

HEART OF THE GRIZZLY SERIES BOOK 1

BEAR *in* MIND

SHE'S THE KIND OF TROUBLE
HE CAN'T KEEP HIS HANDS OFF.



USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

TERRY SPEAR

BEAR IN MIND

HEART OF THE GRIZZLY SERIES

BOOK 1

TERRY SPEAR

CONTENTS

Synopsis

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Epilogue

Acknowledgments

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Also by Terry Spear

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SYNOPSIS

Grizzly bear shifter Amy Rutherford has special abilities where she can hear voices in her head—the thoughts and feelings of others—and she needs to get control of it. It started way before she nearly died in a car accident during a rainstorm where her parents perished, and she's sure the crash wasn't an accident. But nobody believes her. She can't let go of what had happened, and storms bring on a case of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. She is on a blind date while celebrating her sister and her husband's anniversary while a storm rages overhead at the dance club. She's assaulted by all the voices in her head, until one stands out. A man is observing her, hiding his dark secrets from her, or trying to—and she's not sure if he's one of the good guys, or not.

Cedric Shader is a grizzly bear shifter and knows not to contact Amy the way he did at the dance club, instead of trying to meet her face to face first. But he senses her vulnerability and that she is experiencing psychic overload, just like he would when he was a kid. Now, he uses his ability to investigate murders, but the crime scene memories stay with him, though he tries hard to compartmentalize them, and he doesn't want her to witness them. He told himself he is here on a job, not to become involved with a woman who has psychic issues. But she's in trouble—and he's certain she needs him to teach her how to cope. Worse, she believes someone had murdered her parents, and he's beginning to wonder if she's right. With a break-in at her apartment, and a possible connection to the murder of her parents, they're running out of time before the person or persons kills again.

This book is dedicated to Gloria Meuse for following along on my various shifter journeys. Thanks for joining the pack, or in this case, the bear sleuth, for another wild adventure!

Before Amy Rutherford celebrated her sister and brother-in-law's fifth wedding anniversary tonight at Brannigans, a steak restaurant and club, she wanted to take a run on the wild side as a grizzly bear at Glacier National Park where other grizzly bears, and even black bears, made it their home, thirty-five miles away from her apartment in Kalispell, Montana. She hadn't had any visions of danger—for herself—not that they were always forthcoming as a forewarning to her. A storm was coming, and she wanted to do this before it arrived.

She should be safe in the park as long as no one was illegally hunting grizzlies. Or she didn't run into a grizzly with spring cubs that were five to six months old. Or cross the path of a mother protecting her yearlings born last spring. Amy also had to watch for males who might be looking for a mate.

After a grueling week of chasing down husbands who weren't paying alimony or child support, though she'd had to do the same with a wife in one case, and other investigative issues as a private investigator, she just needed to get out and run for a while in her fur coat. She hadn't done so in several weeks and she thought she might be able to deal better with the storm and having a blind date tonight if she enjoyed nature for a while. Besides, spring was one of the most spectacular times in the park. With a million miles of acreage and 734 trails, it was perfect for a grizzly bear adventure. Though she planned to stay off the human trails.

It was dark by the time she reached the park, cut the engine on her car, and got out to walk into the woods—off the beaten path. With her bear sight, she had excellent night vision and was particularly adept at detecting movement so she could see what she needed to in the dark. She pulled off her clothes, tucked them under leaf litter and called on the urge to shift. Her body warmed at once as she turned into her grizzly, her fur tipped with silver, her undercoat a darker brown fur. She began to walk through the wooded park, smelling scents and listening for sounds that might warn of humans or other dangers nearby. The bugs were singing their incessant songs, an occasional moth flying across her path, a few fireflies lighting the way, the full moon shining through the trees. It was a spectacular night, and she was glad she had taken the time to come here and stroll through the woods before the weather turned foul.

Full-time grizzlies often used the trails that people did. The trails were easier to hike on and the bears walked about the same speed as humans. But she didn't want to scare any humans and really, if wild grizzlies were walking on the trails, she wanted to steer clear of them also.

For about an hour, she meandered along one of the streams fed by alpine glaciers and snowpack that had melted and eventually ended up dumping into one of the rivers. She breathed in the scents of rabbits, foxes, deer, grizzlies, and black bears. She drank her fill from the stream and decided it was time to head back to her car. She needed to return home and change clothes to go to dinner. That's when she saw a grizzly and her three spring bear cubs walk out of the woods to drink water from the stream upwind of her. Amy made a calculated retreat. Not only did she not want to fight a mother grizzly that was protecting her young, she definitely didn't want to be injured and have to hide the fact from humans. Grizzly shifters would understand. Humans wouldn't.

That's when she saw a male grizzly trailing her, a light tan, close to white. The males would often trail a female for days before one approached if he was interested in a female. She didn't recognize him from her bear sleuth, though she hadn't seen all the bears in their fur coats. If she was downwind of

him, she would be able to smell his scent and recognize if it was someone she knew.

She headed back to where she'd left her clothes, hoping she'd lose the bear. It really was time to go home to get ready for her dinner engagement.

She saw another couple of male grizzly bears. The light colored one took off with great haste. Sometimes a couple of bears would be after the same female. She could see stirring up a fight between two hefty male grizzlies and she wasn't even on the market for a grizzly bear. Well, not a grizzly that was all bear anyway. Though meeting someone who believed in her psychic abilities was probably not going to happen and so she really wasn't even looking for a bear shifter to date, to her older sister's consternation. Rebecca believed Amy needed a man in her life to protect her and take care of her, but no one could protect Amy from the visions running rampant in her head.

