

Susan Krinard, Tanith Lee, Evelyn Vaughn - When Darkness Fallsbackground-1- -2-
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KISS OF THE WOLF
from WHEN DARKNESS FALLS Anthology
By
Susan Krinard

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Sometimes love lurks somewhere
between dusk and dawn

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KISS OF THE WOLF

Susan Krinard

To the "Prickly Chicks," cheerleaders extraordinaire.

Chapter 1

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What a way to come home.

Dana St. Cyr stood at the sloping shoulder of a narrow road edged by cattails and a stand of bald cypress trees, tapping the toe of her shoe on the gravel as smoke poured out from under the hood of her rented Lexus. In every direction, as far as the eye could see, lay mile upon mile of swamp, with not a gas station in sight.

The sun beat down on Dana's head and shoulders, plastering jacket and blouse to damp skin. How could it still be so hot in mid-September? Why in the world had she decided to leave her cell phone in California? If she had to walk all the rest of the way to Grand Marais...

Big Marsh. That was a good name for a town in the backwaters of southern Louisiana, even if this was more swamp than marsh. Dana blew out her breath and glanced down at her Prada mules. Practical, she thought in mild self-disgust. Where did I ever get the idea that anything other than sneakers would be practical in a place like this?

But she hadn't worn sneakers since the age of sixteen, when she'd decided who and what she was going to be. All that certainty had vanished a few months ago, when suddenly it wasn't enough to have a thriving career as one of San Francisco's top plastic surgeons, blessed with an elegant penthouse overlooking the Bay and several closets full of Paris couture. The perfect life she'd built had grown inexplicably flat and lonely.

And that was why she was standing here on the road in the soggy heat of a Louisiana afternoon. She still remembered Uncle Charles's stories of the bayou. "If you ever get in trouble," he'd said, "go home to Beaucoeur Parish. You'll always find a welcome there, with your own people."

People she'd never met. People who actually liked living in a place like this. She sighed and pushed damp hair out of her face. The road was still deserted. Birds sang in the cypress trees and tangled thickets of impenetrable scrub. A few white, fluffy clouds scudded across the sky.

Dana pulled off one shoe and flexed her toes. The last thing she intended to do was stand here and wait to be rescued. A few blisters weren't going to kill her. The worst part would be arriving in Grand Marais with a psychological disadvantage, the stranger from California who got herself broken down in the middle of nowhere.

It's not as if you care what they think. You don't have any expectations, remember? This was a crazy idea, anyway, and if not for Uncle Charles...

The cattails by the side of the road rustled with the motion of some hidden shape. Dana lost her balance and leaned against the Lexus, the small hairs rising on the back of her neck. Did they have bears in Louisiana?

You're being ridiculous. It's probably a deer, or maybe an opossum.

But it was not a deer, and definitely not an opossum. Dana blinked, and a tall, very human form emerged from the undergrowth.

The man moved a little way toward her and paused, regarding her silently. Dana assessed him with a keen eye developed over years of sculpting faces, inching her way toward the car door and the can of pepper spray in the glove compartment.

Her first impression was of height, broad shoulders and a shock of red-brown hair. But it was the face beneath that hair that made her forget about the pepper spray. Even if the swamp sheltered escaped criminals or crazed hermits, surely none of them could be quite so strikingly attractive.

Mid-thirties, she calculated. Nonsmoker, not a shred of excess weight, high cheekbones, firm chin with a dimple she couldn't improve on. A mouth with lips just full enough to be sensual without sacrificing masculinity. Strong, straight nose. Eyes just a little deep set, a shifting turquoise under dark, straight brows.

The rest of the body matched the face, beautifully proportioned, narrow through hips and waist under a clean white T-shirt, thighs muscular in blue jeans painted with mud to midcalf. Dana couldn't see his feet behind the tall grass, but his hands, thumbs hooked in his pockets, looked as graceful as a concert pianist's.

The Greeks had made statues like this, but nature seldom duplicated their talents. Not without help. If genes like his were common, she would be out of a job. And then maybe she would have time for a love life...

The man took a step toward her, breaking the spell. Dana flung open the car door and dived across the seat. Idiot. Who knows better than you how little a face has to do with the soul inside?

"Are you in need of assistance, ma'am?"

Dana's fingers slid off the button of the glove compartment. She peered out the passenger window, where the face gazed back at her, lips curved up at the ends as if he knew exactly what she'd been thinking.

She flushed, slid back into the driver's seat and folded her hands in her lap.

The doors were unlocked. He could get in if he wanted, but she would be damned if she let him think she was afraid, especially when he was circling his finger in an unmistakable request that she roll down the window.

Calmly cursing herself, she punched the window button. Hot air flooded the car, and with it the subtle scent of male: cotton, soap, perspiration and a whiff of motor oil. The man leaned down and rested his elbow on the door.

"You're not from around here, are you?" he asked.

His voice was a low drawl, tinged by an agreeable accent that reminded her of Uncle Charles. She searched his eyes for any clue as to his intentions, but found only blue-green sparkling with mischievous light over depths she couldn't begin to plumb.

"A very astute observation," she said coolly. "You don't by chance know how to repair my car?"

"It's possible," he said, his gaze wandering to the open neck of her blouse.

"Where are you headed?"

"Grand Marais." If it's any of your business. "Do you live in this area?"

He rested his dimpled chin on his knuckles. "You're still a good five miles from town, if you don't count the shacks and fishermen's camps along the levee. You have family in Grand Marais?"

"Lucky guess." Better that he know she wasn't alone and without resources, just in case—though her skittishness was beginning to seem very foolish. "Augustine Daigle is my great-aunt. Do you know her?"

"I've met her." He cocked his head and studied her with sharper interest.

"You're a Daigle?"

Dana wondered if this kind of inquisitiveness was specific to Louisiana. "St. Cyr, actually. Aunt Augustine is my mother's aunt. My parents left this area in their twenties. This is the first time I've been here."

Now, what had possessed her to babble on so? Something about his lazy, half-lidded eyes invited her to confide in him, a total stranger, in a way she wouldn't confide in her closest friends back home. She tried to reassemble her guard, but the stranger's demeanor had radically altered in the short time she'd been talking. He had drawn back from the window, and his eyes had lost all of their friendliness.

"You look like a woman who enjoys fine things," he said, all the melody gone from his voice. "Grand Marais is a simple place, with simple people. I don't think you'll like it there. If I were you, I'd go back where I came from."

Dana realized her mouth was hanging open and closed it with a snap. "I beg your pardon. I won't trouble you any further, but if you have a cell phone I can borrow... "

"I'll tell them you're here." His mouth set in a straight, grim line. "Take my advice. Don't stay in Beaucoeur Parish."

Chapter 2

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His last words were drowned out by the roar of a car approaching at high speed from the east. He looked toward the road, and Dana caught a flicker of something breathtakingly dangerous in his face before he turned away.

"Wait!" she called after him. "You haven't told me your name—"

But he was gone. Just like that, vanished, without even a swaying branch to mark his passage. The noise of the car—a very new, very expensive BMW convertible—had become deafening, and Dana winced as it pulled up beside the Lexus.

This seemed to be her day to find astonishingly handsome men in the swamp, she thought absurdly. A flash of white teeth in a tanned face, tousled blond hair and the insouciant air of great wealth dazzled her sight like heat rising from hot pavement. The driver stopped his engine and leaned over the seat.

"Well, hello there," he said. "I'll hazard a guess that you didn't park here just to take in the—" He hesitated, peering at her over the top of his sunglasses. Blue eyes crinkled in consternation and darted away, searching the thicket where the first stranger had disappeared. Just as Dana was about to

Speak, he removed his sunglasses and turned his blinding attention on her again.

"Forgive my bad manners, miss. I trust that I may be of assistance?"

Dana felt her spine relax. She didn't know this man any better than the other one, but he was something she understood: rich, confident, and sure of his place in the world. She'd had several boyfriends exactly like him. The difference lay in the accent; Mr. BMW's voice had the graceful cadence of a quintessential Southern gentleman.

"I hope so," she said, offering her hand. "I'm Dana St. Cyr, on my way to Grand Marais. I'm afraid the rental company has quite a bit to answer for."

"So I see." He took her hand in a firm grip, making no concession to her gender.

"Chad Lacoste. St. Cyr, of the Baton Rouge St. Cyrs?"

"My father was from New Orleans."

"And you're from the West Coast."

"I suppose my accent gives me away."

He grinned. "Believe me, I knew you weren't from around here the moment I saw you."

She guessed he meant it as a compliment. "I flew in from San Francisco two nights ago. Apparently I wasn't very well equipped for this expedition."

"You've been crossing the Atchafalaya Basin—nothing but camps and oil rigs for miles. It's lucky I decided to go for a drive this afternoon." He shook his head. "I'd hate to see you hitching a ride in one of those beat-up trucks the locals use."

"You're not local, Mr. Lacoste?"

"Chad, please. We don't stand on formality here in the bayou."

So she had observed. "Chad. I take it that you don't live in this area?"

"Not in Grand Marais, but outside of town on a piece of land drier than most, in a plantation house built by my great-great-grandfather. Quite a pile, really. I usually spend a few months each year at Bonneterre. The rest of the year it's New Orleans, New York, London. In fact, I haven't been back to the parish for several years." He smiled at her with open appreciation. "It looks as if my stay won't be as tedious as I'd feared."

Before she could think of an appropriate response, he jumped out of the convertible and gallantly opened the passenger door. "If my lady will step into my carriage?"

She grabbed her purse and the suitcase in the back of the Lexus and scooted into the convertible's leather seat, instinctively smoothing her trousers and doing up the top buttons of her blouse. Chad Lacoste hopped in beside her and gunned the engine. The moment she was buckled in, he stepped on the gas pedal and sent the BMW hurtling down the road.

Dana braced herself, struggling to concentrate on the rather monotonous scenery. She felt Chad's eyes on her and wished he would watch the road instead.

"Enough about me," he said abruptly. "What brings you to Beaucoeur Parish, Miss St. Cyr?"

"Doctor," she said, clearing her throat. "But please do call me Dana."

"Doctor. How interesting." He shifted gears and accelerated. She expected him to

ask more questions, but he seemed to be waiting for her to speak. She decided to change the subject.

"Chad... did you happen to see the man I was speaking to just as you arrived?"

His face clouded, and she was reminded of the instant when her first would-be rescuer had changed so completely from lazy-eyed rogue to ominous stranger.

"Remy Arceneaux," Chad said, biting off the words. "You don't want to have anything to do with him, Dana."

"Oh? Does he have a bad reputation?"

"Worse." His jaw set, and she was considering pressing for details when the first recognizable structures appeared by the road.

Many of the buildings were little more than shacks or cottages, but as they crossed a bridge and entered the town proper, Dana noted that there seemed to be a single main street along which most of the businesses were located. Among them she recognized a brick church with a cemetery, a small market and hardware store, some kind of dance or game hall, and a tiny bank.

"Welcome to Grand Marais," Chad said, his voice heavy with sarcasm. "If you can find anything 'grand' about it." He raced down the center of town at seventy miles an hour, past desultory pedestrians, barking dogs and the tiny police station. Dana guessed that there wasn't much more to Grand Marais than she could see—the side streets didn't seem very long, and the tallest building was only two stories high.

She spotted a two-pump gas station next to an ancient hotel and tapped Chad's arm. "You can let me off there," she said. "They must have a tow truck somewhere in town."

"You didn't tell me where you're staying."

"With my great-aunt Augustine Daigle."

Chad slammed on the brakes. Fortunately, no one was behind him. "Daigle?"

"My grandmother's sister. I know she lives on the edge of town..."

She could have sworn that Chad's tan face turned a shade more pale as he swerved into the gas station lot. He set the brake, left the engine idling and vaulted over the closed door as if some private demon nipped at his heels.

"I'll be right back," he said. Without further explanation, he strode into the booth-sized convenience store attached to the station.

Dana sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. She could get out here, of course, and find whatever passed for a taxi in a small bayou town like this. But it seemed rude to leave after accepting a ride from Lacoste, however reckless his driving. It couldn't be that far to Great-Aunt Augustine's.

"Sally?"

She turned at the unfamiliar voice. A middle-aged man, the station attendant by the look of his stained overalls and the rag in his hands, was staring at her in obvious confusion.

"I'm afraid not," she said. "My name is Dana St. Cyr."

"St. Cyr?" He twisted the rag into a tortured spiral. "But you look...you look just like her—except for the hair. And the clothes." He spoke the last part of the sentence as if to himself, but the uneasy expression on his face remained.

"You knew Sally?"

"Sally who?"

Chad emerged from the convenience store before the attendant could answer. He glanced at the older man with a frown.

"No gas today," he said brusquely. He paused at the side of the convertible and tapped a cigarette out of a new pack of Marlboros. "Smoke?" he asked Dana. She shook her head and looked for the attendant. He was gone. "Do I look like anyone you've met?" she asked Chad.

He lit the cigarette with a gold lighter and took a drag. "Why? Has that man been bothering you?"

For reasons she couldn't fathom, she had no desire to discuss the attendant's peculiar reaction with Lacoste. "Nothing," she murmured, reaching for the door handle. "I'd like to thank you for driving me into town. I'll just go see about that tow truck—"

"Forget it." He dropped into his seat and released the brake. "It's already taken care of. And anyway, this is door-to-door service."

While Dana glanced behind to see if the local police had noticed such an easy source of revenue, Chad shot out of the gas station, past several more commercial buildings and into a residential area at the north end of town. He took a sharp left at a tilted stop sign and followed a curved lane past small frame houses, some in disrepair and others neatly kept, with modest flower gardens and whitewashed verandas.

He pulled up in front of one such house, an attractive cottage that smelled of fresh paint. In one motion he snatched up Dana's suitcase from the back seat and opened her door.

"The residence of Augustine Daigle," he said, sweeping his hand with a flourish. After seeing the rest of Grand Marais, Dana wasn't surprised at the small size of her great-aunt's house. In fact, it seemed rather cozy.

And when did you ever have any use for cozy? She stepped out of the convertible and gently pried her suitcase from Chad's fingers.

"I don't know how to thank you," she said, and hesitated. Well, why not? If his worst habits were smoking and speeding, he shouldn't be too hard to manage.

"Perhaps I can take you to dinner once I'm settled in."

"Are you asking me on a date?" he said, grinning around his cigarette.

"Let's just say that I don't know too many people in Grand Marais, and I may need a native guide."

Chad laughed and slid behind the wheel. "That's one thing you can bet on, Doc," he said. "We'll be seeing each other again. Very soon."

The rumble of his engine obscured every other sound, so it was several moments before Dana realized that the cottage door had opened. An elderly woman stood on the porch, arrayed in a bright floral housedress and Birkenstock sandals. Her white hair was neatly arranged in a bun, and her face was youthful in spite of a multitude of wrinkles. This was a woman who'd never visited a plastic surgeon. The woman took a single hesitant step forward. "Sal—" She stopped, blinked several times and slowly held out her hands. "You must be Dana. How wonderful to

see you at last."

"Aunt Augustine." Dana set down the suitcase and took her great-aunt's hands. "I know I wrote that I wouldn't be coming until next week... "

"Hush. You should have come much sooner, *chère*." Augustine pulled Dana into a hug. She smelled of potpourri, oranges and fresh bread. The intimate contact should have been uncomfortable, but it was not. Dana felt strangely moved, as if she had indeed come home.

"We have so much to talk about," Augustine said, releasing her. "So much. But I have a question before we go in and have something cool to drink. Was that Chad Lacoste who just drove off?"

So Aunt Augustine knew Chad. If his family was as wealthy as he'd implied, that was no surprise. Such affluence would be noticed in a place like this.

"Yes," Dana said. "We just met. He drove me into town... My rental car broke down in the swamp. He said he'd arrange to have a tow truck pick it up."

"I see." Augustine's brown eyes grew distant, and then she shook herself like a robin in a birdbath. She took Dana's hand and led her into the house. "I have your room all made up. It's small, but I hope you'll find it comfortable."

"I'm sure I will." Though the words were rote courtesies, Dana found that she meant them. The whole cottage smelled very much like her great-aunt, and the wooden floor was carpeted with handwoven rag rugs. A piano stood in one corner. Antique furniture graced the small living room. The window air conditioner labored to cool the house, but its modest effects were considerably more pleasant than the damp heat outside.

When Dana stepped into the guest bedroom, she was enchanted. The brass bed was piled high with plump quilts and decorative pillows, lace doilies were draped over the dresser and bedside tables, and a carved wooden rocker stood in one corner.

"Here you are," Augustine said. "The bathroom is just down the hall. If there's anything you need that I've forgotten, tell me. I was about to heat up some gumbo for supper."

Dana set her suitcase on the floor beside the bed and glanced longingly at the quilts. "Thank you, Aunt Augustine."

"Call me Gussie. No one has called me Augustine since Jules passed." She caught the direction of Dana's gaze. "You take a nap, now, and I'll come get you when supper's ready."

Once Gussie had bustled away to the kitchen, Dana kicked off her mules and collapsed onto the bed. It creaked and settled under her with a contented sigh that matched her own.

It felt marvelous to close her eyes, and for a moment she thought she might actually fall asleep. But a certain persistent image danced behind her eyelids: a tall male form, friendly and hostile by turns, whose turquoise gaze locked on hers as if to convey a silent message of warning.

Of what? Who is Remy Arceneaux, and why did Chad advise me to stay away from him?

She sat up, raking her hands through her hair. The smell of onions and spices

wafted through the house, reminding her how hungry she was after a very skimpy breakfast of beignets in New Orleans. Too restless to sit still, she slid off the bed and prowled about the room, touching this object and that, until she came to the dresser and the lovingly framed photo displayed there.

Her first thought was that she was looking at a portrait of herself. She picked up the photo and studied it more carefully. The woman in the picture, arm in arm with Gussie, was alike enough to be Dana's twin in height, figure, coloring, even in features, but the small details made the difference clear.

The woman in the photo was tanned from forehead to ankles—the kind of tan one got from strong sunshine and not a tanning salon. She wore very little makeup, and her blond hair was drawn back in a careless pony-tail, not sculpted into a neat bob like Dana's. She wore an open-necked, sleeveless plaid shirt, a pair of shorts with numerous overstuffed pockets and scuffed hiking boots. The last time Dana had dressed like that had been for a grade school field trip.

Dana had no lost twins that she knew of; she'd been an only child. But the gas attendant had mistaken her for someone else. And Gussie had given her such an odd look when they'd first met...

"Her name was Sally."

Gussie stood in the doorway, hands tucked into the pockets of her apron. She looked from the picture to Dana's face, and in her eyes were answers to the questions Dana had yet to ask.

