

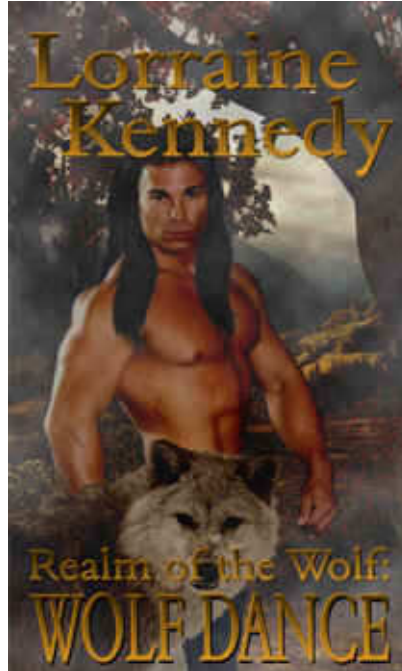


*Lorraine Kennedy*  
*Romance Sampler*

***What is romance without adventure and intrigue?  
Travel into the misty world of the paranormal  
in search of your perfect romance, or venture into  
a futuristic time or distant past and discover  
the thrill of a different kind of romance.***

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*Paranormal Romance*

Available November 2010

The wolf's hunger will consume her, taking her to a place of dark desire and forbidden love. He is the beast that haunts her nightmares, and the only one that can save her from the evil that reaches for her from beyond this world.

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New Concepts Publishing

Rating: Carnal – contains violence and graphic sexual encounters, sex with werewolves in human form.

Wolf Dance – Realm of the Wolf

Dark, erotic dreams and eerie phantoms warn of forbidden passions. Long ago, the *Sungmanitu* Indians withdrew into isolation; what dark secrets were they hiding?

Laura Ellison was soon to find out. The company she works for is planning to send her to Wyoming, where they are preparing to clear-cut the land of the *Sungmanitu*. A fellow employee has mysteriously disappeared, and the local police are baffled by a string of strange murders.

The land of the *Sungmanitu*: a place of breathtaking beauty and menacing evil, where Laura will discover the demon who haunts her nightmares, and the dark truth of who she really is. Laura Ellison will defy all warnings and fall in-love with Justin Gray Eagle, the sinister leader of the *Sungmanitu* Wolf People.

## Wolf Dance Excerpt

### Chapter One

Surrounded by darkness, her heightened senses picked up the scent of damp earth, and blood--so tangy--so sweet. It drove her into a mindless frenzy that threatened to rip away her shell of sanity. Her nails tore at her flesh in a desperate attempt to free herself of her prison of flesh.

The beast was close--she could feel his hunger, his lust. Instinct coursed through her, screaming at her to run, but a dark part of her soul kept her rooted in the midst of the inky darkness.

Though she could not see him, she could sense his nearness, and his hunger--a hunger so powerful, so overwhelming that it seemed to seep through her skin, penetrating into the core of her very being.

Large, powerful hands grasped her legs--spreading them against her will. Her struggles were fruitless against the brute strength that assaulted her. Sharp teeth nipped at the tender skin of her inner thighs, and savage hunger flooded her body as sweet, erotic pain.

The next moment she felt the sensation of a soothing wet tongue licking at her wounds, moving gradually toward that furiously burning need that she could not sate.

A woman's harsh voice came at her the darkness. "*Put!* Run you stupid girl!" the voice hissed.

She could feel his hot breath close to her ear. "Stay with me," he pleaded. Though his voice was soft, there was also an underlying, animal like growl emanating from him.

Thick mist whirled around her, reaching into her nostrils to suck at her life force. In desperation, she clutched at her throat and labored to breathe. A hand grasped her shoulder and gently shook her.

Gradually the fog cleared and she forced her eyes open. The purple hues of dawn were creeping into the small dingy windows of her grandfather's trailer.

"Laura, you are being haunted in your dreams." Grandpa Busby's hoarse voice pulled her further into the waking world. "You should not go on this trip."

Laura sat up, rubbing her sleep-swollen eyes. Getting to her feet, she walked the few steps to the small kitchen of the cramped trailer.

The coffee was fresh, as she knew it would be. Laura poured herself a large cup. Sipping the soothing liquid, she studied her grandfather through the dim light. He still sat on the edge of the couch where she had slept.

Once again worry gnawed at her. He was old and so frail. The right side of his body no longer worked as well as it once had. This was the result of a stroke that had cut him down only a few years ago. Since that time he used a cane to help him get around.

Each and every day since his illness had struck, Laura had thanked God that he had been spared to walk the path of life with her for just a little while longer.

Long, thin wisps of gray hair framed the old man's deeply lined face. At times his eyes gave the impression of staring off into space, as they were at this very moment.

Laura thought it possible that he might be losing his sight, but Grandpa would never admit it. She had tried on many occasions to convince him to move to Santa Fe where he would be near her, but she had received the same answer each time.

“I am Busby, born to the Bitter River People for the Deer Clan. I am *Dineh* and will die in my own country.”

She understood him of course. He had raised her in the tradition of the Navajo and she knew that his homeland was very important to him. Nevertheless, the thought of him out here--all alone--troubled her. If something was to happen and she lost her grandfather--the thought was devastating. He was her only living relative, unless she counted the distant relation of her clansmen.

Laura quietly sipped her coffee, letting the hot liquid soothe her dry throat. Her grandfather's dark eyes seemed to be analyzing her, dissecting her from the inside out.

“Grandpa, you know I have to go to Wyoming. I stopped here to let you know where I'd be.” She tried to soothe him.

His old bones burned with age and he grunted with the effort of getting to his feet. “Don't know why you'd have a hand in that kind of work,” he muttered.

Once again, Laura attempted to explain her motives. “It's my life, Grandpa, and I cannot live my life in poverty on this reservation.”

“I warned your mother of the consequences of getting mixed up with a *Belagana* and now your father's ways are bleeding into your spirit.” Busby painfully lowered himself to the hard kitchen chair.

“I don't cut the trees, I just work for them.” Laura pleaded with him to understand.

“That is enough.” Busby's voice contained the stern quality she knew meant he was deeply concerned about something. “If you destroy the earth, bad things will come of it. Already the darkness enters your dreams.”

The sun had finally made its majestic appearance and Laura opened the aluminum door to let some light into the trailer. She breathed in the dry desert air. The tangy scent never failed to bring back childhood memories. Most of her memories were good, but the constant lack of food and water cast shadows on some of those memories.

“I don't agree with what they do Grandpa, but I just can't stay here and marry one of my mother's people. Life is too hard here and when I have children of my own, I do not want them to live through the ugliness of poverty. Not if I can prevent it.” She tried to explain her reasons, like she had many times before.

The old man got to his feet and walked to the doorway where she stood. “You mean you want to hide your children from the truth of what remains of the *Dineh*.” He brushed past her and slowly descended the steps of the trailer. A few moments later he disappeared into the junipers of the nearby hills where each morning he went to pray.

*Maybe her grandfather was right?*

Laura was not ashamed of her Navajo blood--she was just not sure that she wanted to share in their destiny, not when there was a life out there free of the dark clouds that existed within the boundaries of the Navajo reservation.

Her strange dream crept back into her thoughts. For two nights now, she had been plagued with the same nightmare. Heat flooded her cheeks as she recalled the details of the dream, and how it left her feeling, but even more troubling than the desire the dream

stirred within her, was the fact that she was left with the vague feeling that she was being torn in two different directions.

In the brightness of day the dream seemed too ridiculous to worry about, but she had been brought up in a superstitious world, and doubt nagged at her.

The woman in the dream called her a whore--*why*? Why would she dream something like that?

Possibly she was feeling guilty? Her grandfather had been needling her since she'd started working for Duccini, and maybe it was finally starting to get to her.

Laura tried to shake the dark dream from her thoughts as she stepped into the small bathroom. She hurriedly changed into a T-shirt and blue jeans, and then ran a brush through her long, golden brown hair. As a result of inheriting her father's coloring and amber eyes, Laura appeared to be more white than Indian. She wasn't entirely sure she was pleased with that fact or not. When she was a child, there were times she'd felt out of place among the *Dineh*, and it had made her self-conscious.

Returning to the kitchen, Laura prepared the breakfast food that she'd brought with her on the small, propane stove. Once she'd finished, she waited on the steps for her grandfather to return. It was not long before he emerged from the brush, and Laura watched his slow progress across the desert floor.

She felt her throat constrict with emotion and unwelcome tears stung her eyes. The old man had made many sacrifices for her over the years and no matter how she might disagree with him, her heart would never forget that. Laura recalled the times he had pretended not to be hungry so that she would have enough to fill her aching stomach.

Laura set the food on the small wooden table and they settled down to eat. There were no further words between them.

Her eyes scanned the tabletop, taking note of the deep gouges and scars in the wood. Laura's gaze came to rest on some carved letters. Deeper than the rest of the marks on the table, the letters L.E & K.B stood out.

Remembering the day she'd carved them into the wood with her little pocketknife brought back fond memories of her childhood sweetheart. The days of innocence, childish laughter, and Kenny Begay seemed worlds away from her life now.

Finished with breakfast, Busby sat at the table and nursed his coffee while Laura tidied up the kitchen. When the kitchen was clean, Laura knelt beside her grandfather.

"I'll have to be leaving now. I'm due at the field office the day after tomorrow, but I'll be back soon, a couple of weeks ... maybe." She made a feeble attempt to put some cheer into her voice.

"The Indians up there, they have given your boss the rights to cut?" His voice betrayed his doubt.

"Yes, we received the release just a few days ago. It clearly states they have signed off cutting rights to the land surrounding Beaver Creek."

"I find it a hard thing to believe that the Shoshone would hand over their land to butchers of the earth." He was clearly skeptical.

"They are not Shoshone." Laura paused, trying to remember the name of the tribe that had laid claim to the area. "I believe they call themselves, *Sungmanitu*. From what I have been able to gather, they broke off from their main band years ago and settled a small part of the land in the area--forming their own community."

Laura was busy packing and failed to notice the way her grandfather's face had drained of color or the way his features distorted with fear.

"It's better if you do not go there, something's wrong about this. Why do they need you there?"

Snapping her suitcase shut, Laura took a deep breath and patiently tried to explain the situation. "The people there are not real happy about the situation and they need a P.R. specialist to try and smooth the way for a while."

She felt it would be better not to add the fact that Dan Mitchell had disappeared shortly after forwarding the release documents. In addition to her other duties, she had been instructed to find out what she could about Dan too.

Franklin Duccini was a shrewd businessman, and smart enough to know that without Dan, there could be a problem. The *Sungmanitu* could contest the legality of the release documents, and without Dan as a witness, things could get messy.

"Grandpa, I have to go now." She stood next to him, holding her bags.

Busby took hold of her arm. "Be careful," he whispered in a raspy voice.

Laura's eyes widened in shock--a sudden rush of fear caught in her throat.

"Grandpa, are you feeling well?"

Putting down her bags, Laura kneeled beside him, putting her arm around his shoulders. Never before had he been so adamantly against her work.

He gazed at her with a wisdom that one can only obtain with the passing of many years. "You must promise me something, Laura."

"If I can, Grandpa."

"Stay far away from the *Sungmanitu* ... they are dangerous."

"What do you know of them?" Laura's curiosity was peaked.

The old man shook his head. "Stay away from them, Laura."

\* \* \* \*

The summer sun was climbing high in the turquoise sky and the surrounding desert shimmered with the rising heat. Laura drove west toward Arizona--she felt a slight sense of dread as she left New Mexico behind her.

Laura took her eyes from the road for only a split second to fiddle with the knobs on the stereo. When she looked back up her heart jumped into her throat. In the middle of the road stood an old woman--her bulkiness covered with a thin cotton blouse and blue skirt. Streaks of gray ran through the black hair that was neatly bound in a tight bun at the back of her head.

Her panicked consciousness took all this in as she was instinctively slamming on the breaks. The tires squealed and her red Bronco slid off the road, missing the woman by mere inches.

Still dazed, Laura scrambled out of the vehicle. The woman stood in the same spot, as if the near miss had not affected her in the least. The old lady just stood there--staring with piercing black eyes that seemed to cut through Laura's soul.

Raising her hand, the woman pointed in the direction from which Laura had come. "Go back, *Putta!* The way you go leads only to darkness. Go back before it's too late."

Laura felt faint. It was the same voice she heard in her dreams. Shards of light burst forth in her head and Laura squeezed her eyes shut in an effort to block out the sudden ball of pain. When the throbbing finally subsided and she was able to pry her eyes open, the woman was gone. Laura quickly scanned the area but the specter was nowhere to be seen.

With her stomach twisting into knots, a wave of nausea overtook her. Laura leaned against the Bronco until the feeling began to pass.

Reaching inside, she grabbed a canteen of water. Taking the cap off, she brought the water up to her dry, parched lips. Laura took several swallows before capping the canteen and putting it back in its place on the floorboard.

Circling the car, Laura checked for damage. Fortunately everything seemed to be in order. Still too shaken to drive, Laura sat in the driver's seat and rested while trying to gather her wits. It must be heat sickness, she concluded. The woman could not have vanished into thin air.

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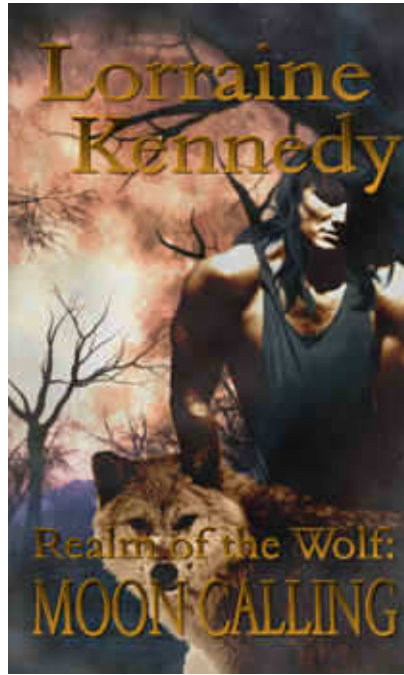
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*Paranormal Romance*

Coming Soon

He is the predator and she is his prey. Vengeance burns within the wolf's heart, even as his lust for the sensuous Kayla Chandler threatens to consume him. She is the woman he has been sent to kill ... the one human that is a threat to the Realm of the Wolf, and the only human female that can possess him body and soul.

