of the door shutting on Sean's truck had awakened her. Quietly she had walked the short distance to the room Colleen had discreetly pointed out when she gave her a brief tour. Inside the room, she had heard the shower running and sat on Sean's bed to wait for him.

* * * * *

"I'll answer your questions now, if you want."

"What the fuck!" Sean spun around in surprise. He had no idea that he wasn't alone in the room. Ever since he had met Rayne he'd had reason to doubt his own psychic abilities. Shaking his head slowly, he walked over to the bed. "I don't have any paper with me at the moment, Rayne."

She smiled and shifted up onto her knees on the bed. "We could go down to your office if you'd prefer."

"The only thing I prefer right now is my pillow and sleep." He stopped as he saw that Rayne was wearing the top to the silk pajamas his mother had given him last Christmas. "I think you forgot the bottom half of that outfit." He sat down on the far side of the bed.

Rayne shook her head. "I didn't forget. Colleen only gave me the top. I think your sister has matchmaking on her mind."

Sean considered the light-hearted tone in her voice for a moment, and then he stood back up. He tugged the comforter and sheet down on his side of the bed. "Maybe." He pulled on the blankets until Rayne got up so he could pull her side of the bed down as well. Without another word, he got into bed and pulled up the covers. He put his hands behind his head as he leaned back on the pillows.

Rayne stood and watched him for a few seconds before she spoke. "You object?"

"Nope. I am rather in favor of the idea myself. How do you feel about it?"

Rayne slipped under the covers, turning on her side to look at him. "I'm not opposed, but I don't want you to think that what happened today influenced me."

Sean rolled over onto his side to face Rayne. The room was only very dimly lit by the faintest of lights coming from the bathroom. "You may think it is too early, but I love you, Rayne. What happened last night and today didn't change my feelings."

"It is too soon for us to be sure, but I think I feel the same way."

"Just think?"

"I'm pretty sure, Sean. Today's events have changed things, or they will. I could end up in jail."

Sean shook his head negatively. "No, you aren't going to jail. We will have to be careful about your kitty cat, though." He paused to shake his finger at her.

Rayne nodded and leaned forward to grab hold of his finger. She pulled it toward her, closing her mouth around it. Sucking on it for a moment or too, she then smiled. "I feel very guilty about it all. I didn't do this without provocation. Mohan never would have attacked without my giving the signal."

"I wasn't planning on going over all of this until morning, but I am curious about one thing. I didn't know you had a tiger living with you, by the way." He paused to give her his mildest glare. "How did you end up with a tiger named Mohan?"

"It's a long story."

"Go on, honey. There is no place else on Earth I'd rather be."

"White tigers are very rare any more. Very few in the zoos and captivity survived the war, and on average in the wild, only one in ten thousand are born white. No white tigers in the wild were found after the 1950's in fact, and the wild species, which is really just a sub-species of the Bengal tiger, only survived in captivity due to inbreeding and crossbreeding programs."

"They are albinos then?"

Rayne shook her head. "Not at all. The white tigers, which survived until present times, are the result of the breeding programs using inbred and crossbred mixes of the Bengal and the Siberian tiger. An albino would have pink eyes, and there had been only one recorded instance of true albino tigers, Sean. In Cooch Behar, which we know as West Bengal, in India, two albino cubs were shot in 1922."

Rayne paused to shift slightly on the bed. "The white tiger has pale blue eyes, a mottled grayish-pink nose and is white with the dark stripes that can vary from black to a chocolate brown color. White tigers are born only to parents who both carry the recessive gene for the white coloring."

"What about the Siberian tigers I remember hearing about in history?"

"Actually, Sean, no wild white tigers have ever been reported in either the former region of Siberia, or anywhere else in the world, except the one found in Rewa. The Siberian White Tiger that existed in zoos were all cross-bred production."

Sean reached his hand out and captured a lock of Rayne's hair. Slowly he wound it around his finger. "You are a fount of information, my love, but how did you end up with something that is obviously on the endangered species list and should be in one of the few remaining zoos?"