"You two are alike as two mudbugs in a ditch," Gussie said. "That's why I was surprised when I saw you. I couldn't tell from that small picture you sent... I couldn't have imagined."

Dana set the picture down. "Someone in town mistook me for her," she said. "Who is she?"

"Your cousin—my granddaughter." Gussie sighed and sat down in the rocker, her wide hips just fitting between the curved arms. "You do look like her, but I can see you must be very different."

"Does she live in this area?"

"Sally... disappeared five years ago."

Chapter 3

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A chill lodged on the back of Dana's neck. "Disappeared?"

Gussie closed her eyes. "She was so full of life, from the time she was a little girl. She drew everyone to her, like a light. In school, the boys were all in love with her. More than one wanted her for his wife. But she chose to leave Grand Marais. She went to the city, to study at the university." Gussie smiled.

"She wrote me sometimes. She worked very hard, and when she was done, she had a degree in the study of birds—'ornithology,' she called it."

"I didn't know," Dana murmured. "I'm so sorry."

Gussie seemed not to hear. "When her maman was dying... a little more than five

years ago... she came home to be with us. She heard about a special bird in our swamps, very rare, and she stayed on to look for it. One day she went into the swamp and never came out again."

The idea of being lost in those swamps was terrible enough, but to imagine dying there... Dana touched the grinning face in the photo with a fingertip. It seemed unbearably cruel that one so young and happy should have met such a fate.

"They looked for her," Gussie went on. "They searched the 'chafalaya for days. They never found a sign of her. There were rumors—" she laughed "—there are always rumors. But Sally wasn't the kind to get herself lost in the swamp or anywhere else. We all knew she wasn't coming back."

With rare impulsiveness, Dana knelt and took her hands. After so many years of examining faces from every angle, she knew what lay behind her great-aunt's impassive expression. Grief—hidden, unhealed, devastating.

"I am sorry," Dana repeated softly. "I wish I had known her."

Gussie patted her hand. "I'm sure she would have felt the same. This is the room I kept for her when she visited. She would want you to be comfortable here." She sniffed. "The gumbo needs stirring." She got to her feet and hurried out of the room, leaving Dana to contemplate her story.

So much for the placid appearance of Grand Marais. Even small towns could hide a multitude of sins. Was one of them murder? How had Sally died, and why?

Dana wasn't prepared to intrude on Gussie's grief just to satisfy her curiosity.

Yet she couldn't help but feel, however irrationally, that she and Sally shared something more than a face.

I could have gone anywhere to find myself and put my life back on course—New York, Hawaii, Europe. Is there a reason I felt drawn to come here, where so many of my mother's family lived and died?

She knew the notion was foolish, that she should put morbid thoughts of poor Sally's disappearance from her mind. But even when she was full of gumbo and had enjoyed an hour of pleasant, untroubled conversation with Gussie, her mind bounced back and forth between two people, man and woman, each vanished in the endless swamp: Sally Daigle and Remy Arceneaux.

Sleep was out of the question. Sally's eyes watched her from the photo, as if trying to convey a message from the other side. After a fruitless hour of staring up at the ceiling, Dana climbed out of bed and went to the phone Gussie kept in the kitchen. She thumbed through the phone book in the faint hope that the person she wanted had a listed number.

There it was: Lacoste, Reuben. Chad's father, no doubt, unless he had other relatives in the area. Dana was prepared to take that chance. She punched out the number and waited tensely as the phone rang.

A sleepy female voice answered with a formal "Lacoste residence." Dana introduced herself and asked for Chad.

"I'll see if Mr. Lacoste is available, Dr. St. Cyr," the woman said, and put Dana on hold. Only a minute passed before a familiar accented voice came on the line.

"Dana?" Chad said. "I didn't expect the pleasure of hearing your voice again so

soon."

"I'm sorry to be calling so late. I hope I didn't disturb you?"

"Not at all. I'm at your service, day or night." He just managed to avoid innuendo in his tone, but Dana could not mistake his interest.

"I know I owe you a dinner, but I have another favor to ask of you."

"Fire away."

"I'd like to go into the swamp, and I thought perhaps you might be able to recommend a guide."

"Go into the swamp? That's not one of the amusements I'd expect a woman like you to enjoy."

In that, he was correct, or would be at any other time. "I have a very specific reason. I've learned that my cousin, Sally Daigle, disappeared in that area a few years ago, and I'd like to see where..." Now she was sounding ridiculous. How could she explain this strange, unaccountable feeling she had to learn more of Sally's fate?

"Sally?" Chad repeated. "No one knows where she was lost."

At least he wasn't surprised; of course, he'd reacted when she'd given Aunt Augustine's last name. He might have known Sally. He, too, might have grieved her passing.

"I know it sounds a little odd, but I'd really like to see what she saw before she... before she disappeared. Call it a whim, if you like. I do realize that I'll need an experienced guide—"

"You've got one. It so happens that I grew up in this area, and I know the swamp as well as anyone except the old-timers who live on the bayou. I'll take you myself."

"I wouldn't want to inconvenience you—"

"No inconvenience. I knew Sally. She'd have been grateful that you took an interest in her."

"Perhaps you can tell me more about her."

Papers rustled. "I'm free tomorrow, if you want to go so soon. Maybe you'd like to rest a few days, get used to the climate."

"If it's convenient for you, I'd like to go tomorrow."

"That's fine. Tell you what—I'll pick you up tomorrow morning, around six o'clock. It's a good idea to get started early. The ground is fairly dry this time of year, but there's still a lot of mud—wear jeans and sneakers and a long-sleeved shirt. Mosquito repellent, too. I'll take care of the rest."

"I appreciate this, Chad."

"Think nothing of it. Oh, before I forget—the mechanic is working on your Lexus. It should be fixed in a day or two."

"That's terrific, thanks." Dana rested her hand on her chest, amazed at the rapid beat of her heart. It wasn't Chad she was thinking of. "I owe you two dinners now."

Chad chuckled. "We'll see. Six o'clock tomorrow morning, then."

Only after she'd thanked him again and hung up did Dana wonder why he'd been so willing to guide her himself, and on such short notice. He wasn't the type to

like getting muddied up. It was natural to assume he wanted more from her than a couple of dinners out, but Dana had no intention of leading him on. She would have to be up-front with him on that score, sooner or later.

Tomorrow's worries would take care of themselves. At the moment she had to figure out what she could wear into a swamp. Jeans and sneakers were not among the clothing she'd packed. Perhaps Gussie had something she could borrow until she had time to buy whatever the local stores had to offer.

Whatever the inconvenience, she wasn't going to let such small matters as the "proper" clothing for swamp-walking get in her way. By this time tomorrow night, she hoped to have rid herself of this peculiar obsession with her identical cousin.

If only she could say the same of Remy Arceneaux.

The woman swore with surprising vehemence, pulling her leg out of the sucking mud and shaking it as fastidiously as a cat. Remy didn't laugh. He'd been tailing her ever since Chad Lacoste got them lost and left her with the boat while he went in search of "help," and there was nothing humorous in watching this particular female flounder around in the area where Sally had died. She was Sally's double. Remy had seen it immediately when he'd met her at the roadside, but he hadn't realized who she was until she mentioned the name Daigle.

Sally Daigle had been like fire, impulsive and warm. This one was just the opposite. Her hair was a paler blond than Sally's, and her face, even smudged and streaked, held both reserve and strength of purpose in its delicate, symmetrical contours. Remy had witnessed that strength more than once today when Lacoste had proved his utter incompetence at playing swamp guide.

Fortitude and patience weren't her only assets. Outlandish as Ms. St. Cyr was, in a tentlike cotton shirt, belted jeans several sizes too big and tight sneakers black with mud, she had an unmistakable elegance in her bearing. Her beauty was not like Sally's, sculpted in wind and rain and sun. It had been honed and refined by city living, ambition and money.

Once, Remy had lived in the city. He'd nursed aspirations appropriate to a fast-rising young stockbroker who'd ridden out the hard times with almost miraculous skill. He'd walked through the French Quarter with women like this one on his arm.

No, not quite like Ms. St. Cyr. She reminded him of the creeks they had in the north: chilly, clear, likely to freeze your hand off if you made the mistake of dipping it in.

But he couldn't quite call her cold. Oh, no... he'd seen something in her eyes yesterday that told him she might not be what she first appeared. Those eyes were the color of brandy, the kind that could make a man drunk with a single sip. If it didn't poison him first.

Maybe that was why he was attracted to her in spite of everything.

Put it back in your pants, Arceneaux. The last thing he needed was a personal interest in a woman who looked like Sally Daigle. Every one of his instincts

scraped that it was no coincidence to find Sally's cousin poking around in this part of the swamp the day after she arrived in Grand Marais.

She came with Lacoste. That's no coincidence, either.

That was the reason, the only reason, why he'd followed her and why he was about to do something stupid. What in hell will Tris do when he sees her? Do you really want to put him through that again?

Remy plowed the damp earth with the toe of his boot, alarming a copperhead, which dove under a mat of last year's leaves. Can you just let her go without making her understand?

How could he make her, an outsider, understand, when even the locals regarded the Arceneaux brothers with the deepest suspicion and crossed themselves when they saw Remy or Tris in town?

With a whispered oath, Remy walked up to the bank where she was struggling with the grounded boat. Even that arrogant son of a bitch Lacoste should have known better than to bring a motorboat out where the water was so low. Too much to hope that he would blunder into old Mauvais-Oeil's territory and get himself eaten by the nastiest gator in this part of the swamp, Evil-Eye.

Ms. St. Cyr looked up as Remy approached, freezing still as a doe caught in headlights. She remembered him, all right. Maybe she'd even had time to hear the rumors.

Remy smiled. "Hello," he said with a mocking salute. "Seems like every time we meet, you're in some kind of scrape."

The woman placed dirty hands on her hips. "Do you have another warning for me, Mr. Arceneaux?"

So she'd learned his name. Lacoste, of course. "I think it's a little too late for that now, chère," he said. "What fool told you that you could bring a boat out here in September?"

She didn't deign to answer but left the boat where it was and battled her way up the bank to dry ground. She rested her back against a cypress stump and folded her arms.

"You, I suppose, know everything there is to know about this swamp?"

"I know that only the main channels are deep enough for a boat this time of year. I'm amazed you got this far." Casually he walked down to the craft and heaved it onto the bank. "What's done is done. You'd better come with me and get cleaned up."

"I'm waiting for my friend. He should return any minute."

Remy laughed. "I don't think so. It's after five, and he'll be lucky if he gets to the main road by nightfall." He made a show of looking around at the sluggish water, the thickets of swamp privet and the still-green cypress leaves overhead.

"You like snakes and gators, Ms. St. Cyr?"

"About as much as I like strangers who appear and disappear with rude and cryptic comments."

He lifted a brow. "I still think I'm better company than what you'll find if you spend the night here. Especially since the mosquitoes are about to start hunting."

She glanced at the brown water winding among the water hyacinth and alligator weed, undoubtedly weighing her chances of walking out of the swamp alone. But Remy was certain of one thing; she was no fool, no matter how proud she was. She knew she wasn't equipped for this. Was she cursing Chad Lacoste under that mask of perfect composure?

"Can you lead me out of the swamp?" she asked. "I can pay for your services."

"Ah, chère, I'll just bet you can." He looked her up and down to see if he could get a rise out of her. Her eyes sparked into a genuine glare.

"Will one hundred dollars be enough?"

"I'd say yes, if it wasn't so close to sunset. Wouldn't do it for any amount after dark."

"Then what do you suggest, Mr. Arceneaux?"

"Guess you'll have to come to my place." He grinned at the way she stiffened up like a possum encountering a fox. "Don't worry, chère. Whatever the movies tell you, we ignorant swamp folk don't jump on anything that moves."

Chapter 4

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Ms. St. Cyr considered his answer, trying to decide whether or not to take offense. "I'm not concerned about that, Mr. Arceneaux—"

"You might as well call me Remy."

"—Mr. Arceneaux, but I can't help but wonder at your offer of hospitality after your behavior yesterday."

If she wanted an explanation now, she wasn't going to get it. Maybe he could find a way to warn her, and maybe he couldn't, but he planned to be the one asking questions.

"If I was rude, I apologize," he said. "I can offer you supper, a clean bed, privacy, and a ride back to town in the morning. You'll be safe as a baby gator in its mother's jaws."

She frowned. "I still don't understand—"

"You don't know much about people around here, chère, even if you're kin to the Daigles. It'll take an hour on foot to get to my place. You coming?"

She hugged herself and gnawed on her lower lip, a habit very much at odds with her confident demeanor. It made her seem more vulnerable, somehow, especially when she started slapping at her neck as the mosquitoes' advance guard began its evening onslaught.

Ms. St. Cyr caught him watching. "I used repellent," she protested, trying without success to keep her hands at her sides.

"Mosquitoes just like some people better than others," he said. "Once they get a fix on you, ain't no repellent gonna do the job."

"So I—" whack "—see. Well, Mr. Arceneaux, it seems that your kind offer is my only salvation."

"Allons. It's Remy. No one's called me Mr. Arceneaux in—" Oh, about six years,

since the days when he'd had an office on the tenth floor, with his own secretary and Herman Miller furniture. "In a long time."

"Remy," she said, a mere breath, as if she could hold back from that small intimacy by turning his name into a sigh.

"Bon." He held out his hand. "Shall we go?"

At least she tried not to be obvious about it when she sidestepped his hand and strode ahead of him just to prove that she wasn't afraid. He caught up and pulled her out of the path of a particularly nasty mud hole. She flinched a little at his touch, but it wasn't fear that lit her eyes when they met his.

Hé bien, but the woman had fine eyes. And she wasn't nearly as good at hiding her feelings as she thought she was. Remy winced at the sudden tightness of his jeans. Even something as relatively harmless as sheer, uncomplicated mutual lust was a very bad idea.

He took several steps away from her and set out across the highest ground. "Why did you come into the swamp today, Ms. St. Cyr?"

"It's Dr. St. Cyr."

Ah, a touch of frost to quench the fire he'd seen in her a minute ago. "Doctor?" he said. A perverse little devil of mischief made him stop short. He held up his thumb to display the tiny cut he'd received while pulling the motorboat onto the bank. It would be gone in half an hour, but she didn't know that.

"You think you can fix this for me, Doc?"

She just barely kept herself from crashing into him. "I'm not... that kind of doctor."

"You mean there's a kind of doctor who doesn't know how to mend a cut?"

For the first time, he was treated to the sight of her blush. It started at the neckline of her shirt and crept up to stain the marble contours of her face in a delicate and very tasteful shade of pink.

"I'm a plastic surgeon," she said. Primly, as if she were somehow ashamed. Her pleasant fragrance, underlain by the scents of soap, deodorant and some mercifully subtle perfume, took on a tinge of unease.

A plastic surgeon. That explained the sense of wealth, the confidence, the air of superiority. He was willing to bet she was at the top of her field, though she couldn't be more than thirty.

At the moment, though, she wasn't confident. He realized that he wanted her comfortable with him, even though he wasn't likely to see much of her after tomorrow morning. At least he hoped he wouldn't. Or did he?

He struck a melodramatic pose. "Tell me, Doc—do you think I could benefit from your special talents?"

She gave him a look of utter contempt. "If you've ever looked in a mirror, you know damned well you wouldn't."

"Ouch." He grinned sheepishly. "I guess you only operate on ladies with double chins and middle-aged men with beer guts?"

"Do you mind if we change the subject?"

"Don't you like what you do, Doc?"

"Dana," she said gruffly. "My name is Dana."

It suited her. Strong and feminine at the same time. "Dana. You think I'm a pretty conceited cochon, don't you?"

"Conceited, yes. I don't know about the other, since I don't speak French." She was willing to admit ignorance, which was quite a bit for a woman like her. He knew. Maman had always said he had something to prove every day of his life. "I can see we'll have to have a few lessons tonight," he said as he began to walk again. "Cochon. Pig."

"I wouldn't go that far," she said, coming up beside him. "Tell me some other words."

"The name for your friend with the buzz is marin-gouin. Just over there, under the black willows, are a couple of white-tailed deer—chevreuils. You don't see them too much in south Louisiana these days. Just about now the rabbit—lapin—is looking for his dinner, and the owl—hibou—is getting ready to hunt him. The woodpecker, piquebois, is turning in for the night. And soon you'll hear the bullfrogs—ouaouarons—begin their evening chorus."

Dana's lips moved, repeating the words. "You speak like someone who loves this place."

Remy was quiet for a time, debating how to answer. As a boy, he had loved the swamp and the endless adventures he and Tris found there. But his restlessness had pulled him away, to the university and a career in the city. In the six years since his return, he had learned all over again how to value such simple things as peaceful nights, family loyalty and running free where men seldom intruded.

But love? The very word was one he'd put from his mind long ago.

"I grew up in this parish," he said at last, guiding her through a button bush thicket. "Cajuns—Acadiens—start learning about the swamp almost the day they're born."

"Is your family here, as well?"

"Scattered throughout south Louisiana. I don't see them much. What about yours? Where did you grow up?"

"San Francisco—the Bay Area." Something in her tone told him that she was no more ready to talk of her past than he was. "I was an only child."

That must have been difficult. For all his problems with his family and his status as the Arceneaux "black sheep," he'd never felt alone as a boy. Acadians tended toward large and close-knit clans, his even more so than most.

He was the one who had left them.

By unspoken agreement, he and Dana fell silent, concentrating on the nearly invisible trail winding among the broom sage and chokeberry shrubs. They skirted the edge of Matou Lake, dotted with the knobby projections of cypress knees, and Remy could smell the scents of sun-warmed metal, tomato vines and seasoned cypresswood that meant home.

It was time to warn Tris.

He stopped Dana with a light touch on her arm. "Wait here," he said. "There's something I have to check."

Dana glanced up at the darkening sky but didn't protest. Remy jogged into a

willow grove, out of her sight, and ran another quarter mile so that there was no chance she would find him if she went looking.

In the fading twilight, he took a deep breath, lifted his head and howled.

He knew Tris would hear him. He'd been very clear before he left; if he gave the warning, it would mean he wanted Tris well away from the houseboat until he signaled that it was safe to return. Tris wouldn't find it a hardship to spend the night in the swamp, but Remy hoped his younger brother's curiosity didn't get the better of him.

Once the message was given and answered, Remy ran back the way he'd come. Dana stood where he had left her, arms wrapped around her chest as she searched the darkness. She released her breath when she saw him.

"Where did you go?" she demanded.

"You miss me that much, chère?"

"Did you hear something... unusual a few minutes ago?"

Remy put on a puzzled expression and shrugged. "You mean the howl? Probably some hound chasing a coon."