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New Concepts Publishing

Rating: Carnal - Contains some violence, graphic sex with scenes that include sex with werewolves in human form and transformation.

### Moon Calling – Realm of the Wolf

In the second book of the Realm of the Wolf saga, a new danger is lurking.

Five years ago, Kayla Chandler fell in-love with the mysterious and handsome Jace, but just as they were ready to start their lives together, he disappeared into thin air. The only clues left behind are a puddle of blood, and a wolf figurine carved out of crystal.

Looking for clues to her lover's disappearance, Kayla is drawn back to Wyoming and the land of the *Sungmanitu*.

Vance is a *Sungmanitu*, and a member of the elite warrior society known as the Zen, guardians of *Outerlands*. He is sent to kill Kayla and eliminate the threat of her discovering the truth of the *Sungmanitu* legends, but he has his own reasons for wanting vengeance on the luscious blond doctor ... he believes that she is responsible for the death of his best friend, Jace.

When the wolf and his prey come together nothing matters, but an all-consuming passion that threatening to destroy them both.

## **Moon Calling Excerpt**

### Chapter One

*Ten years after the Jaguar Wars*

He'd know her scent anywhere, it was forever engraved in his memory. Being this close to his prey was driving him to madness. His fury erupting, he let out a low--angry growl as he watched her through his wolf's eyes. In the fading light he could see her leaning against the hood of the car, her gaze fixed on the horizon.

The rest stop was miles from civilization, on a desolate and rarely traveled highway. Now would be the time, but he remained hidden in the thick brush--watching his prey.

He had been sent to eliminate her. The female was a danger. They thought she knew too much.

The persistent wind played havoc with her blond tresses. It was easy to see that she'd been out in the sun far too long, as her cheeks were flushed red. Even from this distance he could sense her fatigue, but still he waited.

With her legs spread slightly, she leaned over to reach into her car to grab something. When she did this, he got a good look at her inner thighs, and the way that her tight--white shorts highlighted her slight--feminine physique.

Lust tore through his body, confusing and enraging him. He howled in protest. Human thought could easily intrude--even while he was in his animal form, but it battled with the instinct of the beast.

Pulling out a sandwich, she started to eat as the last rays of sunshine vanished and the moon began its ascent. The wide-open expanse of the Wyoming desert provided a view of the darkening sky for miles, the brightness of the twinkling stars, drowned out by the bright moonlight. A cloud passed--obscuring the moon, casting the night in deeper shadows.

Painful hunger gnawed at his loins, and again he howled. The human female froze, her senses picking up on the danger that lurked in the darkness, beyond the glow of the lit parking lot. Her hand strayed to the handgun that she'd stuck in the waistband of her shorts, as if the feel of the cold--hard steel was comforting to her.

Far off in the distance, the mist was gathering around the Shadow Mountains. Still he watched and waited.

\* \* \* \*

Kayla pulled out her phone and looked at the time, it had been over an hour and still there was not a soul in sight. Nervously, she directed her gaze to the mountain range in the distance. The peaks rose up from the desert floor--imposing--ominous. Fingers of mist gathered around the base of the mountains, reaching up toward its peaks, glowing eerily in the silver light of the full moon. The thick mist hid the mountain's secrets--secrets that she could sense, though they somehow seemed to stay just out of reach.

Shaking off her strange thoughts, Kayla decided she might as well have a bite to eat while she waited. Unwrapping the baloney and cheese sandwich, she nibbled at the food without really tasting it. It had been foolish to come all the way out here in the hopes that she'd finally get some information about Jace.

Her parents were expecting her back in Denver by the end of the week, and this little side trip had really put her off schedule.

Kayla's hand strayed to the carved crystal wolf that hung on a silver chain around her neck. She would never have believed the caller knew anything about Jace ... if they hadn't have mentioned the crystal. No one could have known how she'd gotten it. She'd never mentioned the details to anyone.

A brown lizard scurried across the blacktop near her feet, causing her to nearly jump out of her skin. Though the night was cooling, she could still feel warmth radiating from the dark surface of the parking lot.

The howling of a lone wolf caught her attention and she stopped to peer out into the distance. Unconsciously ... her hand rested on the small, 25-caliber handgun at her waist. It had been a last minute decision to bring it along.

Normally she didn't condone gun violence, but she had no intention of stupidly walking into a trap laid out for her by Jace's killer. The police would do nothing so it was up to her to find out what happened to him.

Kayla checked the time once more and decided she'd wait five more minutes and that was it. She didn't relish the idea of having to drive through the Shadow Mountains after dark, and the sooner she got it over with, the better.

When she'd been here five years ago, she'd heard rumors from the locals. They swore that unearthly creatures roamed those mountains under the cover of darkness. Not that she believed such ridiculous nonsense, but ... Jace had disappeared in those mountains--leaving behind only scarlet bloodstains, and the crystal. Kayla didn't believe there was anything supernatural about Jace's disappearance, though she was confident that the strange people he'd been involved with were responsible for whatever had happened to him.

Subconsciously ... Kayla reached for the crystal again, feeling comforted by its warmth.

The caller had promised to reveal information about what happened to Jace, but as she looked around for any sign of life, Kayla became convinced that the call had been nothing more than a cruel joke. But cruel joke or not ... whoever had called her knew something.

She'd hoped that her caller ID recorded the number of the caller, but it was only zeros, no number at all.

Maybe the police could use her cell phone records to track the caller? She'd contact them and give them this bit of information. Not that it would do much good ... nothing had so far.

With a forlorn sigh, Kayla scanned the area one last time and got back in her car. She had to be at the Tribal Clinic in the morning, and then there would be one more stop in Montana before she could go home to Denver. Strangely enough ... the flu season had started in midsummer this year, and it was ravishing the children on the reservation. Kayla was sure there would be a lot of cases to see in the morning, she'd need a decent night's sleep.

Her heart heavy with regret, Kayla decided it was time to leave ... not just the rest stop, but maybe it was time to leave that whole episode behind her. Easing the blue rental car back onto the narrow state highway, she headed straight for the Shadow Mountains. She would confront their dark secrets one last time, but on this occasion when she left them behind ... maybe she would be leaving behind any hope of ever finding out what happened to the man she had loved all those years ago.

For five years she had searched for answers, but she was no closer to those answers now than she was the day she'd discovered Jace missing.

As the mountain loomed closer, the mist began to gather around her car, obscuring the details of the road. Even the light of the moon could do little to penetrate the thick--almost radiant fog that had settled around the mountain. The road was barely visible within the beam of the headlights. Kayla let off the gas, slowing the car to a crawl.

The mist that encircled the Shadow Mountains was not unusual. Even in the best of weather, the majestic peaks were often hidden with fog. Going through the mountains was the shortest route to the Shoshone reservation, but now she wondered if it wouldn't have been better to go around them.

To soothe her nerves, Kayla forced herself to think of something else, but the direction her thoughts took wasn't much better.

She'd been offered a resident position at a hospital in California, and there was no doubt that it would pay so much better than what she was making now, but was it what she really wanted?

Since the summer she'd met Jace, she'd worked for Outreach Medical Assistance, a nonprofit program that sent doctors into impoverished communities to administer medical treatment. Helping people had been her life, and moving her allegiance to an establishment that cared more about money than people ... left a sour taste in her mouth.

But it's what Travis wanted. He was accustomed to big cities and luxury. He'd made it clear that he wanted her to take that job if they were to get married. Kayla frowned at the thought of marriage. She'd grown to like Travis, but she wasn't so sure she wanted to marry him, though he'd been turning up the heat. He wanted them to be married so they could settle down to a nice--middleclass existence.

*Isn't that what most women wanted?*

Leaning closer to the steering wheel, Kayla struggled to see through the whirling night mist.

She wondered if there was something wrong with her for not looking forward to marriage with Travis. Of course she missed Jace terribly, and it had taken her years to even start dating again ... but was she ready to tie the knot?

Maybe ... but in her heart she knew it would not be with Travis. Even if she took the new job, it would be to get away from her past--not so that they could get married. There was something about him that bothered her. She had lately noticed a mean streak in Travis that he could not always keep hidden.

Jace had been different--so primal, but yet so gentle. It had been a whirlwind romance, but he'd swept her off her feet just like a Texas twister. She'd never known a man like Jace, and when he disappeared, he'd left her hungering for more of that primitive passion his lovemaking had stirred within her.

Kayla's thoughts drifted to that moment she'd gone looking for him. There was no way she could handle thinking of that horrible night right now ... her mind searched for something else.

From the side of the road she'd caught movement--no more than a shadow within the thick haze. Kayla was torn between slowing the vehicle even more, or speeding up to avoid whatever was moving in the fog.

A nagging fear began to gnaw at her insides.

*What if the stories were true?*

After all, people around the Shadow Mountains did have a tendency to disappear at a higher rate than in other rural areas. At least that's what she'd been told.

Her breath caught in her throat when she saw something moving in the middle of the road ... just beyond the headlights.

Kayla instinctively hit the brakes. The rear-end of the car fishtailed, and the wheel slipped from her grasp. The next seconds were a haze of movement before the car came to an abrupt stop against a large pine tree.

Kayla's vision blurred as her head fragmented into a million points of pain, and a cloak of darkness enveloped her in comforting numbness.

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*Futuristic Romance*

Samura is searching for that elusive fantasy lover who has always haunted her dreams, but what she finds is a Prince of the Stars and a deadly enemy to mankind.

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New Concepts Publishing

Rating: Contains violence, adult language, and graphic sex.

**Song of the Annunaki**

Investigating the bizarre disappearance of children, Samura Priestly stumbles upon a truth that will rock the world ... or destroy it. The strange dreams that have plagued her all her life are a part of the key, and not truly dreams at all. For she has been 'visited' many times in the past, taken, studied, and watched over by the creators, the Annunaki, and more specifically Thian of the tribe of the Enlils.

But Samura's 'dream lover' is her enemy, an enemy of all the Adamu, and he will not allow his fascination with Samura to sway him from his cause. Believing that the violent nature of the Adamu will ultimately bring danger to the galaxy, the Enlils want to destroy the inhabitants of Earth.

## Song of the Annunki Excerpt

### CHAPTER ONE

Pulling the blankets up around her neck, Samura stared wide-eyed at the mist seeping from the cracks of the closed bedroom door, thick, twisting, swirling mist that pulsed and breathed as if it were alive. Crawling across the hardwood floor, the mist radiated a greenish luminous light that cast the small room into a surreal nightmare world.

The mist whirled and danced, forming the image of otherworldly fingers that reached from the floor to twist around her ankles and wrists.

She could not move. She could not so much as squeak in protest. The invasive mist had robbed her of her voice, paralyzing her limbs until she was no more than an infant at the mercy of the unknown.

Behind the door, a bright light invaded the smallest opening with the power of a thousand suns, a brilliance that tore through her eyes, sending tendrils of excruciating pain into her brain.

Samura could feel her body lift from the mattress to hang suspended in midair. Long, shimmering strands of dark hair hung from her head, coming to rest on the pillow below her.

The temperature in the room dropped, covering her with a chill that pervaded the warmth of her white cotton nightgown to send shivers through her body. Her breaths were shallow, allowing only the smallest wisps of warmth to escape into the chilled room, delivering puffs of fog from her lips.

Slowly her body began to move toward the door. Her terror was absolute, its grasp tightening around her throat until it was burrowing down into her stomach. The sickening taste of bile reached up from her gut, consuming her. Only with sheer willpower was she able to force the feeling away.

The little white door that had offered so much protection a short while ago was gone, replaced with a cavernous hole. What lay behind that distorted doorway was the unknown. What lay outside that door existed beyond the sight of many, visible to only the few.

With liquid smooth motion, her body was lifted upright until she was in a standing position.

Samura's soul screamed in protest as she inched closer and closer to that void of oblivion beyond the doorway. Her heart knew that to go through that opening would be to look upon the truth ... a truth that she was not prepared to see ... a reality that could destroy humankind.

A chorus of soft whispers drifted into her head, soothing her like an eerie lullaby.

"Go beyond the door," the singsong voices urged. "See all that was, and will ever be. See the truth."

She had no control. She was gliding through the door. A blast of air hit her, a billion molecules of realities rushed past her and into the world she had always known.

Surrounding her was infinity. She looked upon countless galaxies that stretched into a universe with no visible beginning or end.

Walking upon the stars was the most unusual man, appearing so large as to dwarf the planets beneath his feet. Long flaxen hair billowed behind him, lighting the dark sky with

white-hot radiance. His handsome, breathtaking features were soft perfection, framing gray eyes that lit up like moons in the night heavens.

His lips never moved but his powerful voice echoed through the core of her being.

“Search not for answers. The truth will only illuminate your bondage. The nature of your reality is naught but part of your dream world.”

He stood near her now, no longer as massive as the universe but as a god in a man’s body. The heat he radiated reached out to cover her like a warm blanket. His gaze pulled at her essence, laying bare her entire being.

She felt naked beneath the onslaught of those luminous gray eyes. He opened his mouth but what came from his lips were not words, but a haunting melody so ancient that it rippled through her life force with a vibrating electrical current. Like the song of the whale it went out in all directions, to all points of the universe ... lingering long after the sound had gone.

Her vision was blurred, but the sensations of the waking world had wiggled into her dream. The rough asphalt beneath her bare feet painfully stripped away the fog.

Blinking rapidly, Samura first saw the sickly yellowish glow of the streetlight. Turning slowly, she recognized the deserted road in front of her house. The world slept, oblivious to the woman who stood in the middle of the street, wearing nothing but a nightgown.

The distant hoot of an owl spurred her into action and she willed her legs to move. The cool grass was soothing to her feet after walking across the sharp surface of the road.