"At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the tiger Species Survival Program reinforced its stand against the breeding of the white tiger in captivity. The white tiger is a freak of nature, and obviously cannot survive in the wild. But the popularity of the animal made it a money-maker for zoos, which was the same for the propagation of black leopards, white lions and king cheetahs. They are all phenotypic aberrations and bred solely because they are 'crowd pleasers.' Sorry, I know I keep rambling."

"It is understandable. Go on, honey."

"There was a government research compound near here. After the war, funding was cut. I'm sure you get the idea. My Mohan was the result of some kind of weird breeding program and was waiting for—"

"And you being the soft-hearted woman you are just couldn't let that happen, huh?"

"She only weighed twenty pounds when I first got her," Rayne replied quickly, defending herself.

Sean lightly tapped Rayne's forehead. "Rescuer of animals, grower of strange plants and what else should I know about you?"

"You know more about me than I know about you. I know your sister..."

"And Bob, as well," Sean added with a smile. "I come from a big family so it's better that you don't meet them all at once."

"Hmm. So, what happens now? Tomorrow do we go on as if nothing happened? What if someone starts asking questions about him?"

Sean kissed Rayne to stop her from asking more. "Shh." Slowly he made love to her lips, easing them apart before he finally caressed her tongue with his. "You taste so sweet."

"Toothpaste," Rayne told him quietly.

Laughing out loud, he shook his head. In that moment, he knew. Rayne was the woman he undeniably wanted to spend the rest of his life with; psychic headaches and all that would probably come their way. Sean guessed he should wait, but he couldn't. "I love you. Please marry me, Rayne."

"What if I go to prison? I don't think you would be happy with a monthly conjugal visit."

Sean shook his head. "You aren't going to any kind of jail. I called the Agency and everything has been taken care of. Your place looks like it did the day I met you."

"What if someone comes looking for him?"

Sean pressed his finger to her lips. "It's all over. I'll need some details, but that can wait until tomorrow. You don't have to marry me as part of the plan."

"You told your boss you were going to marry me though, didn't you? It's part of my 'parole' and marriage is how I will be observed in the future. Since I'm a psychic, right?"

"If you are repulsed by the idea, I'm sure we can work something out."

Rayne stared into his eyes for a long time, and he started to wonder if she was going to turn him down. Then he jerked in surprise as her hand grasped his cock. As her soft hand began massaging and pulling on his hardness, he groaned softly. Dimly he was aware of her scooting toward him, but her hand didn't pause or slow down.

"I probably will have some issues I'll have to work out once my state of shock goes away, Sean. But right now," she gave a firm, unmistakable yank on his shaft. "Put this to good use, and we'll worry about tomorrow later."

“My pleasure, my love,” he told her with a smile, rolling her onto her back. “I got the watering done before I came back here, so we can sleep in.”

“Uhnh,” Rayne groaned as Sean thrust into her body. “Thank you, my love, but I could have made it rain.”

“What the...?”

Sean paused in between strokes of his cock in and out of Rayne’s wet pussy. Make it rain? Had she really said she would make it rain?

Rayne’s hands pulled his head toward her, meeting his gaze. “Yeah, that’s what the lady said, mister. Now, do your husbandly duty and we’ll talk about rain and waves and tiger tails later.” She kissed his lips hard, punctuating her meaning.

As Sean got back to the business at hand, he heard a squawk from a far corner of his room.

“Do your duty! Do your duty! Do your duty!”

Life certainly would never be dull with Rayne in his life!

About the Author

A resident of Indiana, Mlyn worked as a registered nurse for 23 years in pediatrics. Reading Barbara Cartland and Harlequin romance novels in high school spurred her to start writing. She did technical writing for her employers until she started writing erotica four years ago. Mlyn is single and lives with her cranky cat Georgia, who she named after her favorite artist for inspiration, Georgia O'Keeffe.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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