"It didn't sound like a dog to me. Are there any wolves in Louisiana?"

"Not anymore." She was sharp, this one. "They were killed off years ago. Let's go."

He waited until he was sure she followed, and then he led her across the remaining half mile to the banks of the bayou, where the houseboat rested on low water. The sun had gone down behind moss-draped cypress and tupelo, but the lamps shining from the deck made a beacon for weary travelers.

You'd better be gone, Tris, Remy thought. He pointed toward the lights. "Home. I can almost smell the fish sizzlin'."

Dana stopped and stared. "A houseboat?"

"Don't worry. I put it together myself."

She threw him a dubious look and paused at the ramp to examine the steel-riveted hull of the old barge, the small cabin with cypress roof on top, and the large pots of tomato and pepper plants on the open deck.

"It's perfectly safe," he said, grabbing her hand. "I don't know about you, but I'm hungry as a wolf."

To his surprise, she let him pull her up the ramp. The boat hardly rocked under their footsteps; she seemed to take comfort in its solidity. There was no sign or scent of Tris.

Remy seated Dana at the small table in the kitchen next to the propane stove and started a pot of coffee. While he worked, Dana gazed about the room with barely concealed curiosity.

"Do you live here alone?" she asked.

He grinned at her over his shoulder. "What do you think?"

"Without seeing the rest of the house, I'd guess you do."

"Why is that?" He poured the freshly brewed coffee into a mug with The State Of Louisiana printed on it and set it in front of her.

"It's utilitarian. Spartan. Women can live that way, but they usually don't prefer to."

He pulled an exaggerated frown. "Ah, chère—now you know my sad story. None of the ladies will have me."

"You mean your charm isn't enough?"

He sat down across from her and gazed into her eyes. "You think I'm charming as well as arrogant?"

She let the steaming coffee consume all her attention. "Thanks for the coffee. It tastes wonderful."

With a chuckle, he got to his feet and set about preparing the bass for supper, refusing her offer of help. "Any Cajun who can't cook fish is a sad specimen.

And anyway, I'll bet you don't cook."

"I—" Her voice took on that stiff, guarded tone once more. "I usually don't have time."

"And me, I have all the time in the world."

"You never told me what you do for a living."

"A little of this, a little of that. I know the best water holes for the fishermen, and I keep the tourists out of trouble."

"Like me?"

"Is that what you are, Dana—a tourist?"

She turned her mug around and around in her hands. "I told you, I have family here."

"So you did." He slipped the bass strips into the pan. "But you never did tell me why you came into the swamp today."

Her silence lasted long enough for him to slice the onions and bell peppers.

Finally she said, "I came here to find the place where Sally Daigle died."

Chapter 5

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Dana had seen many faces undergo major alterations, often under her own skilled hands. But the way Remy Arceneaux's expression changed was beyond anything in her experience.

One moment he was affable, flirtatious and, yes, charming. The next he was regarding her as if she were a deadly enemy. He had looked this way when they'd met on the side of the road, but his behavior since then had put that disconcerting moment from her mind.

No more. His eyes had become cold. "I told you," he said softly, "that you shouldn't come here."

"Actually, you said I shouldn't stay in Beaucoeur Parish."

"And I meant it." Abruptly he turned back to his fish, banging the utensils in a way that set her nerves on edge.

What had she said? Something about Sally Daigle, or her death, had set him off.

And Chad Lacoste had warned her about him. Was there some connection between the warning and Remy's reaction to the name of a dead woman? The name spoken by the cousin who looked just like her.

She had a thousand questions, but Remy's demeanor seemed to wrap a muffling veil about both of them. She picked at the fish he set before her, knowing she ought to find it delicious but unable to enjoy it. Soon thereafter, Remy disappeared down the short connecting hall and returned with a terse comment about showing her to her room.

Dana would have liked nothing better than to walk right out the door and leave Remy to his brooding. But she was dead tired, grimy, and desperate for a little peace and quiet. Remy showed her the small bathroom, complete with sink, shower and a toilet occupied by an outboard motor. She turned down his offer to restore the facility to its original function and accepted a flashlight and directions to the outhouse set several yards back from the bayou. She didn't relish the thought of using it after dark, but at least she would have a full harvest moon for company.

A few sentences later, Remy left her to herself. She heard him moving around for a few minutes, and then the houseboat settled into an eerie silence. The small window was no impediment to the myriad sounds of a bayou night: the singing frogs Remy had mentioned, hoarse bellowing she guessed might be the voice of an alligator, and... once more... that eerie howling.

She sat down on the bed, a narrow affair clearly not intended for two. Remy's, she supposed. The room was as bare bones as the kitchen, with little in the way of decoration except for an old fishing pole hung on the wall and a colorful but amateurish oil painting in an incongruously ornate frame.

Dana got up to study the painting, wondering if it might be some early work of Remy's. It depicted the swamp, and though the technique was inexpert, there was obvious love behind the depiction of the brown water, green trees and blotches of color indicating wild-flowers. But the scrawled signature at the bottom spelled out another name: Tristan.

A relative, perhaps. At least he cared about someone enough to hang that person's work on the wall of his bedroom.

After a quick peep into the hall, Dana washed up, made a hasty trip to the outhouse—it wasn't nearly as awful as she feared—and gratefully returned to the boat and the relative safety of her borrowed bedroom.

She found an oversize red T-shirt, printed with the image of an alligator in a baseball cap, lying across the bed. She fingered it, trying to decide whether or not she should wear something that plainly belonged to Remy. In the end she pulled it on, preferring it to nudity in a strange bed and with a strange man in very close proximity.

Once under the covers, her soiled clothing draped over the room's single wooden chair, she made a token effort at sleep. She was hardly surprised when it refused to come. The sheets and T-shirt, though freshly laundered, held a faint masculine scent she couldn't ignore. The night noises seemed to grow louder and louder; if Remy was still awake, he gave no indication of it.

Remy. He was the reason for her insomnia—he and his grin, his compelling eyes and his changeable moods. Face it, she told the ceiling, you're attracted to him.

Most women would be. The difference was that she knew better. There was about as much likelihood of a romantic relationship between her and Remy Arceneaux as there was between a cottontail and a cotton-mouth.

That painted a pretty picture. Dana sighed and pushed aside the blankets. It was still hot, and now that the sun had set the mosquitoes might not be quite so bad. A little walk on the deck...

Her bare foot brushed something dry, sleek and definitely moving. She gave a brief, strangled shriek and bolted across the room. The object of her terror flicked its tongue at her.

"Dana?"

The door swung open and Remy stepped in, his gaze darting back and forth in alarm. Then he saw the snake, and the tension went out of his shoulders. In a darting motion almost too swift for Dana to follow, he snatched the reptile just behind its darting head.

"Is this what you were screaming about?" he asked.

Dana flushed. "Didn't you say this boat was safe?"

"It's just a li'l ol' milk snake." He lifted the creature's head to eye level as if he were including it in the conversation. "Now, if it was a water moccasin, you might have something to worry about."

"And that's supposed to reassure me?"

"Guess you don't see too many snakes in San Francisco."

Dana eased behind the bed. The room seemed about ten times smaller with Remy in it. "Not too many bellowing alligators, either, or howling wolves."

"I told you..." Remy trailed off as if he'd forgotten what he was about to say, his gaze falling slowly from her face to the T-shirt, which extended to Dana's upper thighs. She had completely forgotten what she was wearing—or not wearing. Dana had blushed more in the past couple of hours than she'd done in nearly thirty years. She made no effort to cover herself. Remy might consider that a victory.

"Don't you think you should put the poor snake outside?" she suggested.

He looked down at his hand in surprise. "Oui," he said. "It's scared half to death." With pointed haste, he turned on his heel and left the room.

Unfortunately, the door didn't lock. Dana dove back under the sheets and pulled them up to her chin. A little while later she heard footsteps on the deck outside, then a longer period of silence. She imagined serpents of every description crawling all around the room. What had Remy said about water moccasins?

Coward. You're on edge about everything tonight. All you have to do is—

A face appeared at the window, a pale blur in moonlight. Dana shot up, clutching the sheets to her chest.

The face was not Remy's. That was all she was sure of. The hair was darker than his, and the eyes stared at her, unblinking, like those of a madman.

Dana was no hapless heroine of some derivative teen horror movie. She tore her gaze away from the window long enough to search for a makeshift weapon. When she looked back, the face was gone.

She sat very still, listening for movement, any sound beyond the pounding of her heart. Surely it hadn't been her imagination, that face. After the incident with the snake, she was less than enthusiastic about running to Remy. It might be midnight or 2:00 a.m., or even later, but dawn still seemed very far away.

She had almost begun to doze off from sheer exhaustion when the howling came again: uncanny, drawn-out, and filled with such mournful pleading that Dana felt her throat close in sympathy. On impulse, she got up and struggled into her mud-caked jeans and sneakers. She crept onto the deck, keeping close to the wall.

The howling had stopped, but her investigation was not in vain. The light of a single lantern caught the gleam of red-brown hair—Remy, walking down the ramp so noiselessly that he might as well have been floating.

It was not instinct that drove Dana to follow. Instinct might be considered a survival mechanism, and this was pure stupidity. She dashed into her room, grabbed the flashlight and ran after Remy, hoping she hadn't already lost him. The moon was still full, though it had moved lower in the sky, and so bright that she didn't need the flashlight. Remy was almost out of sight. She stalked him as quietly as she could, expecting him to turn and see her at any moment. But he had other things on his mind. All of a sudden he began to jog along the narrow path, and Dana had to use all her concentration to keep up.

Remy vanished behind a line of cypress trees. When she reached the other side, she didn't know whether to feel relief or horror.

A man lay sprawled on the boggy ground, and Remy knelt beside him, talking in a soft voice. He didn't seem to notice as she drew closer. Within a few steps she could see that the man on the ground was not simply taking a rest. He was, unaccountably, quite naked. His lower leg was caught in what could only be an animal trap of some kind, and Remy was in the process of prying the jaws of the trap apart with his hands.

The man gave a barely audible whimper. Dana cast away her doubts and knelt at Remy's side. He looked up, his expression conveying chagrin, fear and relief, all at the same time. She saw immediately that the man in the trap was the one she'd seen at her window.

He was young—younger than Remy—but the vulnerability she recognized in his face was not merely that of youth, or even of pain. He gazed directly into her eyes while Remy worked, just as he'd stared through the window. Her discomfort didn't come from his nudity; she'd seen plenty of nude bodies, in all shapes and sizes. Now, if it were Remy instead...

Get your mind back on the problem at hand. And the problem was not the reason the young man had gotten himself caught in a trap while running around naked, but the injury to his leg. That was something a doctor ought to be able to help. And how long has it been since you set a bone or stitched up a wound outside of a sterile operating room? Dana moved closer to Remy, her shoulder brushing his, as he snapped the jaws of the trap apart and tossed the ugly contraption several yards away. The young man winced.

"Remy?" he said.

"It's all right, Tris." Remy glanced at Dana, his expression closed and grim. "I need to take him back to the boat."

"He's injured." Dana bent over the young man's leg and examined it by flashlight. "It's a nasty wound. He may have a fracture. He ought to go to the hospital right a—"

"That won't be necessary." Remy positioned his arms under the young man's back and knees, lifted him gently and set off for the houseboat.

"You're crazy," Dana said, jogging to keep pace. "A doctor should look at his leg."

"You're a doctor."

"A doctor with the right equipment, under sanitary conditions. This is not the Stone Age."

"I know what's best for him."

"You do, do you? Just who is he?"

Remy never broke stride. His eyes glittered in the moonlight. "Tristan is my brother."

Dana St. Cyr was quiet for the remaining distance to the boat, and for that Remy was grateful. She was bound to have questions, and he had to think up answers quickly.

He carried Tris onto the boat, pushed open the door to Tris's bedroom with his foot, and laid his brother down on the bed. Dana was right behind him. If she'd seen this second bedroom before, she would have known he didn't live on the boat alone.

At the moment she was intent on Tris and not on Remy's deception. She arranged the sheets and blankets to cover all of Tris except his leg, and then glanced up at Remy.

"I need you to get me some clean cloth for washing—something that can be torn easily, and boiling water, in two containers," Dana said briskly. "Also soap, and rubbing alcohol if you have it, whiskey if you don't. I may need to make a splint if his leg is broken. I don't see any bone protruding, thank goodness."

Without waiting to see if he would obey, she leaned over Tris and touched his cheek. "How are you doing, Tristan? Can you talk to me?"

Tris gazed at her as if he'd seen a ghost whose haunting he welcomed. "All right," he repeated. "You'll... stay with me?"

"Of course I will. And as soon as you can be moved, we're taking you to the hospital."

Remy strode out of the room. If he didn't do as she asked, she would think him a heartless son of a bitch. But soon enough she would see that her concerns were completely unnecessary.

Then the questions would come. Remy prayed that Tristan wouldn't make things worse.

By the time he returned with the cloth and boiling water, Dana had pulled a chair up beside the bed and was examining Tristan's leg.

"No broken bones," she said. "Your brother is very fortunate." She smiled at

Tris, who couldn't take his eyes from her. "I'll have a better idea what's what when we clean this blood away." She let the water cool slightly and scrubbed her hands vigorously in one of the bowls. Only then did she dip a washcloth into the second bowl and begin dabbing at the wounds.

"I don't understand," she murmured. "That trap should have done much more damage." She frowned. "These wounds are superficial. If I didn't know better, I'd say they were already healing." She turned to Remy. "How did you know?" Remy stared at the wall. "I could see it wasn't bad," he said. "Tris is always getting into some scrape or other."

She shook her head. "It's been quite a while since I've... done this kind of work. But I haven't forgotten that much." She patted Tris's shoulder through the blanket. "Any pain, Tristan? If we go to the doctor, we can make sure you'll be all right."

There was something very admirable in the way Dana took Tristan's part and watched over him, though their meeting had been unusual, to say the least. She even spoke to Tris as if she understood that he needed gentle handling. Nothing about Dana St. Cyr was what Remy might have expected. But that didn't change the facts. She had to get out of this swamp, and out of the parish.

"I'll make a bargain with you, Dana," Remy said. "If you still think he needs to go to the hospital when we're ready to leave in the morning, I'll take him." Dana finished cleaning Tris's leg with the alcohol and bandaged the wound with torn sheets and cotton towels. "There might be infection. I won't change my mind."

"I think it's time to let my brother rest."

"Yes." Dana gathered up the remains of her makeshift medical kit and covered Tris's leg. "I'll be right outside if you need me, Tristan. Call if your leg starts feeling any worse, all right?"

Tris nodded, but it was apparent that he was fighting sleep. Once he was out, he would be out for hours. Remy guided Dana from the room and closed the door.

"Why are you afraid of the hospital, Remy?" she asked as soon as they were back in the kitchen.

Remy put on the coffeepot. "I'm not afraid of hospitals or doctors. We just don't need them."

"We? You and your brother? You've never been sick a day in your life, I suppose?"

"You said you came out here to find out what happened to Sally," he said.

"Yes. But what does that have to do with—"

He turned on her, eyes narrowed and fists clenched. "I guess you haven't been in town long enough to hear the rumors. Didn't you know that the Arceneaux brothers are the chief suspects in Sally's disappearance?"

"What?"

"You heard me." Remy sloshed hot coffee into a mug and gulped it down. "Everyone figures one or both of us had something to do with it. If they had any evidence..." He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "I don't want more rumors started because of you."

Dana folded her hands on the table. "Did you have something to do with it?"

He laughed. "Why should you believe anything I tell you?"

"I don't know. I can see you've been trying to protect your brother in some way, even from me."

"Tris isn't like other people. He's sensitive, a dreamer. There were problems in school and afterward. He—" Hell, he'd been about to tell her things he'd never told anyone. "They could destroy him."

He waited for more questions, the kind he couldn't answer. But she held her silence and gazed out the black square of the window. If she was afraid, she didn't show it. She was too damned brave for her own good.

"I've often wondered," she said, "what it would have been like to have someone to care for the way you do for Tristan."

He didn't allow himself to consider the deeper implications of her personal revelation. "You mean you don't think I'm a callous bastard for not taking him to the hospital?"

She met his eyes. "I don't understand you, Remy. Is it my approval you want? I thought you were trying to get rid of me."

For a skilled surgeon, she cut much too close to the bone. "That's right. I don't want you around here. Anyone in town would tell you the same, if Lacoste hasn't already."

"And I could vanish into the swamp as easily as Sally did."

He couldn't bear the calm, almost indifferent way she spoke of it. It made him sick, and at the same time he teetered on the edge of confiding everything to her.

And that would make him more certifiably crazy than Tris had ever been.

"You'd better go lie down if you want to be in shape to go back to town tomorrow," he said.

"But how can I be sure you won't murder me in my bed?"

"You can't. Should I make some more strong coffee?"

She got up from the table and started for the hall. At the corner, she turned back and looked into his eyes.

"What happened to Sally isn't a joke. Not to me. And I mean to find out what happened, one way or another."

In the morning, almost every sign of Tristan's wound was gone.

Dana looked under the loosened bandages one more time and finally admitted the obvious. Somehow, miraculously, the young man had healed overnight. There were faint, pale lines where the trap had cut into his skin. That was all.

She expected an "I told you so" look from Remy, but he was distracted by other concerns. He'd made up a small pack, including sandwiches and drinks and a

number of other useful items for their trek back to town, though at least part of the way would be on the bayou. He didn't show her a map. He evidently didn't want her to remember the way to or from his sanctuary.

At her insistence, Tris remained in bed, though he made soulful puppy-dog eyes at her and seemed to want to say something important. Either he was painfully shy, or something was holding him back. After intercepting a stern look Remy intended for his brother, she thought she knew what that something was.

Remy was fiercely protective of his brother. Why? What was he trying to hide? Could there be any truth to his warning about their part in Sally's disappearance?

No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't believe either Remy or Tristan were involved in anything like murder. Even so, half of her conversation last night had been sheer bluster. She should be relieved to escape.

She went along quietly when Remy announced that it was time to go. He helped her into a small aluminum motorboat, cast off from the cypress-wood dock and started up the bayou. Their course followed a mile or two of twisting channels, and some time later Remy jumped out in shallow water and pulled the boat onto relatively dry ground. Then he led her cross-country until they reached an area that looked vaguely familiar from her venture with Chad.

Yesterday, however, she and Chad had been alone. Now the little patch of mud was swarming with men, some in the uniforms of local law enforcement, others in civilian clothing.

Remy stopped in his tracks behind a screen of willows, nostrils flaring. "I have to go," he said. "You'll be safe now."