She tried her door, and to her surprise, found that it was still locked.

Samura wondered how she had walked out of the house while she slept if the door was still locked. She reached into the bush that sat next to her porch. Under cover of the greenery was a tin box that contained her spare key.

Once safely inside, Samura shut the door and leaned heavily on it, sighing with relief. She had always been plagued with bizarre dreams, but nothing like she had experienced tonight. As far as she knew, she had never walked in her sleep until now.

Looking down at the shining metal of the key, she concluded that she must have locked the door behind her when she’d left the house, sleepwalking.

Without turning on any lights, Samura walked down the hall to her bedroom. Curiously, that door was still closed as well. Turning the handle, she threw the door open. All was as it had been when she’d gone to sleep, except that her blankets lay in a piled heap next to her bed. The red digital display on her bedside clock told her it was 3:20 in the morning.

\* \* \* \*

Samura watched the empty seat of a child’s swing, swaying back and forth in the hot evening breeze. The fading light lent an eerie overtone to the already ominous atmosphere. Though empty now, less than an hour ago, four-year-old Tilley Andrews had been the swing’s last occupant.

Looking back at her quickly scrawled notes, she wondered again how the scene described by the child’s mother could have taken place. Realistically, it would have been nearly impossible for the events to unfold the way Mrs. Andrews had explained.

Mrs. Andrews had been sitting on a blanket with her younger child, only fifteen feet from the swing. She claimed to have only looked away for a few seconds. Long enough to give her fussing younger child a cookie, and when she looked back, Tilley was gone. The time span could have been no more than ten seconds. Ten seconds that would now stretch into eternity.

The child's mother had heard nothing, not a scream, the sound of a struggle ... nothing.

How could that be?

She had been sitting so close to where the child had been playing that she would have heard someone approach, but she claimed she had heard nothing. St. Augustine Park comprised a fairly open area. There was almost no chance that someone could have gotten away without being seen by at least the child's mother.

Consequently, Tilley's mother was under a cloud of suspicion, though Mrs. Andrews had been so distraught that she had had to be taken to the hospital and sedated.

Her story just did not add up.

Samura's whirlwind of thought was interrupted when her partner gently laid his hand on her arm.

"Sam, there's been a similar occurrence about three blocks from here. It apparently happened within moments of this one. John and Mack are on that one."

Samura arched one perfectly shaped brow. "How is the case similar?"

"It was a four-year-old boy named Charlie. According to the mother he disappeared while taking a bath." Mike Gibson's voice made it obvious that he was still trying to piece it all together.

Samura had always been good at masking her emotions. None of the hurt and fear she was feeling for these missing children could be detected in her blue eyes. At times, her eyes were like pools of florescent color and at others, they could have been likened to ice. At this moment, she stared back at her partner with eyes so unreadable it would appear she possessed no soul.

"Is there more to it?" She flipped the notebook shut.

Mike ran his meaty fingers through his graying brown hair. "The child was in the tub. His mother left the bathroom and walked down the hall to get a towel from the linen closet, and when she returned, the boy was gone. There wasn't even a drop of water on the bathroom floor to suggest that he had ever gotten out. When the responding officers arrived there was still water in the tub along with the child's toys."

"What do you think?"

"The parents are part of some kind of cult, and for some reason they need their children to disappear in the eyes of the world."

Samura smiled coldly. "That's something to think about, but my instincts tell me the parents have nothing to do with the disappearance of their children."

"Oh, come on, Sam, these cases reek of inside jobs. There are no fingerprints, nothing." Mike shook his head.

Disappearances, which on one hand were completely unexplainable, unless you looked to the most obvious culprits. For Mike, the obvious villains here were the parents, or at least the mother. In each instance, Sam had insisted that they look beyond the obvious.

“There’s nothing more we can do right now. Why don’t we let forensics do their job and get out of here? Maybe go get a bite to eat.”

Samura was tall for a woman and barely had to lift her head to look the six-foot Mike in the eyes. “That’s okay, Gibson. You go ahead. I’d just as soon stick around here for awhile.”

Mike shrugged his shoulders, “Suit yourself. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Samura watched Mike Gibson drive away. Outwardly, she was as calm and collected as at any point in her life, but on the inside, she was simmering with anger. Gibson was an okay person, but in her opinion, his arrogance and laziness interfered with his job.

Dismissing Gibson from her mind, Samura once again focused on the task at hand. The search teams had fanned out from the playground, looking for anything out of the ordinary that might give them a clue as to what had happened to the child. The last of the forensic team was now packing up to leave. Samura knew that they would probably not find any viable evidence, since they hadn’t in the last five cases.

One by one, the cars pulled away until all was still and quiet but the rush of the wind. Reluctantly, Samura forced herself to remove her black leather glove and grasp the chain at approximately the same place the child would have held it. At first, there was the familiar tingling sensation and then the flash of abrupt and sheer terror--a horror so pure as to consume one’s sanity--and then nothing. It was as if the child’s soul had ceased to exist.

“Officer Priestly!”

Samura swung around with a startled cry. The stranger stood only a few feet away, the details of his appearance hidden in deep shadows.

She was usually so in tune with her surroundings that rarely was anyone able to sneak up on her, and never had it happened while she was on duty.

Cautiously, Samura unsnapped her pistol, letting her hand rest on the handle. Fear gnawed at her throat until it was so dry and parched that her words came out more like little croaks. “What can I do for you?”

“I know where the children are.”

Stunned, Samura tried to speak but could find no words. As she always did in times of crisis, she reached into the inner depths of her being and drew on the shining white energy that resided deep within her. Her shields slammed down and instantaneously her professionalism returned. “Go on,” she told the stranger in a low, even voice.

“I can tell you no more than that right now.”

“Are you involved in this?”

“No,” the man in the shadows answered without hesitation.

“If you know something that you are refusing to disclose then you will be an accessory to a very serious crime. You will be leaving me no choice but to place you under arrest.” Samura’s voice never swayed or altered from a level, professional tone.

“Samura, you cannot arrest me.” The stranger was obviously amused by her threat.

Samura paused. Who was this guy? A Fed who was purposely obstructing justice? “How do you know my name?” The hard edge to her voice was the only hint of her anger.

“We know a great deal about you, Samura. We know the date and time you were born, right down to the very second. We know your favorite color, what your favorite toy was as a child, and even who gave you your first kiss.”

“You’re lying.”

“How very disappointing. You are showing the very human trait of losing control. It would seem that you have much work ahead of you yet.”

Samura drew her pistol with a swift, graceful movement. “You are under arrest! Put your hands up where I can see them.” Keeping the gun leveled at the darkened image in the shadows, she used her other hand to free her flashlight. Switching it on, she directed the beam in the direction of the dark figure.

He wore a black, hooded cloak that effectively hid his face. Lifting his head, he stared directly at her with eyes of blue ice that strangely reflected the light. Making no attempt to comply with her order, he stood staring at her, a smile playing on his lips.

“I’ve already told you, Samura, you have no authority to arrest me.”

“Sir, I will tell you one more time to put your hands where I can see them.”

“Please put down your weapon and I will let you in on a couple things before I depart.”

Samura made no move to lower her weapon.

“Your time is very near, Samura. This has always been your destiny.”

Samura shook her head, confused by the man’s words. “Sir, are you on any kind of medication, legal or otherwise?”

“I am going to leave you with some facts.” He stepped closer and Samura tensed. “Your father is not the man you have always thought him to be. Ask your mother ... ask her about the lights in the sky.”

“You’re out of your mind.” Samura fought to maintain control of her quaking emotions.

“Oh, come on, Samura, you know deep down that you have always been different, don’t you? You have always felt apart from the others.”

She flinched at this truth. Her vision filled with memories, images of birthday parties that she could not bring herself to attend, sitting in the corner of the schoolyard and having nothing to say to the children who talked to her, their presence making her feel self-conscious about herself.

“If you are to have any chance of finding these children, you will have to accept who you are.”

“I repeat, sir, you are under arrest. Put your hands above your head where I can see them.” Samura knew she should radio for help, but she would have to drop the flashlight in order to grab the radio.

In that instant, as she was contemplating her situation, there was a blinding white flash so bright that her vision consisted of nothing more than black dots for several seconds. By the time her sight returned, the man had gone.

Disgusted with herself, she radioed in giving the dispatcher the man’s description and requested backup. Samura was convinced that she’d just been taken in by some cheap magician’s trick.

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*Paranormal Romance*

No doctor could cure her lameness, and April had saved for years to travel to the man she'd heard of in Africa, Mabasa, believing he could perform a miracle for her. Until the night she watched him perform the fire dance, however, and felt the fire he generated within her, it hadn't occurred to her that he would also fulfill her desire for passion and fill her heart with the love and joy life had denied her.

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Rating: Carnal

## **Mabasa's Fire Excerpt**

### CHAPTER ONE

The drum called out to her ... pulled at her ... seduced her until she felt that her heart beat in time to its ancient rhythm. A stray breeze drifted across the African Savanna, touching her skin, soothing her after the day's furious heat. Even with her hair pulled up, she could still feel drops of perspiration on her neck and back. April paid little attention to her discomforts. Her attention was on the man who'd entered the circle.

He wore nothing but a loincloth, revealing every curve and contour of the muscle rippling beneath his coffee colored skin. The man's long black hair was worn in

dreadlocks, adorned with a multitude of colored beads. His smooth features were marred by four stripes of white paint that ran from his forehead to the bottom of his chin.

In the center of the dance circle was a pile of green wood. The man stepped into the kindling.

The drum grew louder, more erratic. There was an explosion of color as dancers in traditional dress began to move around him, their movements synchronized to flow in complete harmony with each other.

At the center of the dancers, the man moved his hands above the wood and an instant later fire erupted. The flames surrounded him, licking at his exposed skin, but he seemed not to notice. Within the fire he danced, his body moving with the vibration of the drums.

April's gaze followed his every movement. Holding her breath she waited for the fire to consume him, disintegrating his flesh. It felt as if she had been hit with an electrical current, and she realized he was watching her through the flames. Their eyes locked and for that fraction of a moment April became aware that he was probing her mind, his spirit connecting with hers. Heat spread through her body as sensual images intruded in her thoughts, images of lying beneath him, her flesh against his ... moving to the most ancient of dances.

The Fire Master pulled his gaze away as if her essence had burned him in a way that the flames had failed to. Through the blaze he watched, marveling at her simplistic beauty that brought to mind thoughts of golden sunshine and images of carnal lust. There was something about her that set his blood on fire.

He held his hands suspended above the flames and lowered them as if he were pushing down an invisible barrier. The fire was extinguished. His body showed no signs of injury.

There had been little doubt in April's mind that he would walk away from the ritual unscathed. It was why she was in Africa. When she'd first heard about the Fire Master April had dared not believe it. Nevertheless she had followed the stories about him.

Mabasa was a master of fire ... and he was a healer. A healer ... the word filled her heart with a hope that had once lain dormant within her. Did she truly have the courage to allow her faith to blossom?

Could Mabasa succeed where countless doctors had failed?

Suddenly her resolve gave way to uncertainty. Had she been foolish to dream of being healed? For the past three years April had saved every spare penny she'd earned so she could make this trip, now she found that she had lost her nerve.

A finger poked her side and she looked at the young boy who had been her guide.

"Talk to Mabasa," Iniko said with a wide smile.

April's heart warmed toward her guide. Since arriving in Africa, Iniko had been like a breath of fresh air. She could sense that he was pure of heart, something she had rarely come across in recent years. There was no doubt that his parents must be extremely proud of him.

She had hoped one day to have a child like Iniko, but those days of dreaming of a family were long gone. April had years ago accepted that she was damaged goods and not wanted.

Iniko jabbed her again. "Talk to Mabasa."

Mabasa stood just outside the entrance of a thatched roof lodge. Even from this distance April could see that he was eyeing her curiously. Briefly she wondered if there was something about her that stood out that much from the other tourists.

Taking a deep breath, April tried to rise. Seeing her struggle, Iniko held out his hand to her. Smiling, she accepted his help only to the point that she was steady on her feet. April then rested some of her weight on a single crutch.

Frowning, Mabasa watched the scene unfold. Her presence had wrapped around him since the moment he'd seen her. She had sparked a yearning in him that he'd long ago forgotten. Mabasa had to cut short the show as he could not concentrate with her so close, watching him . . . silently calling out to him. Though he'd tried to block her out, his body responded to her nearness and he'd been afraid it would become obvious to all who were present.

Even now her soul was crying out to him to ease her pain and he'd known that she would approach him, though he hadn't known what her affliction was until the moment she'd tried to stand.

He'd been taken back, for she was not the usual western tourist seeking a show, nor was she like the aging and failing bodies that usually came to him. No . . . she was like a bird with a broken wing, still struggling to fly.

The woman reminded him of a porcelain doll he'd seen once in a Victorian antique shop. Perfect pink lips and a heart shaped face framed with a mass of golden curls that came to rest on her slender shoulders. Large, luminous blue eyes watched him through thick lashes. He saw no laughter in their depths, only shadows.

Instinctively he'd wanted to reach out to her, pick her up in his arms and carry her where she needed to go, but could not bring himself to move from where he stood. Never had the urge to ease suffering been as strong as it was now. A part of him that had been buried deep within himself wanted to put the light back in her eyes. She would have beautiful eyes if they were filled with laughter.

Watching as she approached, Mabasa felt the winds of change stirring. This woman would bring change, but would it be a good thing? As she got closer, his stomach twisted into knots. He had dreamed of her on many occasions and in his dreams she was like the lioness hunting his soul.

The woman stood before him, tilting her head to look up into his face. "I am April Lawson." She held out her hand to him.

Impulsively, he brought her small trembling hand to his lips and kissed it lightly. "Mabasa at your service." His lips spread into a smile.

"I am in need of your services." April pointed to her leg. "I have brought money to pay you," she added quickly as if she was sure he'd turn her down without it.

He did not look down at her leg, but instead his gaze remained fixed on her face as he studied her in quiet contemplation. Mabasa felt a burning sensation travel through his body and he knew this woman was dangerous. Not in the sense that she would harm someone, but dangerous to his emotional wellbeing and to his control.

Instead of answering her plea for help directly, he motioned with his hand to a thatch covered awning where people were eating. "You should eat Miss Lawson."

April shook her head, but Mabasa took her hand and led her to the dining area. "You will love plasas. It is my favorite stew."

A woman in brightly colored clothing handed her an earthen bowl full of stew. She took several bites and Mabasa could tell that April liked the spicy food.

"This is great," she told him in between bites.

"I knew you would like it. The spice is good for bringing life to the tongue."

“You speak English well,” she commented.

“I attended one of your universities for many years. You are American, yes?”

April nodded.

“I came back to Africa after getting my medical degree,” he explained.

“You’re a doctor?” April asked with a crestfallen look on her face.

Mabasa laughed. “I am a practicing physician, but I need not be in your case . . . if it is not a doctor that you are looking for.”

“Doctors can do nothing for me,” she said with a frown.

“May I ask what is wrong?” He motioned toward her leg.

Her eyes clouded and she looked away. “When I was a young child there was an incident and my leg was shattered. The doctors did the best they could to put it back together, but I have been like this since.”

He sensed that there was a dark corner where the painful memory dwelled and she found it difficult to bring it out into the light.

“And you feel you need your leg healed to be happy?”

She thought about it for a moment before finally answering him. “I don’t know. I guess I never looked at it like that. I’ve never really felt complete the way I am, but I’ve had my moments of happiness.”

“Ah, is that not true for us all? Happiness comes in fleeting moments and we must grasp those moments and treasure them.”

She smiled, brightening suddenly. “You are right. Maybe happiness is not so much a state of being as a way of looking at those positive points in our lives.”

Mabasa nodded; satisfied that April had the ability to look beneath the surface. It was important if she was to be healed. Her injury was extensive and would take some time to reverse, but he wondered if it was wise to spend so much time with her. When a woman stirred his body and soul as this one did, he knew it was time to step back.

It had been so long ago that he’d let his heart believe that a woman could share his life with him. He’d been sure that love would overcome all. That was until Annette.

He’d been mystified by her reaction when he’d told her he planned to leave the states and return to Africa to help his people. She’d had it in her head that they would remain in California and live the good life.

Annette had laughed at him when he’d asked her to share his life with him in Africa. Her love had been superficial but it had taught Mabasa that the life he’d chosen must be a solitary life. He could offer no woman a life of luxury, only himself and his little house on the savanna.

He’d grown accustomed to a solitary life, so why all the sudden, was this woman tearing at his mind and sending longing into his loins?

Those startling blue eyes watched him with such faith in them that he could feel her burrowing into his mind.

He stood up abruptly. “Let us walk,” he told her, holding out his hand to help her to her feet.

April was surprised by his sudden shift in mood, but let him pull her up. They slowly made their way out into the night. They walked until the village was out of sight, but the drums could still be heard over the sounds of the night.

The moon was bright and lit their way. Like the touch of a lover, the warm breeze slid across her skin, bringing to mind things better left alone.

“Do you believe that I can heal your leg?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Why do you believe this? Is it faith in a stranger . . . someone you have never met before tonight, or is it desperation?” Mabasa had stopped and was now looking down into her eyes.

“It is both things I think,” she answered truthfully.

Her answer seemed to satisfy him and he smiled.

“I suspect that your ailments go far beyond your leg. Are you willing to let me help you put to rest your pain?”

April nodded, uncertain that this man would have the ability to ease the pain in her soul.

“You must trust me, and this will not be easy since you do not know me. Can you do this?” he asked.

“Yes,” she told him. The fact was that she had never felt so safe and secure as she did in Mabasa’s presence. April had no idea why she felt this way, only that she did.

Impulsively, she put her arms around his neck and placed her lips on his in a light kiss.

It was meant to be a friendly kiss of thanks, but when she felt him put his strong arms around her waist and pull her closer, April was sure that she would melt right there and then. His bare flesh sent shivers through her body and she realized that it wasn’t just a passing fancy. She wanted this man in a sexual way.

His tongue entered her mouth and their innocent kiss very suddenly heated up. Without warning he stopped, gently pulling away.

“Please forgive me, Miss Lawson. I had no right,” he told her as he began leading her back to the village.

“I kissed you first, remember?”

Mabasa smiled but said nothing and April wondered if his regrets were because he felt it improper or did they come from someplace else?

“We will start tomorrow. Iniko will show you the way,” he told her before leaving her in the company of the little boy who had come looking for her.

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*Paranormal Romance*

Bonnie hadn't actually expected true magic. She had expected a 'magical' tropical vacation, and she needed it.

When she discovered Tristan, the man she's lusted over from afar for so long, had also ended up on the island, she could hardly believe her luck—but then she discovers he thinks she tricked into it just so she could get into his pants!

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Rating: Carnal—adult situations and language.

## **Tahitian Magic Excerpt**

### Chapter One

Her body was on fire, burning with unfulfilled need. Scenes flashed erratically before her eyes. A moonlit beach, water ... and blue eyes. Orange flames licked at the darkness ... illuminating strangely exotic faces. The night was alive with the resonance of drums, her heart beating in rhythm to the strange and enchanting reverberation.

A soft caress on her inner thigh sent a tingling sensation to that swollen and aching spot between her legs. Faster and faster the thumping of drums sounded until they seemed to vibrate the very earth. A fountain of sparks erupted from the fire, spraying the sky with pinpoints of light. Suddenly her vision was filled with the grotesque image of a

carved wooden mask. The dancer behind the mask swayed to and fro as if he had become one with the rhythm of the drum.

Bonnie Lee's eyes flew open. She was drenched with sweat and still shaking. The sound of the doorbell shattered the silence of the house.

Damn! Who would wake her this time of the morning? Most people knew she worked late hours.

Leaving the comfort of her bed, she slipped on her robe and ran to the front door. Looking through the peephole she saw her sister's impatient face. After opening the door, she stepped aside to let Trudy enter.

"What's this about? You know I don't get up this early when I've worked." Bonnie frowned.

"Chill out, sis. I brought some doughnuts so that we could enjoy some breakfast and have a sister to sister chat."

For the first time, Bonnie noticed that Trudy was carrying a box of doughnuts and a large white envelope.

"What's that?" she asked pointing at the envelope.

Trudy shrugged. "I found it on your porch. Why don't you open it while I make some coffee?"

As Trudy was busy in the kitchen, Bonnie opened the envelope and slipped out the contents. She had to rub her eyes to ensure that she was seeing correctly. Inside was a piece of paper that read.

Come to the island of magic

Aside from the note, there was an airline ticket to Bora Bora and instructions for taking a charter boat to the island of Hiva. There was nothing to indicate whom it was from, or why she should go there.

"What is it?" Trudy called from the kitchen.

"Its airline tickets and an invitation to go to Tahiti," Bonnie informed her sister as she was walking into the kitchen. She sat at the table where Trudy had poured her a cup of coffee.

"From who?"

"I don't know. It doesn't say who it's from." Her dream from the night before crept into Bonnie's mind. "This is very strange. I had a dream last night about being on an island."

"Jeez, who doesn't dream about being on an island?" Trudy smirked. "But hey ... sounds like a blast. Could be from an incredibly sexy guy who's been stalking you."

"Thanks a lot." Bonnie's voice had turned sour. The last thing she needed was that kind of trouble.

Her sister sat across the kitchen table from her, smiling. "Oh come on Bonnie, live a little. Go see who this mysterious person is." Trudy's blue eyes sparkled with mischief.

They were two sisters who were nothing alike. Trudy was blond, beautiful and bubbling with life. Bonnie on the other hand had always been self-conscious. She felt she was a little on the plain side and had definitely gotten none of the sparkle that Trudy possessed.

Bonnie had always been shy. Afraid of letting her true feelings show, especially with men. Where Trudy had long blond hair, Bonnie wore her dark hair cut at shoulder length and pulled tight into a bun. She wasn't the type of woman who cared to spend hours in

front of the mirror. She would much rather spend her time with a good movie or a book. This was something that Trudy was endlessly reproaching her for.

Bonnie didn't very often take chances and, on the rare occasion that she did, it wasn't unusual for her to end up getting burnt. Like with Ken.

"Trudy, you just never know what this could be about. It could be dangerous."

"But it could be exhilarating, too."

"I don't know." Bonnie was doubtful. "I bet it's Ken, trying to make up to me."

Trudy pulled a sour face. "Girl, I'll be so angry if you let that man back into your life. It's high time you got rid of him for good."

Bonnie knew her sister was right. She'd been dating Ken for some time now and all he'd done was make havoc of her life. This last incident was all that she could take. She'd made a surprise visit to Ken's office and walked in to see his secretary on her knees with her lips wrapped around his cock.

Surprisingly, Bonnie hadn't really been saddened by the discovery. In fact, she almost felt relief to have him gone. At first her relationship with Ken had been wonderful. A whirlwind of romance with a handsome and worldly man, but it had quickly soured.

Bonnie should have realized that Ken was out of her league. She was a simple, down to earth girl. Just a cocktail waitress working at one of the many casinos that Ken's brother owned. From the beginning she'd felt that Ken was playing with her, but many lonely nights at home had made her ignore her gut feeling. Now she wished she hadn't.

"Oh come on Bonnie," Trudy urged her in the whiney voice she always used when she was trying to get her way about something. "This island is supposed to be magic. If you meet the man of your dreams when you're there, he'll fall madly in love with you."

"What do you know about this?" Bonnie asked, glaring at her trouble making little sister.

Trudy gave her that wicked little sister smile again. "Okay ... I admit that I might have something to do with it."

"Spill it," Bonnie told her.

"I was so worried about you being alone that I went to that old fortune teller."

"You mean that old lady out in Prump that does love spells?" Bonnie rolled her eyes. "That's all a bunch of nonsense."

"I don't know. She told me that Ken wasn't the man for you. That she knew who the man of your dreams was, and she would send you both to this magical island."

Bonnie smiled tolerantly at her well-intentioned sister. There was simply no way the man of her dreams was going to show up on that island. If Ken Rosado was out of her league, there was no doubt that she was light years apart from the man she really wanted.

The first time she saw Ken's brother stroll through the Branding Iron Casino, Bonnie had just about dropped the tray of drinks she was holding. The man hadn't even thrown her a glance, but his presence was so powerful that she hadn't been able to get him off her mind.

In contrast to Bonnie's petite frame, Tristan was tall, with wide shoulders and a muscular build that filled out his tailored suits to perfection. Though Bonnie had never seen him in anything but a suit, his bronzed, sun kissed skin told her that he was a man who loved the outdoors. He had that beach boy look with sun bleached blond hair and sky blue eyes.

Just the thought of what that hard body of his looked like beneath that suit could send her over the edge and right into a cold shower. Bonnie would often fantasize that she'd get a call to bring cocktails up to the penthouse suite and, when she knocked on the door, he would call for her to enter.

Taking the tray from her hands, he would brush up against her, letting her feel his rock hard cock through his pants.

"I've always wanted to fuck you," he'd whisper softly in her ear.

For once, she'd shed her inhibitions. She would unfasten his slacks and then, slowly ... with sensual movements she would glide one finger up and down his shaft, paying special attention to the swollen head.

The fantasy always left her panties drenched, her pussy swollen and aching for attention.

Her thoughts returned to the present and Bonnie suddenly felt deflated. The man didn't even know she was alive. On the few times he'd spoken to her at work, he'd been coolly professional. True, she'd met him at the rare social gathering Ken had taken her to, but even then he'd barely spoken three words to her.

There was simply no way Tristan would be at that island. Her sister wasn't even aware of her infatuation with Ken's brother. No one was.

"Trudy ... I thank you for thinking of me, I really do, but ... it would be a waste of time."

"Bonnie Lee Harris. I swear that you are the most difficult person I've ever met." Trudy was getting very irritated with her sister's humdrum personality.

"Even if there's nothing to this magic island thing, you could sure use the vacation this summer. You haven't been anywhere for a long time." Trudy stood up abruptly and put one hand on her hip. "Las Vegas is stifling this time of year. Why not go enjoy the tropical breezes, at least? Besides ... that old woman's services cost me several months' worth of pay."

Feeling ungrateful and selfish, Bonnie stood up and hugged her sister. "You're right, I need a break from this place."

"Then it's settled. Your flight leaves Saturday. I do hope you have your passport in order."

"Well yes, I got it a few years ago in hopes that someday I'd win a trip someplace exotic."

"Looks like you've won your trip. Now let's just hope there's some exotic guy waiting there for you." Trudy smiled.

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*Paranormal Romance*

The daughter of gentleman-turned-gunslinger, Trent Beaumont, and the octoroon, Angeline, reared by her stepmother, May, a saloon girl, May had nevertheless done the best she could to raise Angel as a lady. But Angel wanted revenge and when Hunter Night showed up in Virginia City, she wasn't about to lose her chance at avenging the death of her father.

Hunter had other ideas.

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### **Phantom Rider Excerpt**

#### Chapter One

Everyday for the past seven years, Angel had wondered what she would do if this moment ever came. What would she say? How would she control her violent hate for a man whom she had never laid eyes on ... before now?

The stench of unwashed bodies and stale smoke caused her to gag. She pushed the feeling away.

Angel pressed her way further into the crowded room of the Bucket of Blood Saloon. At least seven men stood around the gouged and scarred wooden bar, but Angel had known instantly which of these men was the infamous, Hunter Night.

Hunter stood apart from the others, but it was more than space that separated him from the other men in the room. There was something about him that was forbidden, as if the world was unwelcome to step into his personal space. He was a loner and liked it that way just fine. While practically every soul in the room stole glances at his back, curiosity was not enough for even the bravest present to intrude on the Hunter's solitude.

With slow, determined steps, Angel crept closer to the bar, her eyes burning with fury.

Known as The Hunter, he was said to be one of the most dangerous men in the west, but at this moment that fact could do nothing to deter Angel. Hunter was her prey.