From you? she wanted to ask. But she spotted Chad among the men and realized there would be no more time for questions. When she turned to say goodbye, Remy was gone. She stepped out into the field.

Chad came rushing toward her. "Dana!" he cried. "Thank God you're all right. You'll never believe what happened—"

"You got lost," she said. "It's okay, Chad. I'm fine. I don't know where your boat is, however."

"Never mind about that." Chad moved as if to embrace her but stopped at the last minute, frowning at the willow thicket. "How did you get back here?"

"I ran into an old fisherman who showed me the way." Now, why had she found it necessary to lie? "Are all these people here for me?"

"I wasn't going to take any chances with your life," Chad said, grabbing her hand. "The swamp can be dangerous for people who don't know it."

Dana refrained from pointing out that Chad obviously didn't know it, either. "As I said, I'm fine now. If you'll introduce me to the man in charge, I'll thank him for his trouble."

"That would be Detective Landry of the Beaucoeur Sheriff's Department. I'll introduce you."

She let Chad pull her away, noting with clinical interest that she felt nothing at his touch. Nothing at all. It wasn't just annoyance with what he'd done yesterday. No, it was something else. Someone else.

Remy Arceneaux.

She thanked Detective Landry and the volunteer searchers, apologizing for pulling them out of their beds so early. Landry was quite gracious, but he studied her with an almost uncomfortable intensity.

"You didn't happen to run into the Arceneaux brothers out here, did you, ma'am?" he asked.

It was much easier to lie to Chad than to this man with his knowing eyes, but she couldn't bring herself to admit the truth. "As I told Chad, a fisherman helped me. I never did get his name."

"I see." Landry looked from her to Chad with a frown. "Well, you're okay, and that's all that matters. Unless you need to see a doctor, I'll take you home now."

"That's not necessary—" Chad began.

"I think it's best if the lady comes with me."

"Don't worry," Dana assured Chad. "I'll call you tomorrow."

Chad gazed at her, a world of hurt in his eyes. "You're angry."

"Not at all. I'd just like a good night's sleep." She freed her hand from Chad's grip. "Please don't worry about me."

"I swear I'll make this up to you. We could fly out to New Orleans and get the best meal you've ever tasted."

"Thanks, Chad. I'll think about it."

"Don't think too long." He graced her with his most charming smile. "I insist."

Dana smiled politely and turned to the open door of Landry's car. Chad stopped her.

"Did you find anything... about Sally?"

Dana's heart skipped a beat. "How could I? I didn't know where I was going most of the time."

"Thank God you didn't run into Arceneaux." Landry closed the door, and Chad bent to the window. "Remember what I said about him and his brother. Don't come back here alone, Dana."

Whatever else he'd planned to say was lost in the car's rumble as Landry drove along the well-defined ruts in the mud, leading a caravan of the other searchers. Aunt Gussie was at the door to meet her when Landry pulled up in front of the house.

"Mon Dieu," Gussie said, knotting her apron in her fists. "Thank God you're all right." She searched Dana's eyes and turned to Landry. "Thank you so much, Detective. If anything had happened—"

Landry touched her arm. "It's all right, Madame Daigle. We didn't even have to search. She found her way back on her own."

"Oh, my." Gussie grinned. "You're a mess. Come and have some tea, and we'll get you cleaned up. Detective, you want to come in for a bit? I just made a pecan pie."

"Perhaps another time." Landry glanced at Dana. "You take care, Doctor."

"I will." She shook Landry's hand. "Thanks again."

Gussie waved to the detective and hustled Dana into the house. Soon Dana was

soaking in a warm bath, her hair clean and her clothing in Gussie's washing machine.

Afterward she and her aunt enjoyed tea and pecan pie. Dana realized how famished she'd been. And when Gussie offered her a spot of bourbon with lunch, she also realized that the day's events had rattled her much more than she'd suspected. The drink gave her the courage to bring up the subject that had never left her mind.

"What do you know about the Arceneaux brothers?" she asked Gussie as they sat in the tiny living room.

"You didn't see them in the swamp, did you?"

"I... I've heard about them," she said carefully. "I've heard they have a reputation in town."

"Reputation." Gussie hunched her shoulders and worked furiously at her knitting.

"All the Arceneaux in this part of the parish have a 'reputation.' Not that anyone sees much of them. Most of them are hermits, almost never come to town. But they're said to be... strange. Not like other folk. Some even say they're not to be trusted. Dangerous."

Did Gussie know from personal experience? Had she ever suspected Remy or Tristan Arceneaux of being involved in her granddaughter's disappearance? Dana could think of no way to ask.

But Gussie read her mind. "Some say," she said softly, "that those brothers might have been with Sally right before she vanished."

"Do you think they're right?"

"I don't know." Gussie dropped her knitting and closed her eyes. "No one ever found anything. Only talk." She sighed. "When Sally was in school, one of those boys was sweet on her. Chased after her everywhere but never did any harm. Sally was always nice to him. Felt sorry for him. Then Chad Lacoste came along and swept her off her feet."

"Chad?"

"Didn't I tell you?" Gussie smiled sadly. "They were engaged to be married once. But Sally up and went off to college in the city, and Chad went somewhere else. He was here when Sally came back to look for that bird, though. I thought they might get back together again."

"But they didn't?"

"Maybe they would have, but Sally... that's when she went missing."

Chad and Sally?

Dana leaned her head back against the armchair, absorbing this new and surprising information.

Chapter 7

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Everything Aunt Gussie had said about the Arceneaux seemed to be true. Dana talked to several people in town, including the man at the gas station

who'd mistaken her for Sally. He was the first, though hardly the last, to clam up at the mention of Remy and Tristan Arceneaux.

Others had more to say. The elderly couple who ran the combination hardware and grocery store on the main street were eager to regale her ears with superstitious tales of men who could change into wolves and hunted by moonlight. Grand Marais's sole hairdresser told Dana how all the girls had been after Remy Arceneaux in school, and how their parents had warned them away from him. Not that he'd ever shown interest in any of them; no, he'd always had his sights set on escaping Beaucoeur Parish. And he had escaped—for a while. Until Sally vanished and the rumors started.

That was when he and Tristan went to live in the swamp, and the rumors grew. By the time she had spoken to a dozen townspeople, Dana was used to being stared at as if she were a ghost. She knew that Remy had left behind a career in the city to take care of his brother, though it was still unclear what had happened to make such a radical change necessary.

It all came back to Sally Daigle, and the suspicions that one or both of the Arceneaux brothers were responsible for what had happened to her.

No one, however, had any facts. No evidence of any kind had ever been found, not even Sally's body. She'd been seen talking to one of the brothers a few hours before she disappeared. That, and the way the Arceneaux were viewed in Grand Marais, was enough to settle their guilt in the minds of many.

But that wasn't good enough for Dana. All her life she had relied on her own judgment when there had been no one else to trust. That judgment had told her that she had to get out of San Francisco, away from her staid routine, and search for the one essential element her well-ordered life was missing. If she was ever to trust her instincts again, she had to learn the truth. She owed her cousin, and herself, that much.

Lost in her own troubled thoughts, Dana became aware that someone was shadowing her along Main Street. The damp hair on the back of her neck prickled in alarm. But when she turned her head, all she saw were the usual scattered pedestrians, moving slowly in the midafternoon heat.

She was just about to turn for home when Tristan stepped around the corner of a building. His eyes darted from side to side as he approached her.

"Tristan?" she said. "Are you looking for me?"

His lips parted. "Sally?"

"I'm sorry, Tristan. I'm not Sally. I'm her cousin, Dana. We met yesterday, remember?" She took a step toward him. "How are you feeling?"

"Good," he said, ducking his head. "Remy said you helped me."

So he didn't remember. Perhaps his problems were more severe than she had guessed. "Does Remy know you're here?"

Alarm lit his face, and at first she thought she had frightened him with her question. But the sound of footsteps from behind told her that Tristan was concerned with someone else. She turned quickly.

"Detective Landry," she said. "I was just—"

"I told you to stay out of town," Landry said to Tristan, as if she hadn't

spoken. "Go home. Allez."

"Wait a minute," Dana said. "He hasn't done anything wrong."

In the time it took for her to address Landry and turn back to Tristan, the young man was gone.

"I've been keeping an eye on you, Dr. St. Cyr," Landry said. "You've been warned about the Arceneaux brothers. I suggest you pay attention to those warnings."

"Detective, if you know something about Sally, if you can tell me anything at all—"

But Landry was already walking away. Dana clenched her teeth on a shriek of frustration. What was the matter with the people in Grand Marais? Were they all crazy? Was she crazy to get involved with the bizarre doings in this peculiar country?

No, not crazy. Just a little reckless, which she so seldom was. She continued to walk in the direction she'd been headed before Tristan arrived, brooding over Landry's words. She couldn't stop thinking about Tristan. Was he in some new trouble?

Just as she completed the thought, she caught sight of Tristan's dark-haired form moving among the shadows of a side alley. She turned into the alley, hoping he wasn't spooked enough to run away from her as he had from Landry.

But he came out at once, greeting her with a smile that transformed his face to a remarkable and astonishingly masculine beauty. "Miss Dana?"

She breathed out a sigh of relief. "Tristan, how did you get to town? Did you drive?"

"Walked. It's not far."

Somehow she guessed that "not far" to the Arceneaux brothers might be quite a distance by her standards. "All right. I'm going to take you home. Will you come with me?"

He nodded, and she led him to the Lexus she'd left parked at the curb half a block down the street. Faces, staring from the sidewalk or gaping out of storefront windows, turned to follow their progress. Dana thought she was beginning to understand Remy's extreme protectiveness.

It was easy enough to retrace Chad's route into the swamp, first on a paved road, then gravel lanes, and finally onto an overgrown jeep trail that proved a challenge for the Lexus. Dana realized how foolish she'd been to offer Tristan a ride. She had only the vaguest idea of the direction in which Remy's houseboat lay.

"Stop here," Tristan said. "I know the way."

Dana parked the car on a dry patch of ground. "Can I get there and back before sunset?"

"You don't have to come."

"I'd like to, Tristan, if it's all right with you."

He smiled with genuine pleasure and offered his hand. She took it. This time she would pay attention, so that she could retrace her steps the next time she came. She had no doubt that she would.

Tristan was very solicitous of her as he set off through the trees, pausing

frequently to make sure she kept up. After a half-hour's walking, they reached a familiar open space.

That was when she saw the wolf. It stood, quite still, in the center of the field, red coated and bigger than any wolf had a right to be. Its face was turned toward her, its triangular ears pricked and alert. It definitely knew she and Tristan were there.

Hadn't Remy said there weren't any wolves in Louisiana? Was this animal a fugitive from some local zoo, or someone's exotic pet? Even she knew that wolves didn't make good pets. She also knew they usually didn't attack humans, but that thought was not particularly comforting.

Tristan showed not the slightest sign of fear or wariness. He started forward, moving confidently toward the animal. Dana caught his arm.

"Tristan! It might be dangerous."

The sound of Tristan's laugh startled her as much as the wolf. "Don't worry, Miss Dana. It's only Remy."

The game was up.

Remy heard Tris's casual statement and knew his choices were very limited. He could remain a wolf and scare Dana away, in which case he might soon be facing a mob of unwanted and hostile visitors; he could vanish into the swamp and hope Dana would continue to believe his brother was crazy; or he could decide to trust her.

"It's all right, Remy," Tristan called, making the decision for him. "You can tell Miss Dana. She'll understand."

A wolf's eyes didn't roll nearly as well as a man's. Remy's curses emerged as a series of growls. Dana continued to grip Tristan's arm, her eyes wide and fascinated, her scent only a little tinged with fear.

Dana St. Cyr was fundamentally levelheaded, intelligent and very, very stubborn. Once she saw what he was about to show her, she would probably believe. For good or ill.

Remy flattened his ears, shook his coat and willed the Change. When it was finished, he found Dana sitting on her rump with her mouth open and her skin very pale. Tristan patted her shoulder.

"I told you," he said. "Remy won't hurt you."

"He's right," Remy agreed, rising from the grass. "All those stories about loups-garou who hunt humans are pure hogwash."

Dana gulped. "Loo... gah-roo?"

"Close enough." He was keenly aware that the grass wasn't quite tall enough to cover his anatomy above mid thigh. Well, she was a doctor, wasn't she?

Embarrassment was the least of her problems. "In English, you'd say 'werewolves.' I've always preferred the French term, myself."

"Oh, my God," she whispered. And then, as he'd predicted, she took firm hold of herself and scrambled to her unsteady feet, leaning on Tristan for support.

"This isn't a trick, is it?"

"No." Remy took a step in her direction, and she stiffened. He took another, but

she held her ground.

"You... are the wolf?" she demanded.

"Oui."

"You don't even need a full moon?"

Either her dry sense of humor was returning, or she had already begun to accept.

"That's only a story," he said. "Just like silver bullets and wolfsbane."

"I see." She glanced at Tristan and ran her tongue over her lips. Remy's eyes were drawn to the motion, and he continued to stare at her mouth with as much fascination as she observed him.

"Is Tristan... ?" Her expression cleared. "When we found Tristan caught in the trap, he had just... done what you did. Hadn't he?"

The practical question drew him from his study of her very enticing mouth. "You catch on quickly. I think we'd be more comfortable talking back at the houseboat."

"Is that where you left your clothes?"

He grinned, showing all his teeth. "You sound disappointed, chère. I can send Tristan back, and we can stay right here, you and me."

"What if I say that I want to go home?"

"Fraid not. Not yet. We don't like our little secrets bandied around, you see."

She folded her arms across her chest. "And if I decline to go with you?"

"You have such an elegant way of saying things, chère." He bowed, a foolish gesture in his current state. "Tris and I would be heartbroken if you didn't come for supper tonight."

"Yes," Tris said eagerly. "You've got to come, Miss Dana."

In spite of her poker face, Dana's thoughts were easy to read. "People will start asking questions if I don't come home. My great-aunt will be worried, and several people saw me with Tristan."

That might, indeed, pose a problem. But Remy wasn't about to let Dana go her own way until she'd heard a more complete explanation of what she'd seen today.

"Nothing will happen to you," he said, setting all levity aside. "You do want to know more, don't you? About what we are?"

"And about Sally?"

"You won't know unless you come."

She tilted her head to one side, challenging him with a direct stare that should have set his hackles on end. Instead, he felt a strengthening of that attraction he'd felt since their first meeting. She wasn't loup-garou, but she might as well have been.

"All right," she said. "I'll come for a few hours. If you promise to put some clothes on."

"Je vois. Then there is some flaw in me you can fix, Doc?"

"I don't have a remedy for your current... difficulty."

Difficulty, indeed. He was aching with desire, and this particular distress manifested itself in a very public fashion.

"That's too bad, chère," he said. "Maybe one will come to mind."

"When this swamp freezes over." She smiled and tapped Tris's shoulder. "Lead on,

Tristan."

Remy was tempted to run as fast as his legs would carry him on the unlikely chance that he could outdistance his lust. He broke into a trot ahead of Tris and Dana, reaching the boat in time to pull on jeans and a T-shirt before the others arrived. He sat on one of the oft-mended lawn chairs on the deck and watched Dana stride up to the ramp.

Maybe it was because she had accepted his true nature so readily, or maybe it was her unruffled courage in the face of the impossible. She looked far more beautiful to Remy now than she had at the side of the road in her pricey couture. Putting on clothing had not eased his lust in the slightest.

He stood up as she approached and extended his hand, making a bet with himself. If she walked past him without stopping, he would resolve to stay away from her, listen to his common sense and ignore this inconvenient attraction.

But if she took his hand... if she looked into his eyes...

She glanced at his hand and then at his face. Slowly she clasped his fingers in her own.

Remy didn't know whether to howl or curse.

Chapter 8

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I'm the captive of a naked wolfman, Dana thought, sitting at the kitchen table across from Remy while Tristan pattered around on deck. Make that formerly naked.

Not that Remy's clothed state was much comfort. He could be dressed for a jaunt in the Arctic, and she would still be painfully aware of him and what she had seen.

She could reconstruct everything in perfect detail: Her first view of the wolf; the remarkable change to human, half-hidden in a reddish veil of mist; then Remy himself, standing there, utterly shameless, in all his glorious nakedness.

She'd been thinking about Greek statues the first time she saw him. She just hadn't been imagining in quite enough detail. Certain parts of Remy were more impressive than on any statue she'd ever seen.

And while she was sitting here trying to fight off a long-unfamiliar sensation of pure sexual attraction, a part of her stood back and asked all the sensible questions her body preferred to disregard. If there really were such things as werewolves, and if Remy was one of them, could she believe his insistence that they weren't what legend and film made them out to be? Could she afford to discount the possibility that Sally might have fallen prey to men who weren't quite human?

"I had my lunch."

She started at Remy's voice. "I beg your pardon?"

"Just wanted to reassure you that I'm not going to eat you... at least, not in the way you're thinking."

A wash of heat gathered at the pit of Dana's stomach. "I thought you said that werewolves don't kill people."

"They don't. Not as a rule." He leaned his chin on his hand and stared at her with unblinking turquoise eyes. Now that she looked at them more closely, she could see that they had a feral quality, slightly tilted above his high cheekbones.

Wolfs eyes.

"Go ahead and ask," he said.

"All right. Are there more of you... how do you spell that word?"

"L-o-u-p-s-g-a-r-o-u. Plural. And yes, there are more of us. We generally don't go around announcing our presence."

Maybe they didn't need to. Maybe people sensed the truth without knowing exactly what it was. "Your parents? Family?"

"Most of my immediate family live in this or adjoining parishes. But we aren't the only lous-garou."

"In Louisiana?"

"In this country, even in San Francisco. Probably other countries, as well."

"You're serious."

"I am about this. Like I said, we make sure that not too many people know about us."

That meant that she, Dana St. Cyr, was one of a privileged few. What would happen if she couldn't persuade Remy to trust her? She wanted very badly to trust him.

"You said that you can change whenever you want to?"

"Oui. We're born with the Change, the way people are born with their eye color."

Oh, not nearly so simple as that. "You don't consider yourselves human?"

He smiled. "Depends on who you ask."

"Where did you come from?"

"We don't know the answer to either question. Our lineage goes back to Canada, and then to Europe. We know there are others." He flexed his hand on the table.

"We heal quickly—you saw that with Tris. We're stronger and faster. We keep some wolf senses even when we walk as men."

"But when you change... can you still think like a man?"

"Ordinarily, yes. We keep our intelligence and all our memories." He frowned and glanced toward the door. "Tris... he's different. He—" Abruptly he rose from the table. "Let's just say that there are always exceptions."

What had he been about to reveal about Tristan? That something wasn't right with his memory?

"There's still one question you haven't asked," he said.