The man who she held captive in her sights leaned his tall frame against the bar while he nursed a bottle of whiskey. His leather pants and beaded vest molded to his muscular flesh. Long, black hair fell over his wide shoulder.

He took no notice of the young lady who sat on the stool beside him, or of how oddly out of place she was in her flower-print dress and bonnet.

"Hunter Night?" Though Angel phrased it as a question, she already knew who he was.

Slowly, he turned ice blue eyes in her direction, but he said nothing to confirm his identity. Hunter waited patiently for the woman beside him to state her business.

His casual indifference brought a flush of humiliation to Angel's face. This spurred on her reckless intent. "My name is Angel Beaumont and I believe you were an acquaintance of my father, Trent Beaumont." Angel waited for a reaction, but the man was completely unreadable.

Angel felt her temper seeping to the surface with each passing second. "I would like to ask you a few questions about my father if you don't mind?"

Still Hunter said nothing, but he appeared to be looking at her with a touch more interest.

"My father disappeared eleven years ago while on his way to Santa Fe to meet you .... I demand that you tell me what happened to him!" Angel's anger toward this man was causing her to lose sight of her good sense.

Finally he spoke to her. His deep voice carried his words softly so that no one close would overhear. "Sorry Miss, but I never had the pleasure of meeting Trent Beaumont in Santa Fe." A hint of a smile played upon his lips.

"I believe you killed my father, Hunter Night!" Her voice quivered with barely controlled fury.

His smile only widened, making it very obvious that he found the conversation amusing. "Well, Miss, you would be wrong then."

Angel tucked an irritating tawny ringlet back into her bonnet. "Mr. Night, I demand satisfaction on behalf of my father." She spoke the words loud enough so that all could hear.

For a split second, Hunter was caught off guard and Angel felt a sliver of satisfaction at the startled look in his eyes.

The room had become so quiet that Angel felt sure he could hear her teeth grinding in nervous determination.

When Hunter realized that her challenge was not just mere words, he stood up to his full height and looked down on her with something between contempt and wonder.

“Miss, as much as I would like to give you the attention that you seem to be seeking, I have to get riding.” He touched the brim of his black hat in a gesture of mock respect.

The urge to smack the smile right off his face was almost uncontrollable, but instead, Angel spread her full, red lips into a dazzling smile of her own.

“As you wish, Mr. Night, but our next meeting might not be quite as pleasant as this one has been.” Angel turned away from him and strolled out of the Bucket of Blood. The other patrons parted to make way for her departure.

Angel’s stepmother burst out of the Silver Lady Saloon and ran to where Angel stood on the wooden plank sidewalk.

“Girl, have you gone plumb mad?” May Beaumont’s anger flared. “I just got word that my foolish stepdaughter was challenging the Hunter to a gun fight!”

May Beaumont wore a low-cut, blue silk gown that made her blue eyes look like sapphires in her tired, but pretty face. A gust of wind whipped through May’s golden ringlets.

“That man will not get away with killing pa.” Angel’s own anger returned to the surface.

“Hang up your fiddle girl. That man you speak of happens to be the Hunter, and there isn’t anyone who has been able to take him down yet.” May’s exasperation with her stepdaughter was apparent.

More from frustration than discomfort, Angel yanked her bonnet from her head, allowing a cascade of golden brown curls to fall to her waist. “I may be only a woman, but I am also Trent Beaumont’s daughter, and his murderer will have some reckoning to do.”

May shook her head sadly and gently clasped Angel’s arm, leading her toward the church where Angel had left the wagon.

When she had heard the whispers in church that the Hunter was in the Bucket of Blood, Angel had been able to think of little else but a confrontation. She had shamelessly walked out of Sunday services in the middle of Reverend Duncan’s sermon.

When they reached the wagon, May gently clasped Angel’s shoulders and peered into her stepdaughter’s determined face.

“I have failed you and your father if you go get yourself killed, Angel.” There were tears in May Beaumont’s eyes.

Angel was riddled with guilt for the anguish she knew her actions would cause her stepmother. “You are the only mother I have ever known, and you certainly have not failed me. What would have happened to me if you had not taken in Trent Beaumont’s daughter?” Angel hugged May before climbing into the wagon.

May put one hand on her hip and pointed a finger at Angel with the other. “You stay away from that savage, you understand girl?”

Angel didn’t answer. Instead she smiled and took hold of the reins with both hands. Waving to her stepmother, she led the wagon and their old roan down Virginia City’s main street.

A few moments later Angel’s wagon left the town behind and headed into the Comstock Mining District. Everywhere one looked, silver mines dotted the sage covered

hills. Angel's thoughts were in a whirlwind and she hardly noticed the break neck speed in which the wagon was taking the steep decline from Virginia City.

Hidden in Devil's Canyon was the little two room cabin that Trent Beaumont had built for his family more than a decade before. Angel's thoughts drifted as she expertly maneuvered the horse wagon onto the deeply rutted canyon road.

The words May had spoken to her on the day the sheriff had brought them the news of her father's death replayed endlessly within her mind.

"Your father chose the way he lived and died the way he chose." Tears rolled down May's cheeks. "Trent was a good man, though most would probably dispute that fact. I know he would rather have died than admit it to me, but I think he never really stopped loving your mother. The day your mother died ... a part of him died. I believe he lived by the gun in hopes that some day ... someone would end his misery."

May Beaumont - a saloon girl and the wife of an outlaw - reached out and pulled her husband's only child to her bosom.

"Your pa was a very unhappy man and I believe he knew exactly what he was doing when he sought out the Hunter. You have been my baby since you were in the cradle, and that will never change. I'll raise you to be a right young lady, I sure will." May smiled at Angel and wiped the child's tears away.

True to her word, May had continued to be a mother to her late husband's child. She had insisted that Angel attend school on a regular basis and church every Sunday. Though May Beaumont was shunned, she dutifully took Angel to services every week, pretending that she did not hear the whispers and see the looks of disapproval. Eventually the town gained a grudging respect for May. After all she was attempting to raise Angel in a respectful way.

Once Angel was old enough to attend church alone, May let her off at the door and picked her up after services. Though there was always vicious talk, Angel had learned to ignore the clucking tongues of the town gossips.

Every day for the past eleven years, Angel had lived on the hope of one day finding the Hunter, and now that day had come and he would pay.

Angel quickly changed out of her Sunday best into pants and a loose fitting shirt. Securing her long hair in one thick braid, she tucked it into one of her father's old hats. Underneath May's bed lay one of the few things that remained of Trent Beaumont. Angel picked up the rifle.

Running her fingers along the cold steel of the barrel a knot formed in her stomach as uncertainty gripped her. Angel had never hurt another living thing in her life, and here she was preparing to shoot down the man who had killed her beloved father.

Reaching up to the pantry shelf, she grabbed her tin. This is where she had stored all the money she'd saved for the past few years while working as a seamstress in Cora's Dress Shop. The bank notes amounted to approximately one hundred dollars. She felt sure it would be more than enough to hide out for a while after she'd done the deed she was setting out to do.

Quickly, Angel wrote a note to her stepmother, telling her how sorry she was to have slipped away, but it was something that had to be done.

Guilt gnawed at her for taking the old roan so she placed some money on the small wooden table with the note. Hopefully it would be enough to help May buy a new wagon horse. Angel knew that she would be gone for some time, for after she took care of the

Hunter she would no doubt be wanted by the law. Outlaws throughout the west feared the half-breed bounty hunter, but Angel knew she could bring him down. She must.

\* \* \* \*

On a distant bluff, a lone rider watched Angel leaving the sanctuary of her home. His horse and clothing echoed the infinite blackness of his eyes, where not even a hint of white could be seen.

The sound emitting from the rider's mouth was that of a hissing serpent. The Loa's solitary purpose was to take her soul into the darkness ... into the bowels of misery. The child called Angel would be his ... soon.

\* \* \* \*

Angel lay on her stomach, peering down into the sage and rock of the canyon below. She knew Hunter would have to pass through this canyon when leaving Virginia City, if indeed he was headed north like the whispered gossip had suggested. The talk had hinted that Hunter was traveling to Wyoming.

The hours passed slowly until the setting sun of late afternoon cast shadows onto the canyon floor. Only one other person had passed through the remote canyon while Angel waited. Feeling drained and fatigued, Angel wondered if she had been mistaken, but just then, a slight movement caught her eye. True to his Lakota heritage, Hunter rode through the canyon silently, almost undetectable.

Positioning the rifle between two boulders, Angel patiently waited until he was within range. Her finger tensed against the trigger, but she found herself caught up in a moment of hesitation.

Her father's face swam before her eyes and she squeezed hard. In the instant before the rifle erupted, Hunter leaned down, close to the horse's neck, whispering something to the animal.

Hunter had his pistol drawn and returning fire before Angel had a chance to fire a second time. Bullets ricocheted off a nearby boulder, sending fragments of stone in all directions. Keeping low, Angle fired blindly into the rocks where Hunter had disappeared.

After nearly emptying the rifle, Angle realized there was no return gunfire. She held her breath, listening to the silence of the canyon. There was no sound but the screech of an eagle in the distance. Scanning the rocks and brush below, she searched for any movement that might hint at the scavenger's hiding place. All was still.

Angel froze at the sound of a pistol's hammer being drawn back. She didn't have to look over at him to know he held the hot barrel of his Colt 45 close to her head.

"Drop it and get up slowly." The fury in his smooth voice was like liquid fire.

She complied, turning to glare at him with rage filled eyes.

Angel detected a very brief moment of shock on his face, but it was quickly masked by fury. An eternity passed and still Hunter said nothing—he just glared at her with the intensity of a wolf that had just cornered a rabbit.

A little bit of her fire ebbed. She was sure that she was looking into the hard eyes of death. She would disappear, the same as her father had.

Hunter motioned to a path leading from the ridge down into the canyon. "Start walking," he ordered.

Angel started down the trail, never looking back to see how close or far away he was. She knew that the slightest movement on her part and he would shoot her where she stood. Just before reaching the bottom of the canyon, her boot caught in a tangle of exposed roots and she was sent sprawling to the heat-baked earth.

Hunter made no move to help her up, instead he nodded his head indicating that he wanted her to get to her feet. Bruised and scraped, Angel rose. The sting of her wounded pride hurt much worse than the lacerations on her face and arms.

Following close behind, he never let her get more than a foot ahead of him. Soon they came to an outcropping of large boulders where Hunter had hid his paint. The horse stood quietly and nearly motionless awaiting the half-breed's return. Reaching to the side of his saddlebag, Hunter grabbed hold of a tightly coiled rope.

Angel caught herself watching the way his muscles rippled beneath his copper-colored skin. He wore the sleeveless leather vest open, exposing the chiseled contours of his chest and arms.

Flustered, Angel looked away quickly when she realized that Hunter had caught her staring.

A smile played at the corners of his mouth. Nevertheless, he grasped her wrists roughly and secured them with the rope.

"Where are you taking me?" she demanded.

"Back to town," he told her, while he was securing the other end of the rope to the saddle horn.

"What about my horse?" Angel's defiance reared up.

Hunter arched one brow and his mouth spread into a dazzling smile. "I do hope he knows his way home Miss Beaumont, because you're going to be making the journey on foot."

Refusing to give Hunter the satisfaction of whining over his harsh treatment, she compliantly followed behind his horse without a word of complaint.

He rode at a good pace, but not so fast that she would fall or become over exhausted. At least she could be thankful for this, and the fact that he apparently had no intention of killing her.

Angel pondered this fact for a brief moment, but brushed it off when she realized that he could not kill her. Too many people would suspect him because of their confrontation in the Bucket of Blood earlier. Her legs felt like rubber by the time they reached the top of the incline leading into Virginia City. All eyes turned to her as he led her into town and straight to the sheriff's office.

Hunter removed the rope from his saddle horn, but Angel's hands remained bound as she was led inside the building to face Sheriff Jackson.

The burly, gray-haired sheriff wore his white hat, day and night. Indoors or out, it didn't matter. May would chastise the man for this shortcoming, but he would just click his tongue and declare that he would rather walk naked down Main Street at noon than go without his hat. Orley Jackson's warm-brown eyes snapped up from the newspaper he was reading when they entered.

A look of utter astonishment passed over the sheriff's features when he recognized Angel. "What in blazes is this about?"

“Miss Beaumont took it in her head to ambush me on my way out of town.” Hunter untied Angel’s wrists and led her by the arm to the sheriff’s desk.

“That the truth, Angel?” Sheriff Jackson asked in disbelief.

She confirmed the accusation with a nod of her head, but quickly spoke up to defend her actions. “He killed my father, sheriff.”

“Is that so?” He now looked at Hunter.

“It is not,” Hunter stated. “To tell the truth, I can’t rightly remember seeing Trent Beaumont, except for maybe his image on a wanted poster.”

Hunter’s reference to her father’s shady past stung Angel.

“Then explain this, Hunter Night.” Angel reached into her shirt pocket and pulled out a letter. The paper had gone yellow with age. It was the last they had ever heard of her father, and Angel had made sure to bring it along when she had set out to bring the Hunter to justice.

Sheriff Jackson took the letter from Angel that contained the last words of Trent Beaumont. Sheriff Jackson struggled to read the faded writing.

### *Dearest May*

*I have gotten word from the Hunter. He speaks of a judge who will be lenient on me if I turn myself in. He says maybe a couple of years in jail and then I can rejoin my family. The messenger he sent talked of how I will meet him in Santa Fe and he will escort me to this Judge Morris whose district is somewhere in Texas. I will then be free of the law and we can go someplace where they will not make hell of our lives. We will no longer have to hide from them. I will get word to you as soon as I am able. Give Angel my love.*

### *Trent*

The sheriff read the letter again, this time out loud so that Hunter could hear what the contents were. When Sheriff Jackson had finished, he cast his eyes on Hunter and awaited an explanation.

“I have no knowledge of anything in that letter, and I am not personally acquainted with that judge or any other judge. I’m a bounty hunter, and I make no deals.”

“You talk fancy for a breed, son.” The sheriff stared hard at Hunter.

“My education is of no matter in this.” Hunter’s voice turned cold.