"Only one?" she said with a lame attempt at humor.

"You want to know why all the stories say that we're killers. What happens if we ever lose control of the wolf side of ourselves." He paced back and forth across the floor of the kitchen. "We're like anyone else—we come in all kinds, all beliefs. My family has never liked to deal with ordinary people. They keep to themselves and stay in the parish. Few of them have ever left, even for a short

time."

"But you did."

"You've been asking around."

"I like to know whom I'm dealing with."

"So do I." He favored her with a lopsided smile. "Yes, I left the parish. I attended L.S.U. in Baton Rouge, got my degree. Everyone at home thought I was crazy."

"Is that why you and Tristan live out here alone? Why did you come back to Grand Marais?"

His mouth set in a hard line. "I told you I'd answer your questions about loups-garou. My personal life is off-limits."

"What about Sally Daigle?"

She knew at once he wasn't going to answer, but she couldn't let it go. Not now.

"You told me that you and Tristan were prime suspects in Sally's disappearance. You tried to warn me off several times, but now you're confiding what must be your deepest secret." She breathed in slowly. "I need to know, Remy. Did you have anything to do with it?"

The silence dragged out over several excruciating minutes.

"No."

Dana closed her eyes. I knew it. "I just had to be sure. Do you know who—"

"I don't know anything. Drop it, Dana."

He was lying, but there wasn't much chance that she would get him to open up with direct tactics. Something was still very much out of whack here. Remy knew much more than he was telling.

"Well," she said, "now that you've explained what you're willing to explain, can I go?"

"Just like that?"

"I give you my word that I'll keep your secret. No one will ever hear about loups-garou from me."

"I believe you." He sauntered back to the table and pulled his chair closer to hers, the seductive charm returning to his eyes and his smile. "You all done with questions?"

"For the time being."

He reached across the table and stroked the tips of her fingers with his. "You really want to go?"

"I told you that people will be looking for me."

Remy played with her fingers, rubbing them with deliberate, sensuous strokes.

"What if I don't want you to?"

The most sensible thing to do would be to withdraw her hand from his, get up and retrace her path to the Lexus. There was still a chance that Remy wouldn't let her go, but that wasn't likely. He'd gone far in trusting her, and she was flattered when she ought to be wary.

Werewolves, for God's sake. Was that why she was so drawn to a man she'd met only two days ago? Was he truly the embodiment of "animal magnetism"? Or was it the very possibility of danger that made her feel as if she were willingly

drowning in his turquoise eyes?

"That's right," Remy whispered, turning her hand palm up and tracing its surface with lazy circles. "Just relax, chère. No reason to hurry, is there?"

"You don't want... people coming out here again—"

"They won't." He began rubbing her arm just below the sleeve of the plain cotton shirt she'd bought at the store in town. "You figured out a cure, Doc?"

Dana was beginning to feel as if she'd downed several cocktails in a row, and she never drank. "Cure?"

"For my 'condition.'"

He wasn't talking about the werewolf condition. Oh, no. No man had looked more ready than he had when he'd confronted her after his change. Her mouth went dry. If she were to touch him beneath the table, she had a good idea what she'd find.

The idea excited her. What's gotten into you? she asked herself with a last grasp at sanity. Yet the way she felt now was hardly more bizarre than what had led her to cancel all her appointments, pack up and leave San Francisco with no idea of where she was going or what she wanted.

For the first time since her teens she was adrift, uncertain. She was prepared to throw herself headfirst into an abyss that might be filled with flames or icy water or have no bottom at all.

But what she wanted... suddenly that seemed very clear.

"Why are you so sure I have the cure?" she asked.

He lifted her hand and kissed her palm. "Instinct. That's one thing I never question."

Dana shivered. "If I followed my instincts... "

"You don't want to do that, chère. Mine'll have to work for both of us." He opened his mouth and drew his tongue along the underside of her arm. "You taste good. Too good to waste."

She tried, and failed, to shake him off. "I'm... I'm not a virgin, you know. I haven't exactly gone to waste."

"But it's been a long time, hasn't it?" He moved his chair until it bumped against hers. "Too long. And you've never known anyone like me."

"No. I've never—" She felt his lips on her neck and sucked in her breath. "I haven't met too many werewolves."

"Then you've got a real treat in store for you, chère."

"I'm... afraid to ask why."

"Don't worry." His breath feathered the corner of her mouth. "We make love like you do. We're just better at it."

"You are conceited, you know that?"

"I thought we'd established that already." He pulled back a little and grinned, giving true meaning to the word wolfish.

"My," she whispered. "What big teeth you have."

"All the better to eat you with, my dear." And he kissed her, cupping the back of her neck in his hand in a firm but gentle hold. Heat surged through her, barely contained, a savage wanting as heedless as that of any creature of the night. She opened her mouth to him, and he laced his fingers in her hair and

deepened the kiss as if he intended to devour her.

Dana lost all sense of time. Awareness returned in the form of a noise she couldn't ignore, a sorrowful wailing that made Remy jerk away and leap to his feet in alarm.

Howling. There was no mistaking that cry, which seemed born out of the fragments of a broken heart.

"Damn," Remy swore. "Damn, damn, damn!"

Dana shook away the muffling haze of desire. "What is it? What's happening?"

"It's Tris." He pounded his fist on the table. "He must have seen us."

To her dismay, she realized she'd forgotten all about Remy's younger brother.

"But why should that—"

He swung about, brows drawn in a scowl that she sensed was aimed more at himself than at her. "Haven't you figured it out yet? He was in love with Sally Daigle. He's never gotten over her."

Of course. That's what Aunt Gussie told me—one of the Arceneaux boys was in love with her.

And I look like Sally. Tristan called me by her name.

"There's no telling what he might do," Remy said. "I've got to go find him."

"Maybe I'd better come with you."

"Forget it. After... what we've been doing, it's going to be difficult enough for me to get him to come back." Remy headed for the door and stopped, his knuckles white as he gripped the doorjamb. "Can you find your way back?"

"I paid attention when Tristan brought me here," she said. "I still think—"

"Be careful. There's plenty of daylight, but don't stop until you get to your car." He hesitated. "And thanks for bringing Tris back. He shouldn't be going to town. He could have been hurt."

And you think he may be in trouble now. A disturbing thought struck at her heart. A danger to himself—or to others?

"You be careful," Dana said.

"I will." He flashed her that ironic grin. "Don't think we're finished, chère."

And with that, he was gone. She imagined him stripping off his clothing, becoming a wolf, racing off in pursuit of his wayward brother.

She, however, was bound to ordinary human shape. Still off balance from the day's events, Dana returned the way she and Tristan had come, ears straining for howls or other indications of Remy's passage. Only the occasional bird's song accompanied her across the field, through the cypress trees and all the way back to the Lexus.

Once behind the wheel, she had time to think. She had to admit that she was a little relieved that her liaison with Remy had ended when it did, even if she regretted the circumstances. She'd come very close to committing herself to a path she wasn't sure she wanted to take.

And what about tomorrow? Would they take up where they'd left off, as Remy had promised?

She found no answers. Aunt Gussie met her at the door with a message that Chad Lacoste had called, several times.

"He seems mighty anxious to meet with you," she said. "Kept asking where you were and when you'd be back." She shook her head. "He was always very nice to Sally. A true gentleman. But I can't help but wonder... "

She didn't complete the thought, but Dana did it for her. I wonder if it's because I look like his lost love? Maybe that's why he was so ready to help me. But I'm not Sally. And if he's still obsessed with her the way Tristan is, I'll have to make that very clear.

But not tonight. She'd had enough drama to last her a year, and she had a feeling it wasn't over.

She went to bed early, but it was no use. She worried about Tristan; she worried about Remy, who certainly didn't need her concern. The tossing and turning continued until after midnight. She was listening to Gussie's grandfather clock strike one when someone tapped on the bedroom window.

Chapter 9

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Dana's heart jumped into her throat. A pair of strong, brown hands lifted the unlocked window sash. Dana scrambled upright on the bed.

Remy stuck his head through the window, heaved himself up and tumbled into the room, landing easily on his feet like a cat.

"Remy!" Dana exclaimed, collapsing onto the bed. "You scared the hell out of me."

He didn't offer up one of his half apologetic, half challenging grins. "I haven't found Tristan."

With a strange conviction, Dana knew why he had come to her now. He was worried sick about his brother, and he trusted her enough to seek... comfort, was that the word? A man like Remy needing comfort from an ordinary woman?

"It shouldn't be this hard," he said, plopping down into the corner rocking chair. "Tris isn't that subtle, and I'm a good tracker. The best. He can't just have disappeared."

Dana climbed off the bed, grateful that she was wearing pajamas that gave excellent coverage at such a vulnerable moment. She went to Remy's side, hesitated and finally sat on the floor next to him.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Surely he'll come back?"

He looked down at her, his expression softening. "I thought he might have come here," he said. "But you haven't seen him?"

"No." She wanted to reach out and take his hand, but she folded her fingers in her lap instead. "What are you afraid of, Remy?"

Instead of taking offense, he sighed and leaned against the back of the rocking chair. "My brother... you asked why I came back from the city. It was because of Tris. He needed someone to look after him."

"And there wasn't anyone else?"

"No. Even my family... they were never at ease with him."

So things weren't so different among these loup-garou than they were with humans. "You gave up something to come back. Something that mattered to you." "I had a career—stockbroker with a major firm. It was never as important as my brother."

How many layers in this man had she yet to uncover? A stockbroker, no less. She had a feeling he'd been good at it, too. And now he was living out in the swamp for his brother's sake.

"When I was young, I used to pretend I had a brother or sister. My relationship with my parents... wasn't the greatest."

"I'm sorry."

She shrugged. "It gave me the motivation to succeed."

"My only motivation was to get out of this parish. But since I've come back..." He squeezed her hand, but she sensed that his thoughts were far away. "I've learned to appreciate things I missed before. The way butterweed covers the fields with gold in spring. The cypress groves where snowy egrets nest in summer. The thunderstorms crashing around you as if the world is ending. The frogs and the warblers singing, and all the other sounds you can't hear in the city. Even the hurricanes."

"You make it sound very beautiful."

"Not something you'd noticed, I guess. Sometimes it takes a while for outsiders to see it."

"I guess I am an outsider," she said, hiding a twinge of hurt. "I think I always have been, even in San Francisco."

He took her other hand and pulled her to her knees. "Could be this is the place where you'll finally belong."

For a minute Dana was unable to speak. She was dangerously close to tears. This was a new Remy, a man with great empathy and understanding. And she realized she did more than lust after Remy Arceneaux; she liked him. She liked him very much.

"Tris may still come here," she said. "Or he'll just go home when he's tired of running. Give him a little time, Remy. Sometimes you just have to let go."

"I hope you're right." He bent forward, resting his forehead against hers as if they were old and dear friends. The contact was both restful and stimulating, and she felt sensation streak down her spine to end in overwhelming need. The same need she'd felt hours ago in Remy's kitchen.

Remy felt it, too. He was acutely aware of Dana's state of near-undress, the fact that she was naked underneath the thin silk of her pajamas. The cloth, the bed, the very air was infused with the scent of this woman, and her unique fragrance had begun to take on a taste he couldn't have ignored if he tried. Arousal. Oh, he'd sensed it on her before—a scattering of molecules suspended about her like an invisible net, released by her body entirely without her knowledge. But she couldn't be ignorant of what was happening to her now. She was too observant to miss what was happening to him.

Damn it, he should leave. Now.

He pulled back. "You'd better send me away."

She tilted her face, and loose blond hair fell over her forehead. His fingers

itched to bury themselves in that cascade of sunlight. He clenched his fists and surged up from the chair.

"I'm going. Lock the window behind me."

Dana caught his hand. "Do you still want me to be afraid of you, Remy? You're not doing a very good job."

"You're playing with fire, chère."

"Maybe I haven't done enough of that in my life," she said, twining her fingers through his. "I think I might even learn to like this Cajun heat."

He threw her a look of amazement. Was she trying to seduce him? It didn't fit with what he knew of her. The funny thing was, he scarcely knew anything about her, yet he felt as if he'd known her all his life.

She was human, and that meant the feeling he had for her wasn't the folie d'amour that sometimes overcame lous-garou. A werewolf who found the âme soeur, soulmate, in another of his kind was bound to her for life.

His parents had been determined to mate him, according to tradition, with one of his Arceneaux cousins. He'd refused such a fate by running away. Now, it seemed, destiny had played a joke on both him and his family.

Dana gave an uneasy chuckle and released his hand. "Did I shock you? I'm not exactly an expert at... I've been out of the loop so long I don't even know what they call it these days."

Remy hardened his heart. "They still call it sex."

"I... suppose they do."

"Is that what you want from me?" He crouched before her, staring into her eyes.

"A little roll in the hay?" He bared his teeth in a grin. "Are you still curious about how werewolves do it, chère?"

It wasn't every human who could meet a werewolf's gaze without flinching. "Is there something I ought to know?" she asked. "Is it catching?"

Hé bien, but she was a cool one. He couldn't say the same for himself. "That's one thing you don't have to worry about." He stroked her lower lip with the ball of his thumb. She closed her eyes. "We're not animals. I am a man, and if you don't want me to stay, you'd better say so now."

Her breath hissed out between parted lips. "Stay."

He'd never had a plainer invitation in his life. Hell, he'd had his share of lovers in the city, and a few here at home. None of them had any complaints that he knew of. But every one of those women had known there weren't any strings attached.

Did Dana?

"Has there been anyone for you?" she asked. "Anyone important?"

He drew his fingers down her chin and let them fall to her breast. "You want promises, chère," he said, stroking her nipple through the silk, "you better find yourself another man."

Her clear eyes met his. "I don't want another man. I want you."

He groaned deep in his chest. One last chance. "Devastatingly attractive as I am, I don't carry protection in my pocket. Unless you—"

"I thought of that. I'm prepared." Color washed over her cheekbones. "Unless, of

course... you don't want me."

Gone was the confident, self-contained professional who had propositioned him so calmly. Her lip betrayed the slightest hint of a tremble. This beautiful, intelligent woman was afraid of rejection, braced to accept the humiliation of falling flat on her face.

He answered her in the best way he knew how. As they knelt there on the floor, thigh to thigh, he cupped her face in his hands and kissed her.

Dana claimed to have been "out of the loop," but her response was neither hesitant nor in the least virginal. She kissed him as if she'd been storing up about a hundred years' worth of sexual appetite and was ready to use it all on him. He had a feeling this was the Dana St. Cyr very few people ever knew. Take it easy, Remy. He should be able to keep his head. He could try, anyway. "Slow down, chère," he whispered, kissing the side of her neck. "I'm not goin' anyplace." Carefully, he undid the top button of her pajama top, and then the next, and the next. Her breasts were firm and round in his hands. She arched against him, pliant as a dancer, and he felt her reach for the snap of his jeans.

He scooped her up into his arms, kissing her nipples one at a time, and carried her to the bed. She slid from beneath him before he could lay her down, and he thought she'd had second thoughts at about the worst possible moment. But she hadn't. She fumbled for the knob of the drawer in her bedside table and pulled out a package. She looked at it and then at Remy, one brow arched, and suddenly burst into helpless giggles. Remy realized it was the first time he'd heard her outright laugh.

"You think it's funny?" Remy demanded. "See if you're still laughing when I'm through with you." He snatched the package from her hand, set it on the table and began to undo his shirt, lingering provocatively at each button. Dana stifled her snickers behind her hand, but her eyes followed his motions with flattering attention.

Damn, but he was just as nervous as she was. He finished unbuttoning his shirt and peeled out of it with exaggerated rolls of his shoulders, wondering if his skin looked as hot as it felt.

"You like what you see, sugar?" he asked with a suggestive leer. "You want me to come on over there and show you how it's done?"

Her laughter had stopped, but her eyes shone very bright. She flipped back the bedcovers and held out her hand.

All the silly posturing fled his thoughts. This was no joke. He went to stand before her, gazing down at that solemn, lovely face. She undid his zipper with unsteady hands. She caught him as soon as he was free, and her fingers stroked up and down his length while she slid the condom into place.

After that he stopped thinking. He knew from her scent that she was more than ready for him, that she would gladly have taken him inside without any foreplay at all. But he didn't want it that way. Not with her. He tugged off his jeans and stretched out beside her, sliding his hand under the waistband of her pajamas.

She was naked underneath. She closed her eyes and gave herself up to his caresses.

Her skin was wet silk where he touched her, warm and welcoming. He stroked her with his fingertip, so delicately, seeking the rhythm that would give her the most pleasure. Her hips lifted eagerly. He kept the rhythm going as he kissed her stomach just below the arch of her ribs.

"Remy," she murmured.

"Let me taste you," he said.

She shivered. He pulled the pajamas down over her hips and thighs. They tangled about her ankles, and she kicked them away.

"Jolie blonde," he said with heartfelt admiration. He left a trail of kisses along the slope of her belly and stopped at her honeysuckle curls. Her scent was maddening. Her taste was beyond anything he could have imagined.

Dana remembered what it felt like to have sex, but she knew now that she'd never truly made love. The way Remy touched her with his finger and his mouth was not mere expertise. It was profound tenderness that took as much delight in giving as in receiving.

She could have let herself go and come to completion alone, but that was not the way she wanted it between them. With gentle tugs she pulled him up, glorying in the feel of his body rubbing hers.

Thigh to thigh, hands clasping, they kissed. Dana wrapped her legs around Remy's hips. He didn't need further encouragement. He entered her with controlled abandon, stroking deep and then withdrawing in a way designed to give pleasure with every movement.

She lost track of anything but the incredible feel of him inside her, his muscles flexing and releasing, his breath hot on her shoulder. They climbed to the stars in perfect tandem. She clutched his shoulders and arched up, up, urging him over the top with cries and whispers of joy.

Still he held back until he felt her shudder, and then he let himself fall. She took him in with all her heart. Remy whispered endearments, and kissed her neck and face until she remembered to breathe.

If ever a human being felt like howling, she did. Remy nuzzled her neck.

"Again?" he asked.

She chuckled, bursting with bubbles of laughter like warm champagne.

"What is it?" Remy murmured into her hair. "What's so funny?"

She shook her head and kissed the dimple in his chin. It wasn't funny at all.

She had just discovered that werewolves really did make love just like humans.

But she knew there would never be another man, human or otherwise, for her but Remy Arceneaux.

Chapter 10

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The alarm clock showed a little past three in the morning when Remy finally

remembered to look. He found it difficult to move, let alone think, with Dana's hair spread across his chest and his lungs filled with the heady scents of their lovemaking.

Her breath grazed his damp skin, and her hand swept up and down his arm in a soothing, hypnotic rhythm. He swallowed hard. He'd forgotten to warn her that loup-garou really did have one major advantage over human males: they could keep it up all night long.

But not tonight. Not with Tristan still on the loose and Dana's great-aunt snoring in the next bedroom. And those were the least of his problems.

"Are you okay?" she murmured, kissing his shoulder. "You weren't too disappointed, I hope?"

He propped himself up on his elbow and leaned over her, tracing his finger along the curve of her jawline.

"Allons, allons. What kind of talk is that for a smart, sophisticated lady like you?"

She gave him a sly, delicious smile. "Let's just say I'm a very quick study. Of course, I'm sure I haven't had as many lovers as you have. It may take me a while to catch up."

"Don't even think about it." He heard the growl in his own voice and stopped. One hour with her and he was already talking like a jealous boyfriend. Talking like one, and feeling the knot tighten in his stomach when he thought of Dana with anyone else. Ever.

"I mean," he said more gently, "that you should never follow my example in anything, chère. And you shouldn't take chances."

"Like the one I took with you?"

"Exactly." He swung his legs over the side of the bed and grabbed his jeans.

"You listen to me. Stay away from Chad Lacoste. Whatever you do, don't trust him."

She sat up, drawing her knees to her chest under the sheets. "He said almost the same thing about you."

"Yeah. I'll just bet he did." He dressed hastily, hoping he wouldn't turn to see the hurt in her eyes.

"Why mention Chad now?" she asked. "Are you afraid I'll seduce him next?"

He deserved her scorn. He could have controlled himself, and he hadn't. He needed to put space between them again, but not at the cost of losing her trust.

"I mentioned Chad," he said, shrugging into his shirt, "because he's here."

"What?"

"He's right outside your front door."

"How can you know that?"

"I smell him."

"Why would he come at this hour?"

Remy was relieved at the suspicion in her voice. If she was on her guard, that was all he could ask. "Did you know Sally and Chad were an item some years ago?"

"Gussie told me." She pushed aside the sheets, slid off the bed and strode to the dresser against the wall. If she was self-conscious about her nudity, she

didn't show it. "She said Chad almost married Sally."

"Did she also tell you how furious Chad was when she refused to get back together with him five years ago? He still thought she belonged to him, but she had other ideas. She had her own life. Chad wouldn't let it go."

Dana turned from the open drawer, a pair of sensible high-cut cotton briefs in one hand. "What are you suggesting?"

He backed toward the window. "I'll be right outside."

"Wait! Remy, you can't—"

But she could hear, as he did, the firm knock on the front door. Clothing rustled as she finished dressing, and then her footsteps hurried from her bedroom and into the hall.

There was an extended pause before the front door swung open, admitting Chad into the house. From his position outside the open window, Remy heard the entire conversation. It was easy enough to imagine what wasn't spoken aloud.

"Chad," Dana said, feigning surprise. "What could be so important at this hour?"

"You didn't call," he said, couching the accusation in good-natured tolerance.

"I've been thinking about you, Dana. Every day."

"I've only been here a few days."

"And you've been busy, haven't you?" Chad moved across the creaking floorboards of the living room. "Asking about the Arceneaux brothers. More than asking. You were seen with Tristan in town."

"He didn't do me any harm. I don't believe he's dangerous."

"Dana, Dana. I've tried so hard to make you understand." A faint scrape of wood on wood. "Poor Sally. So beautiful. I'm surprised that your aunt still keeps pictures of her around. I wouldn't think she wanted the painful memories."

"And what about your memories, Chad? You were in love with her."

"It was common knowledge." He put down the picture frame. "Yes, I loved her. I would have done anything for her."

The silence after that lasted so long that Remy almost climbed back through the window. He smelled anxiety, fight-or-flight hormones underlying Dana's scent. But there was no threat from Chad Lacoste. Yet.

"I think you'd better go," Dana said at last.

"I'm afraid you misunderstand me, Dana," Chad said. "I don't want to leave it like this. You and I—"

"At a more appropriate time, perhaps. Good night."

Chad's footsteps clumped toward the door. "Good night, Dana," he said softly.

"Sleep well."

The door opened and closed with a solid click. Remy jumped through the window and was waiting when Dana entered the bedroom. She was fully dressed in a blouse and jeans, her face revealing no obvious distress at her encounter with Lacoste.

Remy wasn't fooled. He moved close to her, sickened by Lacoste's smell lingering on her skin where he had touched her hand.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Fine." She said. "Though I don't understand why he dropped by so late. He didn't seem quite... rational. Though he didn't cause any trouble—unless you count

the way he looked at me."

The hair rose on the back of Remy's neck. "And how was that?"

"I'd rather not speculate." Her smile faded. "I took your warning to heart. You were about to say something else about Chad before he arrived."

"It'll have to wait. Tristan's still out there."

"What aren't you telling me, Remy?"

He hated leaving her like this. She had a right to know what he suspected, what he most feared. But the time wasn't right. He still wasn't sure. He might never be.

"Stay here," he said. "Stay in the house until I come for you."

"I'm on your side. And Tristan's. Why can't you believe that?"

The smooth words he might have answered got tangled up in his throat. "I'm sorry, Dana." He slipped out into the night. She didn't call after him.

It had been too much to hope that he would find a solution to the turmoil of his emotions in Dana's bed. But when he caught Chad's scent on the thick night air, he knew there was a different kind of satisfaction to be had. Satisfaction, and another chance at the truth.

Chad had scarcely gone any distance at all. Remy found him and his BMW less than a quarter mile away, parked at the curb of a street lit only by the setting moon and the red embers of his cigarette.

He reeked of more than cigarette smoke. His hand clenched and unclenched on the steering wheel as if he were working up to some difficult and unpleasant decision.

Remy stepped in front of the convertible and leaned against the warm hood.

"Hey," he said. "Aren't you on the wrong side of town, Lacoste?"

Chad dropped his cigarette with a curse, waving his burned fingers. He snatched up the smoldering butt before it could burn his expensive upholstery and tossed it over the side of the convertible. For just a moment his eyes reflected the fear Remy had sensed. Then his mouth curved into a contemptuous sneer.

"I might ask the same of you," he said, slumping back in his seat. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Looking out for a certain lady you don't have the sense to leave alone."

"And just what do you want with her, Arceneaux? She's way out of your league."

"Could be." Remy leaned closer, smiling at Lacoste through the windshield. "But she's exactly what you want, isn't she? A perfect replica of Sally Daigle. Only, she's on to you, Lacoste, the same way Sally was at the end. She knows better than to trust you."

"Because you warned her?" Lacoste laughed. "You think she trusts you? Oh, I know she's met with you a few times on her quest for the truth about Sally. I'm sure she's heard all the stories by now." He tapped out another cigarette and regarded it thoughtfully. "I hardly think she's the type to let her imagination run wild when the evidence so clearly points in one direction."

"Vraiment? Then why did she kick you out of her house, chère?"

Chad flushed to the roots of his sandy hair. "I know who to blame for that, Arceneaux. And once I've had a few chats with the right people, Dana won't need

to be concerned with your lies any longer."

"Ah, oui. You'll have a word with your father's cronies and have me and Tris run out of town." Remy licked his thumb and rubbed at a smudge on the buffed silver surface of the BMW. "But you can't really be rid of me, can you? I know what I saw that day. I know who hated Sally enough to kill her."

"You know what you saw? Your own brother, with blood on his hands, raving about Sally—your poor, crazy, dangerous brother, rejected by his secret sweetheart." Lacoste lit his cigarette. "You can't be rid of me, either, can you? It eats at you all the time, doesn't it—the possibility that Tristan killed Sally, and that I have enough evidence to put him away if you ever make one accusation against me."

Remy kept his expression lazily indifferent, though his guts churned with sickness. The bastard was right. The fear was always there—fear for his brother, and fear of what Tristan had never been able to remember.

"Maybe if Dr. St. Cyr hadn't come to town," Remy said, "this might have gone on for years. Stalemate." He turned his thumb so that his nail scraped the paint he had been polishing. "But you made a mistake chasing after her, Lacoste."

"I don't have to chase anyone. They come to me, sooner or later." He studied the tiny new scratch on the hood. "I feel real sympathy for you, mon ami. For the first time in your life, you've been driven to grand acts of chivalry on a lady's behalf. Too bad the effort will be wasted."

"It won't be wasted if I call your bluff."

"And watch your brother go through a trial? See him lose what's left of his sanity in prison?" He blew a stream of smoke over the windshield. "You know I can make it happen. The people around here are halfway to convicting him already."

"You can't accuse anyone if you're gone."

"Dead, you mean?" Chad laughed. "You think you can kill me and just walk away?"

Remy growled in his throat. Chad had always counted on his father's influence, confident that Remy would never dare touch him. All his life, Remy had preferred to avoid entanglements, combative as well as romantic. He hadn't competed for anything until he went to the city. He hadn't cared enough.

Even what happened to Sally hadn't driven him to violence. He had too many doubts. They had held him back every time he'd seen Lacoste's smirking face. But Lacoste had gone one step too far. He had threatened not only Tris, and he'd made it very clear that he wasn't going to leave Dana alone. The sleeping wolf had awakened... the beast that would stop at nothing to protect its chosen mate. Remy's mind went blank. Chosen mate. The idea had slipped into place so quietly that he hadn't noticed it. Even as he tried to scoff it away, it remained lodged as firmly as a snapping turtle in its shell.

Loups-garou usually mated for life. Among the Arceneaux, only a few had married humans. But mating was a serious matter for his people, one of the primal, instinctive drives that could thrust the wolf nature into dominance.

Remy felt it rising in him. For all the legends, loup-garou were not natural killers, no more than humans. But their greater strength, speed and senses made

them far more efficient at killing if the need arose.

The Change bubbled in Remy's veins. He wanted to wipe that smile from Lacoste's face, hear him beg for mercy the way he imagined Sally Daigle had begged.

He could finish Lacoste, here and now. When he was done, no one would suspect murder. The sheriff's department would wonder what kind of animal could tear a man apart like tissue.

"You're not the only one who can hide a body," he whispered.

Chad lost his nonchalance. He sat up in his seat and swallowed a lungful of smoke.

"You're insane," he choked.

"It isn't insane to make sure that Dana is safe from you the way Sally wasn't."

"And what about making her safe from your brother?"

Remy snapped his arm around the windshield and caught Lacoste by his collar.

"Maudit chien."

"You'd better find him," Lacoste wheezed. "Unless you—" He gave a rasping chuckle. "Looks like the law is heading right this way. Why don't you tell him about it?"

Cursing his lack of resolve, Remy turned. An unmarked vehicle he recognized as Detective Landry's had just arrived at the cross-street stop sign and was turning toward them, headlights stretching like grasping fingers.

Remy released Lacoste and backed to the rear of the convertible, putting it between him and the approaching vehicle. A part of him felt relief at the escape from bloodshed, but the other part wailed in despair and rage.

You can't let him escape. He must be the killer. Not Tris. Never Tris. Prove it, once and for all.

Tires squealed on pavement. Remy felt a shattering impact against his hip, and then he was falling, tumbling head over heels. The convertible roared away as he slammed up against the curb.

I told you, the wolf howled. And then it was silent.

Chapter 11

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Remy woke with his aching head pillowed on something soft, the deliriously sweet smell of woman all around him.

"Remy! Remy, can you hear me?"

He opened his eyes. A face swam into focus, framed by loose blond hair. Eyes wide. Mouth pinched with fear.

Dana. His delightful pillow was some portion of her anatomy, and he was in her room at Aunt Gussie's, lying on her bed. He had no idea how he had made his way here. His body was a knot of pain.

"Remy?"

"I'm... all right." Not quite true, but if he was still alive, he would recover eventually. His memory returned in patches: the argument with Chad, the internal

debate over life and death, the arrival of Landry's car, and then falling...
excruciating pain... darkness.

His senses told him that it was still well before day-break. No one had observed Chad slam his car into Reverse and strike down a shadowy figure, apparently not even Landry. And why the hell was Landry patrolling in town, where the police had jurisdiction?

He tried to sit up, clutching his middle. Dana pushed him back down again and squirmed out from under him.

"All right, my foot," she said, adjusting the blankets. "I should have taken you to the hospital as soon as you showed up." She shook her head. "I almost did when you wouldn't wake up, but I was afraid of what they might discover if they examined you. You said your kind heal fast, but you were out for so long... Do you understand me?"

He nodded gingerly. "You were... right not to call outside help."

She muttered something under her breath. "Look at me." He winced as she shone a penlight in his eyes, first one and then the other. "Good. Now focus on my finger as I move it—don't turn your head. Excellent. Just a few more tests to be sure."

"How did I get here?"

She left him for a moment and returned with a glass of water. "You weren't gone more than twenty minutes when I heard a noise at the window. I found you lying on the lawn, bleeding and barely able to talk. I just managed to get you inside without waking Gussie. Here, drink this."

Remy gulped down the water and made a mental examination of his body. Dana had loosened or removed most of his clothing, and he could feel the pull of bandages here and there when he shifted his weight. His back, neck and limbs still functioned, however reluctantly. He touched his forehead, bound with a thick strip of cloth, and his chest. Cracked ribs would repair themselves. The swelling at his temple was going down and would vanish in a few more hours. Whether Chad had acted by design or impulse, he hadn't put Remy out of commission. What might have killed a human had only damaged him, and not permanently.

Remy's werewolf nature had saved him, and instinct had brought him straight to Dana's arms.

"How long have I been out?" he asked.

"A couple of hours. As I said, if you were a normal man, I wouldn't have taken this risk. People who remain unconscious for an extended period may never wake up, and you were covered in blood. It took me a few minutes to realize that you didn't have any serious injuries other than the concussion, no fractures except in the ribs. The superficial cuts and bruises were already healing." She helped him finish the water and put the glass on the bed table. Remy noticed that her hands were shaking.

He caught one of them and held it. "You did the right thing, Dana."

Gradually her trembling stilled. "I hope to God I never face a situation like that again. How did it happen?"

"Chad. He tried to run me over."

Dana shot up from the bed and paced across the room. "He tried to kill you?"

"He's running scared. He might do anything now."

She turned on him, fierce as a she-wolf. "Don't you think it's about time you told me exactly what's going on? You've been hinting that Chad had something to do with Sally's disappearance, and everything that's happened suggests you're right. Why haven't you gone to the police?"

Remy closed his eyes. Either he was going to have to trust Dana one hundred percent, or the lies would dig a chasm too deep for either of them to cross.

"I haven't gone to the police," he said slowly, "because no matter what the truth is, it will probably destroy my brother."

Dana sat down in the rocking chair, wondering how many more "surprises" she could take in twenty-four hours.

"Destroy Tristan?" she repeated. "What are you saying?"

Remy gazed at her with a grimness that came from something far more devastating than mere pain, or even what Chad had tried to do to him. "You swear to me, Dana St. Cyr—you swear that you'll never speak of what I'm about to tell you."

"Of course. I—"

"And you swear," he said, "that you won't go to the police, no matter what you hear."

This was serious indeed. Dana consulted her conscience and then her heart. The two should have been in conflict. They were not. She looked into Remy's eyes and knew there would be a way to make it come out right.

"I give my word," she said.

He sank back on the pillows. "I warned you about Chad with reason. But I can't be sure he murdered Sally. I can't be sure of anything." His voice took on the monotone of complete detachment, as if he were telling someone else's story.

"Five years ago," he said, "the day Sally was last seen in Grand Marais, I was out in the swamp looking for Tris. I'd seen Sally Daigle at the edge of town the day before. She was arguing with Chad—a pretty nasty fight, though Chad was careful to keep it private. I didn't think anything more of it, even when Tris told me he was taking Sally into the swamp to look for some special bird."

Dana laced her fingers over her stomach as if she could contain the dread gathering inside her. "Go on."

"When Tris didn't return at nightfall, I went to look for him. I found him wandering in a daze. He told me Sally was dead."

"Oh, God."

Remy's face showed no expression. "He couldn't tell me anything else, but I found part of his shirt a little distance away. It was soaked in blood. I could smell a storm coming. I took Tris home, and then went looking for Sally."

"You... didn't find her."

"I caught another scent—Chad's. He smelled like men do when they're beyond terror. I found him running out of the swamp, half-naked and caked with mud. Sally's scent was on him. I remember thinking that I didn't have to worry any

longer, because Chad must have done it."

Dana squeezed the armrests of the rocking chair. "You'd been afraid that Tristan had killed Sally."

"Yes." Remy stared at the far wall. "I confronted Chad. He tried to give me some excuse for being in the swamp, but when he saw I wasn't going for it, he turned cold as ice. He told me that he'd followed Tris and Sally to the swamp, and he'd seen Sally's body. She was dead, all right. And maybe it didn't look good that he was out there in the swamp like that, but it would look even worse for Tristan when everyone knew he'd had an unrequited love for her, that she'd rejected him more than once."

"But she rejected Chad—"

"Yes. He never denied hurting Sally. But he made clear that if I ever implicated him in any way, even said I'd met him in the swamp, he'd make sure my brother was blamed for Sally's death. He had evidence to implicate Tris thoroughly. I believed him. His father used to have the whole parish in his pocket. I knew as well as he did who the police would believe."

The urge to run to Remy and comfort him was so overpowering that Dana had to force herself to remain in the chair. Remy didn't want comfort now. This poison had lingered inside him for five long years.

"After Chad left, I looked for the body. I never found it. By then the rain was coming down hard, and all trace of Sally was gone, washed away. No signs of violence. Nothing. So I went back to Tris. He didn't remember what had happened. When I tried to get him to talk about Sally, he... I was afraid he'd hurt himself."

So much made sense now that hadn't before. Dana thought of Tristan's gentle face, his confusion, his reaction to her when he'd seen her for the first time.

"It wasn't only that you were afraid what Chad would do to Tris if you went to the authorities," she said.

"No." Anguish was naked on Remy's face. "I could never be sure. I wanted to believe Chad was guilty. But Tris—Tris had blood on his clothes."

There wasn't a damned thing Dana could say. The full horror of Remy's dilemma caught her by the throat like a strangler's grip, silencing all hope of foolish, futile words. She got up from the rocker and knelt at Remy's side.

"If Chad killed Sally," he whispered, "I've let a murderer go free to protect my brother. But if Tris had anything to do with it... "

"I don't believe it," she said. "I'll never believe that Tris could kill anyone."

He turned his head to look at her, and the veil over his eyes lifted. "Now you know why I keep him with me on the houseboat. He's my responsibility. Whatever happens to him, whatever he does, will be my doing."