The sheriff contemplated the situation a moment before looking up at Angel. “As I recall, Miss Beaumont, your father had a bounty on his head, so even if this man did kill him, I couldn’t very well arrest him for murder, could I?” Orly was shaking his head.

“Am I to take it you want to press charges against the young lady?” he asked Hunter.

The Hunter surveyed her from head to toe. Angel unexpectedly felt self-conscious and wished her hands were free so that she could smooth the curls that had escaped her braid. She scowled at Hunter for his obvious scrutiny.

“Lock her up for the night. That should give me plenty of time to get out of here without being shot full of holes,” he said, smiling maliciously at Angel.

Sheriff Jackson rose and, taking Angel by the arm, led her to a back room where there were four barred cells. Angel looked back one last time at the vicious heathen.

Hunter tipped his hat to her. “Can’t say it’s been a pleasure ma’am, but it has been an experience.” He turned his back on her and walked out.

Sheriff Jackson whistled between the gaps in his teeth. “Angel Beaumont, you had to have been crazy as a loon to go after a man like Hunter Night.”

“I know he killed my father, Sheriff.”

The old man just kept shaking his head as he locked her in a cell. “I’m locking you up for your own good Miss Angel, and when I do let you out, I don’t want you anywhere near that savage.” The sheriff paused and waited for Angel to respond, but she said nothing.

“You hearing me?” he asked again, louder.

“Next time we might be having to burying you instead of locking you in here. I’ll be letting May know where you are,” he told her over his shoulder as he was leaving the room.

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*Paranormal Romance*

For fifteen years something evil had stalked the people of Sinister, Wyoming. Brody Silver wolf had always known Jenna was the only one who had the power to stop it. When she was drawn back to Sinister by the latest murder ... it was waiting for her.

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## **Soul Eater Excerpt**

### PROLOGUE

The steam swirled and danced within the inipi lodge, filling his body with the sacred medicine of the earth – cleansing his soul. His heart beat in sync with the rhythm of the drum, luring him to the underworld. The atmosphere within the lodge changed as the darkness retreated.

Her aura was bright – so bright that it seared into his brain, tearing at his mind until he was sure he would go mad. Just when he was certain that he could take no more, the light dimmed to reveal her angelic beauty. It was her . . . the one he had to find, had to protect against the darkness.

His need for her burned deep within his groin until it erupted into uncontrollable desire. Her innocence was so complete that it sent shards of guilt into his heart.

He must find her, save her . . . but he couldn't take her innocence.

The Soul Eater was taunting him, tormenting him with the girl's beauty. It wanted to destroy her for she was a threat. Her light could chase away its darkness and starve its hunger. The Soul Eater's need for her was as strong as his own, but it would devour her soul, and the light of her power. The vision wavered, changing until she stood before him, seductively beckoning him to caress her naked flesh.

The mist crawled over her peach-colored skin, stroking her with its ghostly fingers. Her, dark nipples stood erect, inviting him to nibble them. Luscious full lips parted as she gasped, revealing her pleasure at the phantom's touch.

Lust overwhelmed him. He could almost feel her flesh wrapping around his swollen thickness, squeezing until he erupted within her.

The Soul Eater would use his passions against him, tease him . . . blind him with lust until he was sightless to its evil . . . until he forgot his purpose.

The shadows crept ever closer to his angel. Its hunger would devour her as he watched, helpless to stop it.

The vision changed abruptly. She was gone and in her place was his little brother. The sweet ring of the child's laughter filled the air. Happiness reflected in the boy's large, dark eyes.

Finally . . . a new bike! He'd wanted a new bike for a long time. He'd take the dirt trail and only be gone a moment. His parents wouldn't even realize he was gone.

Night was falling quickly and with it would come the coldness of the grave.

Couldn't he see the darkness, the evil that stalked him?

Watch out little brother! Go faster . . . don't let it catch you!

A slight uneasiness descended on the boy and he pedaled the bike faster, but it was gaining on him. The darkness was close to him. It would rip the life from him in its quest for the soul's essence.

The vision wavered and broke apart to become one with the thick mist of the inipi. He was seized by violent trembling. Terror such as he had never known before gripped his heart.

"The evil of the Soul Eater reaches through your dream to touch your heart." The old shaman's voice brought him out of his vision. Raven Heart stared at him from across the lodge.

"I saw her," he told the old man. "It's coming after her and it will come after my brother."

Raven Heart nodded.

"I didn't see where to find her, though."

The old man's bony finger pointed toward the mountain. "You will find her in the shadow of its lair."

\* \* \* \*

From this distance he appeared ethereal as the flames cast flickering light on his dark, features. He stared into the fire as if he could see something in the flames that was invisible to everyone else. At the moment he was alone, but for how long?

Now that she was here, watching him from only a few yards away, Jenna Claremont wondered how she would ever have the courage to approach this fantasy man who had trekked through her dreams for months now. One thing was for sure, though, if she was

going to talk to him, she would have to do so soon, before Angie returned from wherever she had gone.

She wouldn't stand a chance of even being noticed next to Angie McNeil, who was older than Jenna and one of those perky blonds that just seemed to draw men like magnets.

Jenna felt herself to be plain at best next to someone like Angie. She had a mass of dark red hair, with a face marred by the occasional freckle. Would she stand a chance with an older guy like Brody?

The first time she'd saw him was over a year ago at a local rodeo. Since then, Jenna had been in his company several times, but not once had he paid her the slightest notice. He often hung out with her older sister's friends who were all college age and probably much more interesting than Tina's little freckled faced sister.

Jenna frowned at the discouraging thoughts that kept crowding in on her courage. She had to do this. For such a long time she had been waiting for this moment. Now that she was eighteen years old, maybe he wouldn't think of her as such a child.

It would be crazy not to talk to him. After all, Brody Silver Wolf was the only reason she'd risked her father's wrath to come to this party in the first place. Jenna's gaze scanned the many little campfire's that dotted Mirror Lake's beach, briefly wondering how long Angie would be gone.

She knew Brody wasn't Angie's boyfriend, but she'd sure been clinging to his side tonight. It grated on Jenna's nerves when she thought of the way the other girl had been all over him since he'd arrived.

Jenna knew she was way out of her league at this party. Everyone was older than she was. The only reason she'd even known that there was going to be a party at Mirror Lake was because she'd overheard her sister talking about it with some friends. They had mentioned that Brody was planning on going and that's all it had taken to make up Jenna's mind.

Shivering, she imagined her father's anger if he ever found out where she was tonight. Though she turned of age a few days ago, he still treated her like his little girl, and Jenna hadn't been eighteen long enough for him to get out of the habit yet.

Brody was forbidden fruit, for many reasons. Not the least being that he was ten years older than she was and bad news as her father often referred to him.

Jenna's father had arrested Brody more than a few times and whenever she would ask about it, Brent Claremont would just say that he was one of those hell-raising Arapaho's from the reservation. Officer John Claremont obviously had no idea that his eldest daughter was often in the company of many people like Brody, but he wouldn't. Her father would want to think of his daughters as perfect and chose not to see that which was unpleasant.

Running her fingers through her unruly auburn tresses, Jenna jumped to her feet and made her way to Brody's fire. When his gaze moved from the fire to Jenna's face, her stomach twisted into knots. She'd have turned tail and run right then and there if it weren't for the fact that it would have made her look even more foolish.

"Didn't you ride in the rodeo last summer?" She was so nervous that her voice squeaked when she spoke.

"Yeah, I did," he answered while he studied her with open curiosity. "Jenna right? Tina's little sister."

“Yes,” she admitted. A frown touched her lips. She had so not wanted him to remember that she was Tina’s sister tonight. Just once she wanted to be Jenna instead of Tina’s little sister. But on the bright side, he at least remembered her.

Jenna sank into to the sand next to him. “I think you should have won.”

Brody’s lips broke into a smile. “I think you have to actually stay on the bull for a few seconds before you can win.”

Jenna blushed, knowing that she’d just given away the fact that she knew very little about bull riding. Remembering the bottle of water in her hand, she lifted it to her lips and took several swallows of the lukewarm liquid.

“If you don’t watch how much you drink you might not make it home tonight.” Brody regarded her with unmasked amusement.

“It’s just water,” she assured him, her face flushing with embarrassment.

In that moment Jenna felt more like a little girl than she ever had in her life. She knew if she didn’t take desperate measures the only opportunity that she might ever have would slip right by her.

“Well maybe I could have a real drink and just go home with you then.” She smiled impishly, scooting closer to him.

Brody’s gaze traveled from her flashing green eyes to her graceful neck, coming to rest on the cleavage visible above her silky blouse. Even through her innocence, she didn’t miss the flickering of desire in his dark eyes.

The look he gave her made her heart pound so hard that she felt sure it would burst forth from her chest at any moment.

“Do you want to go for a walk?” Jenna asked before she lost her nerve.

Without a word, he stood up and held out his hand to her. Jenna let him lead her away from the crowd. They walked along the beach in silence until coming to a secluded cove.

Undercover of darkness he pulled Jenna to him, crushing her against his chest. Holding her yielding body close to him sent flames of lust ripping through his body. From the moment he’d laid eyes on her he’d know it was she--the girl from his vision. He had yearned for this moment but dreaded it at the same time.

His hunger for her sweet flesh consumed him, nearly clouding his reason until there was no thought but her soft body beneath his.

Burying his face in her softly scented hair he whispered. “Do you have any idea who I am?”

She tilted her head to look into his eyes. “Yes, you’re Brody Silver Wolf.”

His teeth playfully bit at her ear as his hand slid beneath her blouse to caress her back.

“Yes, but do you really know who I am?”

“I don’t care who you’re.” Her words came out in little gasps.

Going up on her tiptoes, Jenna put her lips against his. With a moan he invaded her warm inviting mouth with his flickering tongue. He held her so close he could feel her taut nipples beneath the thin blouse.

It couldn’t hurt to sample just a morsel of what she so badly wanted to give him. Maybe . . . just maybe she had already lost her innocence and it wouldn’t matter. He’d only seen her from a distance a few times, and he had no idea even how old she was.

Your hunger will blind you, Brody. Obscure your sight to the evil that stalks her.

Pushing the mocking voice from his head, he pulled her even closer so that she could feel his rigid flesh against her stomach. She moaned in response, sending shivers through his body.

“You’re so beautiful, just like a little doll.” His voice shook, revealing the magnitude of his passion.

Jenna let herself slip into the unfamiliar feelings that gripped her. Whatever rational thought she’d started out with was far out of sight. For the moment, nothing existed but his touch. He was at the center of her universe.

Gently, he pulled her down with him to the soft sand and with little effort opened her blouse, exposing her small breasts. She felt his long hair fall against her skin and his hot tongue flicking across her tingling nipple.

Without a second thought she reached down and unbuttoned her pants. Grasping his hand, she helped guide him to her throbbing wet pussy that was screaming to be touched.

“I want you,” she told him between little gasps.

“Oh baby doll . . . if you only knew how badly I want you.” His deep voice was laced with obvious passion.

He was up on his knees pulling off his shirt. With uncertainty, she touched the firm ridges of his stomach and let her fingers trail down to the hard bulge in his jeans. She unsnapped his pants and gently slid the zipper down. The molten fire in his eyes set her blood boiling.

“I want you to be my first.” Jenna’s voice quivered with yearning.

Brody froze. He looked as if someone had poured ice water over him.

“Are you a virgin?” he asked.

“Yes,” she whispered.

“How old are you?”

“Eighteen” She wanted to lie, but couldn’t bring herself to do it.

Brody hung his head, and for one terrifying moment she wasn’t sure what he would do. The fact that he was angry was unmistakable. It emanated from every fiber of his body.

“Get dressed!”

To her surprise there was no evidence of his obvious anger in his voice, only regret.

“I’m not a little girl Brody. We can do this . . . and I want to.” Jenna pleaded with him, wanting him to crave her as badly as she did him.

He shook his head. “You’re too innocent to understand. If we do this . . . it will distract me.” Brody didn’t elaborate and she didn’t bother asking him to explain further.

So many feelings hit her at once. Her naive heart was shattering into a million pieces as wave after wave of shame washed over her. She had innocently hoped that he would fall in love with her and nothing else about her would matter.

Brody had already dressed, but Jenna was still where he’d left her. Her devastation was so complete that she couldn’t move. Brody picked up her blouse and handed it to her.

“Get dressed,” he told her again, his voice soft.

Jenna complied without a word. There was something about his manner that alarmed her.

Brody looked away from her and out over the black water of the lake. For a long time he said nothing, and when he did speak he did so in a very low and dangerous voice.

“Your father has been trying to lock me up for a long time. I guess now he will want to get me more than ever.”

“I have no intention of telling my father.” Jenna stood and straightened her clothes the best she could.

“Someone should tell him.” He had risen with her and had her arm clasped in a steel grip. “The next time you might not be so lucky. The guy may not stop, or worse he could hurt you.”

Tears pooled in her eyes, blurring her vision. Her heart could take no more of this pain. “There would have been no one else Brody Silver Wolf.” Jenna’s words came out in sobs. “Are you so dumb that you can’t tell? I love you. I have since the first moment I saw you. This would have happened with no one else. You’re the only man I have ever wanted.”

She thought she saw a flicker of emotion in his dark eyes. Could he actually care about her?

“You’re just a kid. You don’t even know what love is. Believe me, when you’re older, you will look back and wonder what you ever saw in this Indian anyway.” His words were soft and spoken with a slight smile that was intended to numb the sting.

Before he could stop her, Jenna brushed his lips with a kiss.

“You’re wrong Brody. I will love you until the day I take my last breath, but ... never again will I give you the opportunity to hurt me.”

Jenna walked away, leaving Brody to watch her disappear onto a darkened path.

“Wait, let me walk you home,” Brody called after her.

She didn’t even break her stride. Jenna promised herself she wouldn’t look back and she would never again let Brody Silver Wolf fill her heart with pain.

Blinded by tears, she relied on memory to find her way through the dark. Their house was located on the edge of town, about a mile from the lake. Jenna was so submerged in grief that her father’s warning completely escaped her memory. That is until she realized that she was utterly alone and surrounded by the dark forest.