And he truly believed that, Dana realized. He blamed himself not only for failing to expose a murderer, but for being absent while his younger brother's mental state deteriorated into that of a possible killer. Remy's punishment was to abandon his career and his life in the city, and live with this terrible guilt in a place where he and Tristan were regarded with suspicion and even

fear.

"You're wrong, Remy," Dana said. "No one can take responsibility for all the actions of another person, not even someone you love."

"And what would you do?" he asked in a whisper. "If I hadn't made you swear, would you turn him in?"

"I don't know what I'd do," she said. "I know what you have to do if you're going to go on living with yourself and make any kind of life for you and Tristan. You need to know the truth, Remy, and deal with it. But you don't have to do it alone."

"Are you saying you'll be with me?"

He tried to conceal his pain with a crooked, self-mocking smile, but it didn't work. Dana's heart clenched at the yearning in his question and her own ardent response to it.

"I may not know Tristan well, but I care for him. I care for you, Remy. I—I'll do anything to help both of you."

"Then I ask one thing—that you stay right here until I find Tris and bring him home."

"You just admitted that Chad tried to kill you. You can't go out in this state."

He grimaced and pushed himself up on his elbows, tensing his lower body to rise.

"All I have to do is Change, and the rest of me will heal."

"Can you change now?"

The muscles in his face locked in concentration. He let out a long, slow breath.

"Not yet."

"Then you've got two choices—stay here and recuperate until you can change, or take your own personal physician with you."

He shook his head, jaw set, but she could see she'd already won. "If I don't take you with me, you'll probably go after Chad yourself." He shifted his legs toward the edge of the bed. "We'll go back to the houseboat first, in case Tris has returned."

"That makes sense. Hold on, there." She bent to work her arm under Remy's shoulders and helped him sit. No one touching him now would ever believe that he'd been the victim of vehicular assault a few hours ago. She didn't quite believe what had happened in the three days since she'd arrived in Grand Marais. It wasn't the discovery of werewolves that most amazed her, or even getting mixed up in murder. It was the simple fact that she had, improbably and miraculously, fallen in love. And love gave her the courage to face whatever lay ahead of them.

Checking to make sure that Gussie was still securely in her room—thank God the woman slept like the dead—Dana quickly assembled a small pack of supplies she'd prepared for further excursions into the swamp, including several energy bars and a powerful flashlight. She dashed off a brief note, informing her great-aunt that she'd gone for an early-morning walk and might not be back until afternoon. On her way to her room she stopped at the piano to touch the photograph of Sally's smiling image.

If you can hear me, Sally—help me find the truth. Help me give the living peace

and lay your memory to rest.

Dana felt Sally's spirit beside her as she helped Remy dress in his stained clothes, took him to the Lexus and drove to the dock where he kept his motor-boat. By the time they cast off, Remy was moving without apparent discomfort, though she had a feeling he would conceal any lingering pain from her. He'd made himself very vulnerable in her room and now seemed bent on making up for it by remaining as distant as possible.

She'd almost told him she loved him. What if she had? He wasn't ready to hear those words. She didn't know if he ever would be. Even if all they had together was a one-night stand, she was fully committed to her course.

The bayou was dark as pitch, but Remy found his way unerringly to the houseboat. A single light burned on the deck. Remy bounded up the ramp and disappeared into the cabin. Another light came on in the kitchen.

As soon as Dana entered the cabin she knew Tristan wasn't there. Remy's face was stony.

"Tris was here," he said. "Sometime within the past hour. I should still be able to pick up his trail."

"If he came back, shouldn't we wait for him here? He was probably looking for you."

"No. Something's wrong. I can feel it." He leaned heavily on the kitchen table and dropped his head between his shoulders. "You won't be able to keep up with me, Dana."

"You mean that you intend to leave me behind."

"I'm sorry." He began to unbutton his shirt. "I can travel much faster as a wolf, following Tris's scent." He paused and met her gaze. "I want you safe. Stay here. Please."

That stiff but heartfelt request made it very difficult for Dana not to promise.

"What choice do I have, other than to return to town?"

His mouth relaxed. "That's my chère amie." He dropped his shirt over the chair and started on his jeans. "If I don't come back in a few hours..."

"Don't worry about me. Concentrate on finding Tristan. Keep safe."

"You ought to know by now how tricky it is to get rid of a werewolf."

"That's what I'm counting on."

He finished undressing, and Dana was aware of a strange self-consciousness between them, as if they hadn't shared a bed and dangerous secrets. She stepped around the table and laid her palms on his chest. Goodbyes were as inappropriate now as the yearning to feel that magnificent body entwined with hers.

She kissed him instead. Remy returned the kiss with banked ferocity, pulling her hard against him, and then let her go. He was out the door before she recovered her balance.

Dana ran out onto the deck just in time to see the wolf bound away into the umber dawn. She sank down against the wall and watched the mist rise, lit from within as if by some spectral fire.

A man came up the path from the swamp, hands tucked in his belt. Dana jumped to her feet. She knew him; Detective Landry, who had the unfortunate tendency to

show up when he was least wanted.

"Hello," she called out, as if she had nothing to hide. "Can I help you?"

Landry touched his hat. "Ma'am," he said. "I'd like to speak with Remy Arceneaux."

"I'm sorry. He isn't here at the moment." She went halfway down the ramp and smiled at Landry with as much ingenuousness as she could muster. "Can I take a message?"

Landry shared Remy's disconcerting talent for the unblinking stare. "Do you know where he's gone?"

"I'm afraid not. He left just before dawn."

"I see. You wouldn't happen to know anything about a hit-and-run incident earlier this morning?"

Dana froze. "Was someone hurt?"

He sighed and shifted his weight onto one hip. His hands remained near his belt.

"Mrs. Daigle overheard you and Remy discussing coming out to the swamp. The two of you were seen leaving town a couple of hours ago, in your car. I think you know more than you're letting on."

Apparently Gussie wasn't quite the heavy sleeper Dana had believed.

"Is it a crime in Louisiana to go for a drive with someone of the opposite sex?"

"Only if your intent is obstruction of justice." Landry started up the ramp, and Dana retreated to the cabin doorway. "I think it's time that you and I were straight with each other, Doctor. I know Tristan Arceneaux is missing, and Remy's been looking for him. I know someone tried to hurt Remy early this morning. I know he was with you afterward. And I think you know exactly what he is."

Chapter 12

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Dana ignored her pounding heart. "Am I under investigation, Detective?"

"Dr. St. Cyr, I'm on your side, as much as I can be. You're Sally's cousin.

That's why I've been keeping an eye on you. There are still plenty of folks around here who would jump to conclusions if they knew Remy and Tristan are loup-garou." His brow wrinkled in concern. "Here, maybe you'd better sit down." A chair would have been welcome, but Dana managed to stay on her feet. "You... know?"

"Yes." His expression was entirely serious. "That's why I've come to talk to Remy. This has gone far enough."

"I don't understand."

"I've assumed you're not stupid, Doctor, and I'd appreciate the same courtesy.

If I thought you were in any real danger from Remy, I'd have kept you away from him. I'm guessing that he told you about Sally and the rumors surrounding Tristan. You met Chad Lacoste, and you know what he tried to do to Remy. You've been wise not to trust him."

Dana released her breath. "You suspect Chad in Sally's disappearance? Why haven't you arrested him?"

"I can't expect you to understand the complexities of the situation, but I do expect your cooperation."

"You warned Tristan away from town, as if he were a criminal."

"Until this matter is resolved, it's my duty to protect him like any other citizen. If Remy's in trouble—"

"It's Chad you should be pursuing, not Remy."

Landry's gaze hardened. "Did it ever occur to you that Remy might go after Chad?"

It hadn't. She'd convinced herself that Remy and Tristan couldn't be involved in Sally's presumed death, but Remy had every reason to hate Chad.

"He's looking for his brother," she said firmly. "That's all that matters to him right now."

"I hope you're right, because Chad isn't anywhere I can find him, and there are just a few too many people missing for my comfort."

"All I can tell you is that Remy went into the swamp. If I knew where, I'd be with him right now."

"That I can well believe." Landry favored her with a wry smile and glanced down the path. "It will be to Remy's advantage if I can—" He stopped, tilted his head and frowned. "I have a call, Doctor. I strongly advise you to go home and wait. I'll be in touch."

Without another word he returned the way he had come. Dana waited a few minutes and followed him down the path. She heard the distant growl of a car's engine and then only the natural sounds of early morning.

She suspected that Detective Landry had been distracted from his pursuit of Remy, which was all to the good. But she faced the same dilemma as before: stuck here like some nineteenth-century soldier's wife waiting for her man to come home.

Waiting around simply wasn't in her nature. She ran back into the cabin, retrieved her pack and took the path away from the houseboat. Of course, there was no sign of Remy's passage; she doubted that even a skilled wildlife tracker could follow him.

Only a little way, she told herself. It's better than doing nothing. She knew she could get as far as the place Chad had left her that first day, where Remy had rescued her. Perhaps, if she were very lucky, some other clue might come to her by then.

Half a mile into her trek she stumbled upon a minor miracle. Someone had neatly tied a bit of red cloth to a branch at the point where the path dwindled into several narrow tracks. It might have been some other hiker who'd left the sign, but there weren't many intruders near Arceneaux land. Remy certainly wouldn't have left them for her to follow.

Tristan might. He trusted her, and she was prepared to grasp at even the most fragile hope. She took the indicated track.

It wasn't an easy way. Soon Dana gave up brushing leaves and twigs from her hair

and clothing, focusing all attention on finding the next marker. She discovered it draped from the upright, broken branch of a rotting log.

Someone had left these markers, and it wasn't Remy. Tristan had been back to the houseboat; surely he'd left them deliberately. And that meant he wanted to be found.

Dana offered up a prayer and broke into a run.

No one, to Remy's knowledge, had ever compared the speed of a true wolf to that of a loup-garou. But Remy ran faster than he ever had in his life, racing into the swamp with ears pricked and nose alert for the trail he must find.

It led him to the edge of a nameless pond where Tristan's bare feet had sunk into the mud. That was where he found the strip of red cloth. Remy paused only to confirm that it belonged to Tristan, and then he leaped across the water and settled into a tireless lope. He remembered the way; he had come this path five years ago, when he had found Tristan whispering words of death.

Sally's death. A murder left unconfirmed because the body had never been found. The body. Remy redoubled his pace, paws flying over the ground from ridge to slough and over the next rise. He knew, with a certainty deeper than logic, where Tristan had gone, and why.

Tristan knew where to find the body.

Tris didn't kill Sally. He did not. So Remy told himself, over and over again, but the words brought no consolation.

At least Dana is safe.

The rising sun bled pink into the sky above the cypresses, renewing Remy's urgency. Birds clattered from their sleeping places as he passed, and a gator sank under the surface of the black water with an indignant slap of its tail.

The scent he pursued grew stronger, and then overwhelming.

Tristan. And he was not alone.

Remy skidded to a halt behind the last intervening thicket at the edge of a thigh-deep slough. On the opposite bank knelt Tristan with Chad Lacoste behind him, one hand resting on Tris's shoulder with brotherly solicitude. At Tristan's feet, beside a waterlogged stump, lay the skeletal remains of a human being.

Wisps of rotted cloth and rope still dripped from the bones, but it wasn't that which caught Remy's attention. Tangled among the cervical vertebrae near the skull was a chain, discolored from its long tenure under the water. Hung from the chain was a silver ring set with a stone that still, after all these years, swallowed the dim light and sparkled like sweet memories.

Maman's ring, given to Tris on his eighteenth birthday, just before she died. He had put it on a necklace and never taken it off...until around the time Sally vanished. He'd said he didn't know how or where he had lost it.

Now Sally's corpse, what remained of it, wore the necklace in silent accusation. Tears ran down Tristan's face, though he made no sound. He lifted his hand as if to reach for the pendant. His fingers trembled.

"What more proof do you need?" Chad asked with nauseating gentleness. "You knew exactly where to find the body. How could you know that, Tristan, unless you

were here when Sally died?"

A howl of rage built in Remy's throat, but he swallowed it back. Wait. Listen. Chad had tried to kill Remy; he wouldn't hesitate to hurt Tristan as well if he were provoked. It wasn't an accident that he was here. Either he'd followed Tris or come to this place on his own. What happened in the next few minutes might solve all the mysteries and set Tris free.

Or it might condemn him utterly.

"You'll feel so much better when you admit it, Tristan," Chad said. "You loved Sally. So did I. You owe it to her to tell the truth."

Tristan squeezed his eyes shut. "I... don't remember."

"You don't want to remember. I understand. But things will never be right until you clear your conscience." Chad leaned closer, patting Tristan's arm. "It's so simple. All you have to do is turn yourself in. I'll make sure you get a fair hearing. I know a few good doctors who might even be able to get you a lighter sentence. After all, you couldn't have known what you were doing, could you?"

"Please," Tristan whispered.

Remy gathered his haunches for a leap. His muscles screamed with the need to launch himself at Chad, take him by the throat, choke and rend and tear—

"Let me help you," Chad murmured. "You had an argument with Sally. You used your hunting knife to kill her, didn't you? You were afraid someone would find the body, so you wedged Sally under this sunken log and tied her up with rope so the bones wouldn't fall apart or be moved by the current."

Submerged. Remy ground his teeth. That was why he'd never been able to find the body; the scent had been masked by water. A werewolf might think of such a precaution.

"You made yourself forget," Chad went on. "Until today. Then you came here, because in your heart you knew it had to end once and for all. You brought Sally up into the light."

"I... found her."

"And you can't hide it anymore. Everyone in Grand Marais saw you wearing that ring constantly after graduation. I saw it around Sally's neck the day before she died—you gave it to her. And here it is."

"Yes," Tristan wept. "Yes."

With a roar, Remy crashed out of the thicket and spanned the slough in a single jump. Chad's expression went blank, and then he staggered back with a hoarse cry and fell on his rump.

Remy pinned him down, legs straddled over Chad's rigid body. Chad squeaked and closed his eyes against the sight of teeth mere inches from his throat. Through the haze of his anger, Remy realized that Tris hadn't even looked in their direction.

Tris's sanity was a thousand times more important than any dream of vengeance.

Remy backed away, warning Chad with a growl, and Changed.

Remy didn't bother to gauge Chad's reaction; simple shock would keep the man quiet for a few minutes, at least. Turning his back on his enemy, Remy crouched beside Tristan and took him by the shoulders.

"Tris, can you hear me? Look at me, 'tit frère."

No flicker of recognition came back into Tristan's eyes. He drew his knees up to his chest and began to rock forward and back like a disconsolate child.

"I remember," he said. "I found Sally. I did it."

"No." He pulled Tris against him. "No, Tris."

"What more proof do you want?" Chad rasped. He lay with his back against a cypress trunk, arms braced at his sides, body racked with tremors. "You—whatever you are—" He laughed. "Is that why you're not in a hospital? You're not even human?"

Remy stared at Chad over Tristan's head. "You'll be lucky to make it to a hospital."

"You'd rather kill me than face the truth, is that it? You just heard your brother admit to his crime. Of course, that probably doesn't mean anything to a monster like you." He shook his head. "It makes perfect sense. I'm surprised your brother used a knife instead of his teeth."

"Liar. You did this to him. You made him believe it."

"Did I? If you were so sure of his innocence, why did you leave me alone all these years?" His laughter took on the edge of hysteria. "Or is it because you have other secrets to hide?"

Remy was frankly amazed that Chad's reason had been so unaffected by what he'd witnessed. He smelled of fear, and yet he hadn't panicked. That stubborn grip on rationality made him all the more dangerous. There was only one way to silence Lacoste, keep him from destroying Tristan and exposing the Arceneaux heritage.

"Are you going to kill me?" Chad demanded. "Yes, that's right. Tear me apart with your bare hands." He leaned back against the tree trunk and plunged his fingers into the damp earth, laughing until tears ran down his face. "You're a natural-born killer, just like your brother."

"You're wrong, Chad."

Dana stood at the opposite bank, breathing hard, her hair a mat of tangles and her clothes dirty and torn. "Remy's not a murderer," she said. "And neither is Tristan."

Remy's first inclination was to curse Dana's mule-headedness and whatever skill or luck had brought her here. But when he met her gaze across the water, his treacherous heart knotted with relief and gratitude. He let his eyes speak for him.

"Come and join our little party, Dr. St. Cyr," Chad said. "Though I really don't think you're dressed—or is that undressed?—for the occasion."

In a handful of seconds Remy stood over Chad, hands poised to strike. Dana waded through the slough as coolly as a model gliding down a runway.

"You're not sinking to his level, Remy," she said. "I know you too well." She regarded Chad with a look of open loathing. "I presume that he knows what you are... I wish I could have seen his face when he found out. How is Tristan?"

"He doesn't recognize one. He may be in shock."

"And I may have a way of reaching him."

"Dana—"

"Trust me." She gazed down upon Chad like an ancient goddess preparing to pass judgment. "I know you tried to kill Remy last night. Did you come straight here afterward, to make sure the body was still hidden?"

"Dana, Dana," Chad said, clucking sadly. "You know about the Arceneaux brothers, and yet you can make such accusations? I assure you that when I arrived, Tristan had already exhumed the body. What does that suggest to you?"

"You knew exactly where to come. Or was it coincidence that you happened to meet Tris in this very spot, especially considering your tendency to get lost in the swamp?" She sighed with an air of much-tried patience. "I think you knew where Sally was all the time. You loved her, and she rejected you—"

"As you have, ma chère." He pointed at Remy. "For that."

Dana touched Remy's arm, and an electric charge of inopportune desire shot through him. "You aren't half the man—or beast—Remy is," she said, "but you may be the worst that humanity has to offer."

"Perhaps you didn't hear Tristan's confession."

"A forced confession," Remy snarled. "You twisted his mind, fils de putain."

"If I were you, Chad," Dana said, "I'd start telling the truth. I'm not sure I can control Remy if he decides to kill you."

Chapter 13

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Remy almost laughed at her air of aloof nonchalance. It might even have convinced him if he hadn't smelled the anxiety she hid so well. He bared his teeth at Chad and pulled against Dana's restraining hand like an attack dog on a cheap chain.

Chad shrank back against the tree. "You can be a party to my murder, Dana, but everything you care about will die with me."

"That remains to be seen." She turned her back on Chad and knelt before Tristan. "Tristan, look at me."

"He can't help you," Remy said to Dana, gripping her elbow. "He doesn't even hear us. You have to get him out of here. Leave Lacoste to me."

"That's the last thing I can do. Trust me, Remy. Please. What date, day of the week and month did Sally disappear?"

Remy knew that everything hung upon his decision—to let another person hold Tris's welfare in her hands, or take an irrevocable step that would save Tris's life, and perhaps his sanity, at the expense of his soul. And his own soul, as well.

Remy is not a murderer, Dana had said with all the courage and conviction he had come to admire. She believed in him. Now he had to believe in her.

He let out a harsh breath. "It was a Wednesday. September sixteenth."

Dana nodded and grasped Tristan's shoulders, compelling the younger man's undivided attention. "Tristan," she said gently, "this is Sally. Sally Daigle.

Today is Wednesday, September sixteenth, and it's time for us to find the

truth."

She knew her guess was right when Tristan's blank stare began to change. The fear in his eyes receded, along with the horror of memories he could not face. In their place was a calm pleasure, as if he had just discovered a rare flower growing out of the muck.

"Sally," he said. "I'm glad to see you."

"I know." She took his hands and knelt, drawing him down with her. "Do you remember why we came out to the swamp today?"

"To look for your special bird, the one I've seen in this area. I said I'd guide you to find it."

"That's right. We came out here together. We were alone."

"Yes." He ducked his head shyly. "Do you still have the ring I gave you?"

He must mean the pendant lying among Sally's bones. Dana had noticed it immediately, and the reminder chilled her to the core. "Yes, Tristan. I still have it. You gave it to me here, in the swamp. But something happened, didn't it? Something we didn't intend."

His eyes lost their confidence, but he was not yet frightened. "I didn't want to leave you even for a minute," he said. "But I thought I knew where to find your bird in a place you couldn't reach. I wanted to capture it for you, as a gift."

"So you left me alone. But I wasn't afraid."

"No. You were never afraid. But while I was gone, I heard voices. It sounded like fighting. Someone was with you. I came back." His face lost its color. "No. Sally. No."

"It's all right," Dana said. "Who was with Sally—with me—that day? What did you see?"

"You were lying on the ground," he said in a monotone. "You didn't move. He was with you. He had something... something—"

"Who was it, Tris?" Remy broke in, staring at Chad. "Who killed her?"

Tristan shook his head wildly. "He ran away. I tried to help her. Too late." A tear spilled from under his eyelid. "I left her alone. All alone."

"That's how I found him," Remy said, his face rigid with suppressed emotion. "He had Changed, and his memory was affected."

Dana took Tristan's face between her hands. "You're remembering now," she told him. "It's almost over, if you can be brave a little longer. For Sally's sake."

The haze in his eyes cleared, and Dana knew he recognized her for who she was. The vulnerable, childlike lines of his face took on a new definition, a firm maturity—a change just as startling as that of man into wolf.

"For Sally," he whispered. "I forgot so much. But when I met you, it started coming back. I knew where Sally's body was hidden. I didn't know if I put her here, but when I found the body where I expected it to be, I thought it meant I'd... Dieu."

"Go back to that day five years ago, Tris. Try to remember."

"I couldn't think when I saw her lying there. The man with her—"

"Was it Chad?" Remy demanded.

Tristan wouldn't look at him. "I hid until he came back. I saw him tie Sally to

the log and push it under the water. He took the ring—the chain I'd given her—"
"Damn you, Lacoste," Remy said quietly. "I should have killed you."

Tristan gave Chad no chance to reply. "I didn't think," he said. "I Changed and went after him. He was so afraid he dropped the knife—"

Tristan shot to his feet and ran in a tight circle on the bank, like a bloodhound pursuing a scent. He darted to the nearest hollow cypress stump, running his hands over the rough bark. He dashed to a second tree, and a third, searching every nearby stump with frantic purpose.

Out of the corner of her eye Dana saw Chad climbing to his feet. Remy slammed Lacoste against the tree, fell intent in every line of his body.

"Remy," she said. "Don't—"

She forgot her warning as soon as it left her mouth. Tristan had plunged, legs first, into the deep hollow of a cypress stump. From within she could hear the rustling of leaves and the echoing thumps of Tristan's body striking rotted wood. He emerged from the tree with a bundle in his hands and jumped nimbly to the ground.

"I remember," he said. He placed the bundle almost reverently on a patch of dry ground near Dana's feet and knelt beside it.

"Don't touch it!" Remy said, still poised to strike Chad at his slightest motion. "It may be evidence."

"It's all right, Remy." Carefully Tristan began to unwrap the top layers of what appeared to be sturdy nylon, perhaps the remains of a windbreaker. Underneath lay a relatively dry and much cleaner layer of cloth. And within the cloth... A knife. A hunting knife. Dark blood caked the handle and the dull blade like the stain of sin.

Remy swore. Chad had gone positively grim. Only Tristan seemed at peace.

"I didn't chase him very far," he said. "After I Changed to human again, I found the knife he dropped when he ran away. But I didn't remember what had happened—only that Sally was dead. I was afraid to touch the knife. I found Sally's jacket in the bushes, so I used that and my shirt to wrap the knife and hid it in the stump, under a pile of old leaves." He looked from Dana to Remy and finally at Chad. "I know who killed her."

"Quel génie," Remy said almost reverently. "You preserved the evidence." He turned on Chad with an evil grin. "It's over, you bastard. You're going down."

"You think it'll be that easy? I'll ruin you—and Dana."

Howling like a banshee, Tristan leaped up and flung himself at Chad. The two men tumbled into the slough. Remy shuddered, torn between the desire to protect Tris and the need to be in on the kill. He scrambled down the muddy bank.

"Remy!" Dana's voice seemed very distant, but it pulled him like an invisible bond. "Chad might be armed!"

Without breaking stride, Remy plunged into the battle. Chad's fragile humanity was no match for a loup-garou, even Tris. Already he cringed under Tristan's flailing blows, soaked to the skin and scratched in a dozen places. But Dana was right. If Chad was carrying, he was desperate enough to use lethal force. A bullet to the heart or brain could kill a werewolf as surely as it would a man.

Remy reached for the nearest body and caught Tris by his collar, ready to toss him to the bank. In that second, Chad recovered. Silver metal flashed in his hand. Tristan was directly in his line of fire. There was nothing left of reason in Chad's eyes, nothing to stop him from a second murder. Or a third.

"Don't be a fool, Chad," Dana said from behind Remy. "If you kill anyone now, you'll have to kill all of us. You know it won't work."

Lacoste staggered, his .38 fixed on Tris. "Are you so sure, Doctor?"

Dana took a step closer to the bank. Remy willed her away, to the safety her stubborn heart refused. "Go, Dana," he begged. "Go to the police."

She addressed Lacoste as if she hadn't heard Remy's plea. "You wanted Sally, and she rejected you," Dana said. "It wasn't right. You could have given her so much, and she chose to turn her back on all of it. On you. No one does that to Chad Lacoste."

Chad chuckled under his breath, but the sound was strangled and thin. "You think you can condescend, Dana? Do you think you're better than Sally? Better than me?"

"I think you want me the same way you wanted Sally. Maybe you thought you could start over. Maybe you were just crazy. But sooner or later, when I rejected you, you would have killed me."

"You stupid bitch. I could have made it right."

Remy lunged. Lacoste fell on one knee and pointed his gun directly at Dana.

Tristan yelled. Swamp mud sucked at Remy's legs like drying cement.

"I haven't got much to lose now, have I?" Chad said conversationally. "You really should have listened to me, Sally. Or is it Dana? I suppose it doesn't matter now, does it?" He began to squeeze the trigger.

"It's me," Remy snarled. "I took Dana from you. She always wanted me."

Chad's aim never wavered. "Is it any surprise when a bitch goes after a dog?"

Remy gave in to compulsion and Changed. Chad swung his gun wildly. One bullet cracked out before Remy shattered the bones of Chad's wrist.

Lacoste dropped the gun and fell into the water with a shriek. Remy felt Dana's warm hand slip through the upper layers of his fur as if he were a familiar and beloved pet.

"What do you think, boys?" she asked. "Should we bury him with Sally?"

Her words were so chilling that even Remy shivered, in spite of his own desire to feel his teeth around Lacoste's throat.

Tristan leaned against Remy's other side. "That will make us as bad as he is.

Can't we just hurt him a little?"

Chad had had enough. "I won't... I won't tell," he croaked. "I swear."

Dana sighed. "You made a mistake, Chad. You didn't know that we're all around you, we lous-garou. If anyone heard you talking about what you saw here today—anything about wolves at all—you'll wish you could spend your life in prison. It's time for you to tell the truth."

Chad whimpered. Remy stepped into the water. He had no opportunity to encourage Chad's confession, for the morning breeze brought the unmistakable scent of man—Detective Landry. Tristan was already on his feet, staring across the bayou.

Clothes or no clothes, Remy knew he couldn't be discovered in wolf shape. He backed out of the water, snatched Tristan's pendant in his jaws, and started for cover.

"Hold it," a deep voice said. "All of you. That means you, Remy Arceneaux." Remy dropped the pendant and froze, as much in surprise as in response to the command. Landry had addressed him. As a wolf.

"Thank God," Chad cried. "Officer, these people—"

"I'd advise you not to say anything else, Lacoste," Landry said. "We're going to do this by the book. And I'm not talking fairy tales." His gaze swept from the skeleton to the knife and at last to Dana. "I admire your gumption, Doctor, but not your sense. As for you—" He studied Remy with a faint frown. "Might as well come on back, Arceneaux. I'm sure you'll have a few interesting stories to tell me."

Chapter 14

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Chad hadn't put up much of a fight when Detective Landry took him into custody. He had certainly not hesitated to offer veiled bribes and not-so-veiled threats, reminding Landry that he had friends in the sheriff's department, not to mention the state government. Any fool could see he'd been framed. What the hell was Landry thinking, letting the Arceneaux brothers go free? He would have Landry booted out of his job, and he wasn't going to find employment anywhere else in this part of Louisiana...

Dana, standing nearby with Tristan and Remy, watched Landry assist Chad into the back of his car and lean over for a private discussion with the prisoner. Chad was remarkably quiet when Landry closed the door.

"Remy," Landry said, beckoning.

Remy adjusted the thin blanket over his shoulders and glanced at Dana. In the hectic moments that had followed Chad's capture, she'd managed to summarize her conversation with the detective at the houseboat. Now Remy knew what Landry knew, but he remained on his guard. He went to join the detective, moving stiffly with lowered head and clenched muscles.

The conversation was too soft for Dana to hear. She observed Remy's expression as it shifted from wariness to amazement and bemusement. After a few minutes Landry dismissed Remy with a nod and went to make another call on his radio.

"Well?" Dana asked.

"We're related," Remy said. "Incredible. Apparently his father was loup-garou, and he's known about Tris and me all along." He shrugged. "I never even guessed he was one of us. Landry wouldn't say much about it, except that he's kept his true nature a secret until now. Something about a promise to his mother."

"A werewolf detective," Dana mused. "Quite a lucky break."

"More than lucky. Landry was one of the detectives on the case when Sally disappeared. He'd heard all the rumors about Tris but never quite believed them.

He knew most loup-garou aren't killers, and those who are wouldn't commit a crime and stick around afterward. He suspected Lacoste but couldn't pin it on him without something solid. He's pretty sure that the new evidence will clear Tris and implicate Lacoste in Sally's murder."

"Thank God." Dana looked for Tris, who'd kept mostly to himself since Landry's opportune arrival. He seemed lost in his thoughts, but there was nothing in his behavior to suggest that he was anything less than sane.

"Poor Sally," he'd said as he'd walked beside Dana to the detective's vehicle.

"All she wanted was her bird. I wish I could have found it for her."

Dana had squeezed his shoulder. "You still can, Tris, when this is over. I think Sally would have liked that."

He'd nodded and stepped aside, perhaps pondering the events of the past few hours. Remy had watched him with some concern, but he also seemed to sense in his brother a change for the better.

"We'll have to go in for questioning," he said, following Dana's gaze, "but Landry thinks he can spare Tristan the worst of it." He lowered his voice. "Said something about misplacing Tristan's pendant. Loups-garou look after their own." And where do ordinary humans fit in? "I'm glad it's over. Sally will finally have justice, and maybe Tristan can get on with his life." And both of us with ours.

She tried to think past the lump in her throat. Her ordeal was over, but the next few days were going to be very hard for Tristan. There was still a chance that Chad would stick to his original threat of attempting to implicate Tris. He would certainly hire the finest lawyers the state had to offer. But the odds, and evidence, were stacked against him now, and Dana had a feeling that it wouldn't take much more to drain him of that psychopathic confidence in his own power. Even if Chad babbled about men who changed into wolves and back again, no one was likely to believe him—or admit to believing him, anyway.

"You were brilliant, you know."

Dana came out of her thoughts and focused on Remy's voice. "Was I?"

"Those sinister hints about werewolf revenge, pretending to be one of us. I wouldn't have thought of that myself—we're usually trying to avoid the 'evil monster' reputation, not encourage it. But you pushed him right over the edge." He grinned. "You haven't been holding out on me, chère? Hiding a little loup-garou blood you're not talking about?"

She shook her head. "When I came here, I didn't like who I was anymore. I thought I might find a part of myself I was missing, and I did. But it isn't what you think." She smiled dryly to conceal the ache in her heart. "Sorry to disappoint you."

"Disappoint me? You crazy, woman?" In full view of the car's occupants, Remy pulled Dana into his arms. "You scared me half to death back there. Lacoste might have shot you—"

"But he didn't. This was as much my fight as yours. Sally was my cousin. I think I was... brought here to help lay her to rest."

"You've done that, chère," he murmured, running his hands up and down her

mud-stained sleeves. "You're a hell of a lot braver than I'll ever be."

"Ah, yes. That's why you tried to keep me out of it and urged Chad to shoot you instead."

"I should never have let him get away with what he did."

"You were trying to protect Tris, your family. And even if you were wrong then, you made it right."

"I hope so. Still, getting you involved... "

"Maybe it's not much comfort, but I've had more fun these past few days than I've had in the past ten years."

"Fun?" Remy's hands tightened on her arms as if he wanted to shake her. "If this is your idea of fun, Dr. St. Cyr, I don't think I'll survive your notion of discomfort!"

She clucked with mock severity. "And here you're the one used to roughing it, while I'm the pampered city girl who arrived in Grand Marais wearing a Prada blouse and pearls. Don't tell me one little adventure has turned you into a wimp?"

"Only where you're concerned."

"Why, Monsieur Arceneaux," she said, dipping a slight curtsy, "I hardly know how to answer such overwhelming gallantry."

With a subtle shift of his hands he held her still, compelling her to meet his gaze. "There's only one way, *chère*." He swallowed. "You said you felt you were brought here to set Sally free. Is that the only reason?"

She held her breath. "Should there be another one?"

"Maybe... maybe you were supposed to come here. Not only to save Sally and find your real life, but to... *Enfer!*" He lifted her onto her toes, kissed her passionately and let her go. "Did I mention that Landry's half-human?"

For a moment she wasn't sure she'd heard him correctly. "You mean one of his parents was—"

"What does that tell you?"

"Werewolves and humans... they can—" Where was this unaccustomed modesty coming from? She was a doctor, for pity's sake. How many naked men had she seen in her career? She'd even kissed a few in her private life.

Not one of those men had been Remy Arceneaux.

"Our people wouldn't have survived this long as a race if we kept completely to ourselves," he said. "Whatever the elders say, we couldn't live without humans, no matter how much trouble they cause."

She felt positively dizzy. "I'm sure there are plenty of women who'd be willing to... contribute to your genetic diversity."

His voice softened to a near whisper. "You don't want children? I can understand—"

Oh, God. "I want—" I want your children. "Would they be able to change?"

"It's a dominant trait." He nuzzled her neck. "How 'bout it, *chère*?"

"What are you trying to say, Remy?"

"I'm saying that I can't live without you, Dana St. Cyr. If you think you can put up with me and my swamp."

"Are you asking me to stay with you?"

"I'm asking you to marry me and make a life here, in this parish."

Be sure, Dana. Be completely sure. She clamped down on her irrational joy and faced him squarely. "I thought you wanted a life in the city, excitement, challenge. You can go back to that now that Tristan will be cleared."

"I could. But you see, I've learned how to appreciate the things I couldn't when I was younger. The swamp is a part of me. And you... you've become a part of me, too."

She searched his eyes. "Is that enough? I'm only human. I can't do half the things you can."

"But you can heal, Dana. You have your own gifts. If you can see yourself fixing up simple country folk instead of rich city slickers—" He faltered. "Most people in this parish live from paycheck to paycheck. I'm not sure how much market there'd be for plastic surgery. Maybe you'd rather—"

"I left that life when I came to Louisiana," she said firmly. "I'm not going back. I think I may even have found the courage to take up the kind of practice I gave up a few years out of medical school. Not for money, but for something else."

"For love." Remy took her face between her hands. "You could come to love this place, these people. My people, and the ones like your aunt Gussie. They aren't bad, you know, only ignorant."

"And perhaps, with a human at your side, you might dispel some of that ignorance."

"It's a start." He rested his forehead against hers. "Not just any human will do, you know. It has to be the one I love. My wife."

Dana breathed in the words and held on to them until they filled her chest to bursting. "I suppose it's a good thing that I love you. It'll make putting up with your wisecracks a little easier."

"You love me?" Remy grabbed her waist and lifted her off her feet. "Say that again."

"I love you."

Remy's grin spread and spread until he couldn't contain it any longer. He bent back his head and howled until the birds rose in squawking masses from the trees and Landry jumped out of the car to investigate the ruckus.

"Keep it down, Arceneaux," he said gruffly. "You're scaring the prisoner."

Remy took Dana by the hands and danced her in a circle, ignoring his blanket as it went sailing off into a mud puddle. "Now, ain't that just the damndest shame," he drawled. "Let's give him something else to think about, shall we?"

And he kissed her until the cypress trees spun overhead.

Dear Reader,

I'm very excited to introduce my first work for Harlequin/Silhouette, "Kiss of the Wolf." When editor Leslie Wainger approached me about contributing to a dark fantasy anthology, I jumped at the chance. I've always considered her a leading

light in the world of paranormal romance.

I knew immediately what I wanted to write—an idea that had been floating around in my head for years. After doing a number of historical paranormal novels, I was eager to return to a contemporary setting. I'd always been fascinated by southern Louisiana and Acadian culture. And since werewolves and the bayou just seem to go together, it was natural for me to combine the two in a story based on my loup-garou series.

Remy Arceneaux is a bit of a rogue and an outsider. He and his brother Tristan have "reputations" in the town of Grand Marais; their names are connected with the mysterious disappearance of a local woman. It takes the arrival of Dana St. Cyr, a sophisticated doctor from San Francisco, to break open the mystery and uncover Remy's secrets. But can their love survive the truth?

I hope that you enjoyed *Kiss of the Wolf* as much as I enjoyed writing it. I love to hear from readers. You can reach me at Sue@Susankrinard.com.

Sincerely,
Susan Krinard