The sun had still been up when she’d walked to the lake. The walk home was something she hadn’t taken into consideration. On further thought, Jenna had to admit that wasn’t entirely true. She’d just been so full of hope for this evening, she’d felt it would be worth it.

Jenna froze, behind her had been the sound of a branch breaking. Holding her breath she listened. The night was silent, unnaturally silent. There wasn’t even a hint of the usual sounds of crickets or coyotes.

The conversation she’d overheard this morning came rushing at her.

Another victim.

A drifter.

Found in the foothills.

This time there had been a witness, but all they saw was a shadow near the victim.

Again, there was that noise coming from behind her, the sound of rustling leaves in the wind ... but the night was still ... without the slightest hint of a breeze.

She picked up her pace until she was practically running, looking over her shoulder every few seconds.

Then she saw it, a silhouette in the moonlight that moved. A sound resembling a squeal erupted from her throat and she shifted gears to high. Blinded by panic, she ran, not knowing or caring where she was going.

She felt herself falling and at the same time burning pain ripped through her ankle. Then there was nothing but the terror of the dark figure looming above her and the coldness that wrapped around her throat. Her screams shattered the stillness of the night before the gripping chill cut off her air and she sank into darkness.

\* \* \* \*

Someone was shaking her and she began to flail wildly at whoever had her in their clutches.

“Jenna, stop it! It’s me, Brody!”

“It took a minute for his words to penetrate her terror, but finally she stopped fighting, and her screams turned to unrelenting sobs.

“It was the killer.” Jenna told him while her body trembled with shock.

He pulled her into his arms trying to warm her. “It’s okay now. Whoever it was is long gone.”

Jenna shook her head, “No, he might still be around. We have to get out of here.”

“I think whatever it was is gone. It took off through the trees when I got here.” He tried to reassure her.

“I want to get out of here.” Still panicked she tried to get to her feet, but collapsed against Brody with a cry of pain.

“I think my ankle is broken.”

With gracefully swift movement, he picked her up and cradled her in his arms. Brody made his way through the woods with the efficiency of an animal, but Jenna didn’t miss the way he kept looking around, as if they were being hunted.

“Is he out there?” she asked in a barely audible whisper.

“Yes, don’t make a sound.” His lips were up against her ear.

Fear crawled over her skin like a million tiny spiders. She found it hard to even breathe. Finally the dirt path gave way to a paved road and the lights of town came into view. Jenna knew he had to be tired by now, but he kept walking. Only a little ways further was her house, she could see it from where they were.

She didn’t have to tell him where she lived. Her father’s police cruiser was clearly visible in the driveway. Upon reaching the house, he put her down, but continued to support her so she wouldn’t have to put any pressure on her injured ankle.

“You know he’s probably going to try and find a reason to put me in jail over this.” Brody spoke in hushed tones.

“Wait.’ Jenna stopped moving, forcing him to do the same.

For some time she stared at the darkened house, not moving, not saying a word.

Finally, Jenna looked up into Brody’s curious eyes. “Something’s not right.” Her words cracked through the night.

“What is it?”

“It’s only 10:30 and the house dark.”

Brody shrugged. “Maybe they are in bed.”

Jenna rolled her eyes. “My sister never goes to bed before midnight.”

“Well, maybe she isn’t home,” he offered

Jenna shook her head. “No, she told me she was staying home tonight because she didn’t feel well, and besides, my dad never goes to bed until we’re both home.”

“Where does he think you’re?”

“The movies,” Jenna answered guiltily.

“Sit here, while I check it out.” Brody helped her onto the grass on the front lawn.

At the door, Brody rang the bell a couple of times and then waited. Nothing stirred within the house. Once more he tried, this time he pounded on the door, but still there was no response of any kind.

Finding the door unlocked, he slowly pushed it open. Jenna watched as lights began to come on throughout the house. A moment later he returned.

“The house is empty. No one’s here at all.”

“That’s impossible. Their cars are here!”

Shrugging, he scooped her up in his arms and carried her into the house. The warmth of the lit living room should have quieted her trembling, but it only grew worse. Brody gently set her on the sofa.

“You have to get to the hospital and have that looked at.” He motioned toward her injured ankle. “Is there someone you can call?”

Jenna’s gaze was fixed on an area of the carpet that was soaked with blood. “Something’s happened to them.”

He looked to where her gaze rested on the carpet. With a sigh, Brody picked up the phone that was sitting on the end table. “I must be insane,” he muttered. “Never thought I’d see the day I voluntarily called the police in this town.”

The rest of the night passed in a haze of flashing red and blue lights, the hospital, doctors and an endless stream of questions from the police.

Three days later her Aunt Alison arrived from Texas, and there had still been no trace of her family.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Ten Years Later*

The early morning sun rose above the horizon to shroud the surrounding aspens and pines with its golden light, but the town of Sinister Wyoming still lay deep within the shadow of Eerie Mountain.

Jenna pulled to the side of the road and studied the town from the slight incline of the highway. It had been ten long years since she’d laid eyes on her hometown, but ten years hadn’t been long enough. Just the sight of Sinister sent shivers down her spine.

So many times over the years she’d thought of coming back here to put the ghosts of the past to rest once and for all, but each time she’d contemplated driving into this dark little town, her stomach lurched and her skin would crawl with fear. For a long time she’d wake up in the middle of the night, trembling from nightmares that wouldn’t let her rest.

Had fate brought that unfortunate girl through Sinister? Senator Brodrick’s granddaughter had been on her way to Jackson Hole to meet up with some friends, but

she had never made it. Her car was found abandoned on the Indian Reservation and her body discovered floating in the Sweetwater River near Sinister.

The official report said that Mary Brodrick was another victim of the Eerie Mountain Killer, but Mary was only one in a long line of victims.

This was her first field assignment for the FBI and Special Agent Jenna Claremont had been given this assignment specifically because of her history in Sinister.

With cold determination, Jenna pushed the hellish images away and pulled back onto the road. The streets were still quiet, almost unnaturally so. Though the town had grown, it couldn't be called a city by any stretch of the imagination.

She was surprised when she pulled up to the police station on the west end of town. No longer was the station housed in the shabby little red brick building she remembered. What greeted her was a larger, ultra modern white building. She wondered if the Sinister Police Department now consisted of more than five officers.

Jenna had been sure she would know just about every soul in town, but she didn't recognize the uniformed officer at the front desk.

"I'm Agent Claremont with the FBI. Could you let Captain Findley know I'm here?" Jenna flipped open her identification for the officer to examine.

A few moments later, Jenna sat across from the person who had been her father's best friend. The man who peered at her with eyes set deep in a fleshy overweight face, bore little resemblance to the person she remembered.

"What a pleasure to see you again, Jenna. So you followed right in your daddy's footsteps?"

Gordon Findley gave her a hearty welcome and a smile, but Jenna couldn't shake the feeling that something just wasn't right with her dad's old partner.

"I would be happy to even be half the officer my father was," Jenna returned the captain's smile.

Captain Findley drummed his meaty fingers on the desk in what Jenna took as impatience.

"What's the status of the Brodrick case?" Jenna attempted a smile but just couldn't make the muscles of her face cooperate.

"Girl, it's fantastic to see you again. All grown into a fine young woman, and an FBI Agent to boot ... but I do have to tell you that I think your trip here was a waste of time."

"Why's that?"

"We took the perpetrator into custody last night. We'll be bringing charges up on him within the next day or two."

"Really, after all this time?" Jenna's green eyes widened in surprise and she couldn't help but wonder at the fact that the killer had eluded the police for nearly fifteen years, but was caught so quickly after this case.

"How did that come about?"

Gordon leaned back in his chair. "A witness saw him leaving the area where the car was discovered and tracks matching Ms Brodrick's car were discovered on a road leading to this gentleman's property."

"How interesting. Do you mind if I take a look at the case file?"

Jenna was quick to notice Gordon's slight hesitation, but she was sharp enough to keep it to her self.

Skimming through the file, she stopped to stare at the larger than life, crime scene photos. The girl lay pale and lifeless against a blanket of dry leaves. Jenna felt her stomach tighten at the sight of the close up of the girl's neck. Discoloration of the neck and lack of blood attested to the Eerie Mountain killer's MO.

After looking through the rest of the file Jenna was a little unnerved to see that there was no autopsy report, nor a report on the arrest made the night before.

"What happened to the autopsy report? There must be one by now."

"No autopsy," the captain smiled. "The cause of death is obviously loss of blood. I saw no reason to waste the tax payers' money on ordering an autopsy."

Jenna peered at the man in disbelief. "An autopsy is an automatic when dealing with a homicide case, captain. You must know that."

Gordon shook his head. "City ordinance says that we only order an autopsy if the cause of death is not immediately obvious."

Jenna knew that the state law would definitely override that, but she refrained from commenting further for the moment.

"What about the arrest report?"

Gordon lifted his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "The arresting officer hasn't finished writing it yet, but I can tell you what you need to know."

"Okay, what evidence has been compiled against the suspect?"

"Well, what I've told you. A witness seeing the suspect near the abandoned car, and possible tracks on his property."

"That's all?" Jenna asked incredulous. "You'll need something a little harder than that to get a conviction."

"Jenna, the investigation is ongoing." Gordon paused, taking a tired, rattling breath. "I'm sure more evidence will pile up. Right now we're in the process of getting a search warrant for the suspect's property and residence."

Jenna was angry at the department's incompetence, but her features softened as she remembered that she was talking with her father's best friend.

"I'm sorry Gordon. I would just hate to see this monster walk after all these years because the investigation was bungled."

"I can understand that." Gordon smiled but the smile faded rapidly at Jenna next words.

"I'll need you to have the body ready for transport to the Medical Examiner's office in Cheyenne by noon."

Gordon was shaking his head. "That's completely unnecessary, I assure you. Besides, it's Sinister's jurisdiction."

Jenna shook her head. "Sorry Gordon, with the fact that the car was found on a Federal Indian Reservation, and that the murder could have possibly taken place there, it is now FBI jurisdiction. We'll be taking over the investigation. I'll need to interview the suspect and I'll also need access to any additional case files that may link the suspect to other crimes."

Mouth agape, Gordon stared at her through hardened eyes.

"If it helps at all, I am sorry. I'm just doing my job," Jenna said, attempting to sooth him.

Slowly his mouth widened in a grin. "Of course you're. We're just not used to a little sprig of girl coming in here and taking over our cases."

Jenna knew that there was probably a lot of truth to Gordon's words.

\* \* \* \*

The interrogation room was bright with harsh florescent lighting, hardly an atmosphere conducive to relaxing a suspect and taking him off guard. The white clinical walls gave one the impression that they were about to undergo some major surgery.

None of this penetrated Jenna's shocked consciousness at the sight that greeted her when she entered the small room. The man who sat on the other side of the table appeared to be tired, but instinctively alert.

All the hurt, anger, and passion of that long ago night reached its ghostly fingers through the wall of time to wrap around her throat. Jenna had to make a conscious effort to breathe. It was finally the amusement in those dark eyes that broke through.

"Do you find something funny Mr. Silver Wolf?" Jenna's words held a razor sharp edge.

Brody shook his head slowly. "Only that you seem to be following in your father's footsteps. How ironic is it that ten years ago I was staring at him from across a table."

"Indeed, Mr. Silver Wolf. Why don't you tell me what did my dad arrest you for?"

"Oh, just about anything and everything that went wrong if I was within miles of town. I guess something about me seemed to rub Officer Claremont the wrong way." Brody gave her a crooked smile.

"I don't believe that." Jenna's voice held a note of bitterness. Brody knew nothing of her father.

"Relax Agent Claremont." Brody leaned back in the chair as if relaxing was exactly what he intended to do. "I didn't realize it at the time, but I suspect that he must have guessed his little girl's very grown up interest in me." The look in his eyes told her much louder than words that he hadn't forgotten their night by the lake and her indiscretions.

Heat flooded Jenna's face, sending a torrent of humiliation through her that was quickly replaced by anger. "That was a very long time ago and has absolutely no bearing on either of our lives at this point." Jenna's voice was soft, but unyielding. "I would have thought that you have a much more serious matter to occupy your thoughts."

Brody's gaze traveled from her eyes to her mouth and down the curve of her neck. His eyes glazed over as if his thoughts had ventured to a place that Jenna dared not remember.

Her pulse quickened, and she was helpless to calm it. Against her will, she felt herself spiraling back to a time buried in the past. In that instant she was a girl of eighteen again and her whole world revolved around the man who sat in front of her.

It was an era of innocence and golden dreams, a time when she had dared to dream of her father walking her down the aisle and reluctantly placing her into the capable hands of the most handsome man in Wyoming. It lasted for only the briefest of moments before Jenna slammed the door shut with an echoing crack of finality.

With new purpose, Jenna sat in the chair across from Brody and opened the case file in front of her.

"What were you doing in the vicinity of the victim's car, Brody?"

"That's a confidential matter," he answered without hesitation.

"Did you know Mary Brodrick?" Jenna's curiosity was piqued.

Brody shook his head. "No never saw her before in my life."

"Then I repeat, what were you doing?"

"And I repeat that is a confidential matter," he said with a smile.

"Brody, do you realize how serious these charges are?"

"Yes, ma'am, I do." Again he gave her a soft smile. "But Jenna, you're fully aware that I'm not the Eerie Mountain Killer."

Jenna watched him closely, realizing for the first time that he didn't appear to be the least bit agitated over his predicament. It was as if he knew something that the rest of them were completely overlooking.

How could she be sure that it hadn't been him that chased her through the woods on that terrifying night? If she had to testify in a court of law, could she swear that it hadn't been him?

The fact was, if her testimony was based entirely on what happened and what she saw, then she couldn't swear it hadn't been him ... but in her heart she knew then and she knew now that it hadn't been Brody who had assaulted her that night.

"I'll admit that I think it highly unlikely that you're this monstrous serial killer that has plagued Sinister for the past fifteen years, but you and I both know that it isn't my opinion that counts."

"And so you'd let the man that you swore you'd love forever go to death row?"

Jenna couldn't believe that he could speak of such things with so much amusement dancing in his dark eyes. Somehow he knew that he'd never be convicted of this crime.

"Brody, it would be fine with me if you'd stop referring to that naive little girl that I once was, and just take my word that she doesn't exist anymore." Jenna pasted a hard smile on her lips.

"Are you so sure of that baby doll?" Brody had grown serious.

Jenna leaned over the table, bringing herself close enough to him that she could speak in a hushed tone. "I am quite sure, Brody Silver Wolf. That girl is long gone, and I'm also sure that everything we say and do is being caught on camera. So if you don't want to compromise this case, I'd keep it as impersonal as possible. Otherwise you may risk dealing with an agent that doesn't feel you aren't guilty."

Brody gave her a slight nod of affirmation.

Jenna stood up, but before leaving she turned back to Brody and assessed him in a cool, professional manner. "I'll have to get a warrant to search any property or vehicles you might have. If they don't find any further evidence against you, they'll have to let you go."

She left the room, wishing she could walk away from the emotions that were stirring within her as easily as she'd just walked away from Brody Silver Wolf.

\* \* \* \*

The finality of the electronic cell door clanking shut behind him was unnerving. The new cells were constructed of solid steel with one observation window cut in the door. Brody calmed his nerves by reminding himself that they would find nothing when they searched his property.

That was unless they planted it? The unbidden thought crept its way into his brain like poisonous worms.

He pushed the thought aside, wondering where it had come from. It was true that he had a natural distrust of the Sinister Police Department, but Jenna would play it straight. Reclining on the small cot that was supposed to pass for a bed, Brody closed his eyes and indulged in thoughts of Jenna. Like so many times over the years, images of her haunted him relentlessly. How often had he regretted not plucking the fruit of her innocence when it had been offered?

Brody groaned inwardly as the memories of her soft lips became so vivid that he could almost taste her sweetness. With his arousal becoming almost painful he attempted to close his mind to the memory, but instead of the blank nothingness that he wanted, he heard her hushed words on that fateful night.

I will love you until the day I take my last breath.

Those innocently spoken words had haunted him for all these years. Had Jenna any idea what she'd done to his life on that night? How she'd turned it inside out, and how it had torn at his soul when she'd gone away?

He had long ago accepted the fact that the little waif had gone from his life forever, but every time he looked at a woman, or yearned for the touch of a female, those bewitching green eyes had been there ... stalking him, pleading with him.

Another unwelcome thought intruded into his peace. Jenna showing up at this point in time wasn't an accident. The Soul Eater's evil had reached out to pull her back within reach of its grasp.

She was one smart woman. He doubted that she would miss much. What if she got too close to the truth as a few others had? What would happen to her? He had no doubt that it wanted her. The other victims had been mere appetizers. It is Jenna that it wanted.

Fear wrapped around his heart, squeezing painfully. Brody got to his feet to impatiently pace the confines of the cell like a caged panther.

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*Paranormal – Time Travel Romance*

Out of a dark and turbulent sea comes a curse, a nightmare that will take Rebecca on a journey through time, propelling her right into the arms of the most treacherous pirate of the Caribbean.

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## **The Pirate's Dark Revenge Excerpt**

### Prologue

In a ghastly dance of nature, the winds teased the dark swirling sea, prodding her violent nature, daring her to erupt with her icy fingers of death. Streaks of blue lightning illuminated the black horizon, revealing masses of sinister clouds resembling Satan's own minions.

Not even the fierce gales could drown out the agonizing screams of the dying, their cries reaching out across the night in damnation of their betrayers. Fire erupted, a macabre inferno that cast a hellish light on the grisly scene of death.

The night trembled with the explosive fire of countless guns, sending clouds of smoke to choke the life from those who could still breathe in the acidic air. Another thunderous explosion cracked through the night filling it with the sound of timber splintering into

millions of pieces. The ship's golden figurehead was sent spiraling into the shadowy depths of the sea.

Dark emotionless eyes watched as the frothy black water swallowed the figure.

## Chapter One

Rebecca woke with a start. Gradually, layers of murky fog peeled away from her consciousness until she became aware of her surroundings. The gentle rocking of the boat helped to sooth her tattered nerves. She had arrived in the Caribbean three days ago, and every night since then she'd had the same dream.

Leaving the warmth of the bed, Rebecca slipped on a silk wrap and went above. The deck of the Sea Brat was cool against her bare feet, and the soft tropical breezes caressed her skin as gentle as a lover's touch.

She reached down between her breasts to touch the cool metal of her grandfather's ring. Briefly she wondered if it might have something to do with her strange nightmares, but she quickly dismissed the idea as absurd.

When she'd arrived in Jamaica to settle her grandfather's affairs, she'd been given the Sea Brat and the ring. That had been all of her grandfather's earthly possessions. Grandpa had been an old salt, the sea was in his blood like it was hers. The Ashtons had been seafaring people for hundreds of years, and like so many before him, the sea had finally claimed old Captain Ash.

Tears pooled in her green eyes to roll down her cheeks. Captain Ash had been her last living relative, and now Rebecca Ashton was completely alone in the world.

The memories flooded back ... the call informing her that the Sea Brat had been found abandoned at sea, her frantic flight to the Caribbean, and her stubborn inability to accept the obvious.

They had done a complete sweep of the boat, but had found no trace of any foul play. The conclusion had been that old Captain Ash had partaken of too much rum and fallen overboard, but Rebecca was still not convinced.

It's the Ashton Curse. Rebecca imagined her grandfather's voice issuing that dire warning.

"What utter nonsense." Rebecca reaffirmed her disbelief in the family curse. Sure many members of her family had died at sea, but that was not really surprising when you consider they had always been seafaring people. She herself was an archeologist specializing in underwater excavations.

Rebecca reached for the chain that held her grandfather's ring. It was the ring that didn't make any sense. She knew it was her grandfather's because he had taken it out once to show her, but he never wore it. Captain Ash firmly believed that the ring was linked to a pirate's curse on their family. He had always kept the ring locked away in a box, but when the Sea Brat was found, the ring had been discovered on the deck.

Taking the chain from her neck, she attempted to study the ring under the bright light of the moon. Molded in gold was a sword crossed with a rose and on the back were the words, Dark Revenge and the initials J.S.

Rebecca shook her head. A pirate's curse, what baloney.

A nagging sensation kept intruding into her thoughts. She could not feel that cold, open void that should be there if he were truly gone, this alone made her wonder.

Had his obsession with the curse had something to do with his disappearance?

Even if there were some truth to this pirate's curse, she didn't have a whole lot of clues to go on.

She replaced the chain, then took a moment to just breathe in the fragrant sea air and gaze in wonder at the beauty of Kingston Harbor beneath the full Caribbean moon.

As a scientist, Rebecca relied heavily on tangible fact and was not given to flights of fancy as her grandfather had been. To waste so many years of your life searching for phantoms was not Rebecca's style, and this was why she'd defiantly attached the ring to a chain and hung it around her neck. The curse was ridiculous, and she'd prove it.

"It be a lovely sight to be sure." The deep male voice seemed to come from everywhere at the same time.

Startled, Rebecca took a step back and would have gone overboard if not for the boat's rail. By the light of the moon she could make out few details of the man who was boarding the Sea Brat by way of the dock. He had deeply tanned skin with longish black hair, and he wore a bandanna atop his head as a pirate might have done hundreds of years ago.

Her thoughts raced, and she instinctively backed away from the intruder. What could she use for a weapon? Was this even real or just another dream?

"Me deepest sorrows for bringing a fright to ye, lass," he said with a smile.

"What do you want?" Rebecca feigned anger, though the only emotion she could really identify was fear.

"There's been tales that this vessel be for sale."

The man took a few steps closer, and she could now make out more details. He was strikingly handsome in a very rough sort of way. His eyes were so dark as to be indistinguishable from the night. The moon reflected in them as it did in the black waters of the Caribbean Sea.

Rebecca found it nearly impossible to look away from those hypnotic eyes, but at last the warning bells of her subconscious penetrated her thoughts. "How can that be? I've only just arrived in Kingston and have made no definite plans to sell. Besides, it is the middle of the night, do you expect me to believe that you are here to buy a boat?"

"Believe or not, lass, it be the truth," he told her, gracefully lifting his right hand as if he were taking an oath.

"Well, you heard wrong, Mister, now I'll have to ask you to leave."

Rebecca noticed he'd made his way closer to where she stood. Terror gripping her heart, she groped around for something, anything that she could use to hit him with if he should decide to attack her.

A strong gust of wind tugged at her wrap, whipped at her long auburn curls. Looking down she found that her robe had fallen open to reveal the golden ring that rested between her breasts.

His eyes scanned the contours of her body, which were outlined very revealingly by the thin material of her nightgown. Rebecca felt herself grow hot with embarrassment under his intense gaze.

Again their eyes locked, and she found it impossible to pull hers away. She could feel herself sinking deeper and deeper into their depths.

"Now, Rebecca, if me intentions be to attack ye, methinks I could have done so already." His voice came to her as if from far away.

"What do you want from me?"

"Perhaps that be for ye to discover, fair lady."

Rebecca felt a strong arm encircle her waist, and he took her hand firmly in his. She could not scream ... she could do nothing, for those seductively sinister eyes paralyzed her.

From some far-off place her ears caught the sound of soft music, and the strange man led her into a graceful waltz on the deck of the Sea Brat.

"Who are you?" Rebecca asked in an attempt to force reality into focus.

Beneath a thin black moustache he smiled, revealing two rows of dazzling white teeth with the exception of one gold tooth. "Think about it, love. Ye know who I am."

He held her tight as they twirled to phantom music beneath the light of a full moon.

This can't be happening, it has to be a dream. Rebecca told herself this over and over again as they continued to dance. She had not the slightest desire to wake or to resist when she felt his lips claim hers and his tongue invade her mouth.

It was as if someone else possessed her, and this person wanted this man. Wanted to be here with him under the moonlight, wanted to feel his arms around her and to make love to him right out in the open.

He let out a deep throaty laugh. "Do ye want me, little Rebecca?"

"Yes." She heard herself answer but at the same time wondered where the answer was coming from.

"Would ye die for me?" he whispered in her ear.

"Yes," she heard herself answer again.

"Mayhap ye will, love."

"Take me now, make love to me now!" Rebecca's voice held an urgency that came from somewhere deep within her. She had simply stopped trying to hold onto rational thought.

For the first time the eyes that had held her transfixed released their grip slightly. Their darkness raged with battling emotions.

Rebecca felt herself falling to the deck and then feather light kisses on her lips.

She desperately tried to keep her eyes open, instinctively knowing that she must, but she found it an impossible task. She fell deeper and deeper into oblivion.

\* \* \* \*

The harsh tossing of the Sea Brat penetrated her deep slumber, but it was the roughness of the deck against her skin that sent her mind into full consciousness. Rebecca's aching muscles screamed in protest when she tried to move.

Her eyes flew open and were met by black, threatening clouds. A storm was brewing, and the sea had grown rough. The night before came back to her, and it was like being splashed in the face with iced water.

Had it been another nightmare, only this time she had walked while in a slumber? In the midst of the dream had she lain on the deck to sleep?

With effort, Rebecca got to her feet, but the sight that met her eyes sent her reeling once again. In all directions there was nothing but the sea.

This was impossible! The Sea Brat had been firmly docked in the harbor and had been for some time. She had checked it herself on her first night aboard. It would have taken the force of hurricane winds to send this boat out to sea, and then it probably wouldn't have been in one piece.

There was only one answer, her dream had not been a dream, and her intruder had set her out to sea. But who was he and what purpose would he have to do that?

Those were questions she would deal with later because right now she was in some real trouble. A big storm was brewing up fast, and Rebecca had no idea where she was. There was no land in sight.

Below deck, Rebecca found her grandfather's radio and switched it on, only to be greeted with heavy static. Knowing she had to try anyway, Rebecca picked up the radio's transmitter. "Mayday, this is the Sea Brat, mayday."

The static continued uninterrupted. Rebecca shivered, and an unbidden sense of doom settled over her.

Someone was walking over her grave.

She had no idea where the thought had come from, but she quickly pushed it aside. She was in serious trouble if she couldn't raise someone on the radio. If she set her course east, she might possibly come across one of the many islands that dotted the Caribbean, but maybe not in time to avoid getting caught in the storm that was creeping up.

"Hello down there!" a male voice called from above.

Rebecca froze, remembering her intruder of the night before.

Quietly, she searched through the galley until she found a large knife. Hiding the weapon behind her, she started up to the deck of the Sea Brat.

Emerging from below, she came face to face with another stranger. The man stood on the deck watching her, his features pasted with a mixture of amusement and anger. He was dark skinned and wore his long black hair in dread locks.

"Hey, mon, what ya doing out here on a day like this?" he asked.

"Who are you?" Rebecca demanded, still keeping the knife behind her back and out of the stranger's sight.

"Mon, don't be like this." He lifted his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "I'm Chey, yer grandfather be a friend of mine. Saw de Sea Brat was gone and thought I best find ya before ya was a victim of ole Davy Jones' Locker like ole Ash."

It was at this point that she noticed the man's boat secured to the Sea Brat.

What if he was a pirate and she was his next victim as her grandfather had been before her?

"What do you know about my grandfather's disappearance?" Her voice held more than a hint of suspicion.

"Oh, I guess de old man was looking for Isla de Niebla and the Dark Revenge." Chey shrugged his shoulders. "He was obsessed with that ole legend."

"What is Isla de Niebla?"

"Mist Island," he answered.

"Go on ... where is this island?"

Again Chey shrugged his shoulders. "Tain't on de maps, maybe it don't exist."

Chey appeared to be sincere enough, but there had been a flicker of something in his eyes when he had spoken of the Dark Revenge.

"I don't believe you! I think you know more than what you say."

"Let's be getting de Sea Brat back to Kingston, then I'll tell ya what I know. But it isn't much," he warned.

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