She glanced back at the two male bears. Wait. Was the darker furred bear, David Shader, one of the vice presidents of the First National Bank of Kalispell?



CEDRIC SHADER and his twin brother, David, were running through the forest as grizzlies in Glacier National Park after he had returned home to investigate a triple homicide for the sheriff's department. Since he had returned here, he'd been dying to get into his bear suit and run with his brother. They were having a great adventure, just like old times when they were kids but then Cedric veered off in the direction of where the first of the crime scenes was located in the whitebark pines where a forty-three-year-old psychologist, Patrick Pascal, had been shot and died. David glanced at him. Yeah, Cedric was here to conduct an investigation of his own into the three whitebark pine murders and he hadn't meant to drag his brother into it. But Cedric couldn't help himself. They'd parked their car at the trailhead so they were close by the

murder site, and he wanted to check it out just in case he could learn anything.

Until he spied a female grizzly with her spring cubs, and they made a wide circle around her. It wasn't long after that when they caught sight of a male blond grizzly bear following a silver-tipped grizzly female, no young-uns, thankfully, but she wasn't having any part of the male. Cedric and David came onto the scene, chasing off the other male. The female took one look at Cedric and David and headed off in a hurry.

He wanted to laugh; his brother grunted. Both of them were bachelors, and though his brother might be on the lookout for a she-bear shifter, Cedric certainly wasn't. Not only that but the lone female was probably a wild bear. But then he read her thoughts—she'd recognized David. Did David know her then?

After that, Cedric and his brother spent an hour and a half just enjoying their jaunt, then headed back to where they'd hidden their clothes and smelled the scent of a she-bear that had passed this way. Not only was she a grizzly, she was human and he wondered if she was the one who knew David. Unless another female grizzly shifter was out here.

The brothers shifted and hurried to dress, David smiling at him.

“You better catch up to her.” Cedric wouldn't be surprised if David took him up on his comment.

David laughed. “She has accounts at my bank, but I'm not interested in her.”

“Most of the bears in the sleuth bank with you. Does that mean you're not going to ever date any of the single ones? Or is she mated already?” Though Cedric figured her mate would have been with her if she had one.

“Nah, she's just not interested in me. But you could always check her out.”

“You know me and mating a woman isn't in my future.”

“Yeah, you always say that but if you met the right woman, who knows how it might turn out.”

Not with the kind of work Cedric did chasing down murderers. His psychic awareness could really put a damper on things also.

Still, when Cedric and his brother were dressed and headed back to David's truck, Cedric couldn't help but take deeper whiffs of her scent, wondering if she was the lone female they had seen. "Was that the one we saw then? The lone she-bear that the blond bear was following?"

David raised his brows and smiled at him.

"I'm just curious in case I see her again in the woods in her fur coat."

"Yeah, it was."

She was a beautiful bear, a striking coloring with her silver tipped fur and dark brown guard hairs. Now if Cedric ran into her again in the park, he'd be able to let her know he was safe to be around—as in he wasn't a wild bear looking to mate her—and that he was a shifter too.

"So why isn't she your type?" Cedric asked his brother.

"She is all sorts of trouble, believe me." David wouldn't say any more than that, and Cedric was more curious than ever. "I can't believe you had to visit that one murder location."

"Yeah, you can."

"Well, that's true. Did you get any clues from it before the she-bear distracted you?"

Cedric smiled at David. It wasn't like him to be easily distracted by a female bear shifter when he was on a mission.

On spring nights like this when the Montana May winds began to gust and howl, shaking the red osier dogwood's white flowers and pink cherry blossom flowers in an unwilling dance, and the heavens threatened to weep, Amy felt the killer on the prowl. Every streak of lightning brought back the ten-year-old memory of a gun's muzzle flash piercing the black rain, the squealing of tires on wet pavement, and her mother's shrieks before the car crashed and her mother and father died. Amy reminded herself she was a grizzly bear shifter and growly, if she needed to be and she could take care of herself, but it didn't lessen the anxiousness she felt whenever a violent thunderstorm threatened the area.

Shaking loose of the grim thoughts, Amy remembered her jaunt earlier in the Glacier National Park running through the forest as a grizzly and that it had made her feel so good. Her sister and Brent had picked her up at her apartment and drove her to the restaurant, slash bar, slash dance club. Rebecca was a pretty redhead and had green eyes like Amy. Brent was equally redheaded, though he was blue-eyed, and Amy was determined to help them celebrate their fifth wedding anniversary in style. They had been running a little late to pick her up at her place because Rebecca and Brent had been giving each other presents before they left their house.

"You smell of the fragrance of the forest," Rebecca said to Amy, sounding surprised. "You went running as a bear in the park?"

“Yeah, I needed to do it before the storm hits, and before celebrating your anniversary dinner, of course.”

“You shouldn’t go by yourself, you know. Not after the whitebark pine murders were committed out there recently. Brent and I are going to run in our fur coats tomorrow night,” Rebecca said. “You’re welcome to come with us if you’d like.”

“Thanks, but I’ll be working.” Maybe. But Amy didn’t want to impose on Rebecca and Brent’s time together.

Brent was wearing a new whitebark pinecone tie tack and Rebecca had a new whitebark pinecone necklace. Amy smiled at them. They had actually met each other during the spring while climbing a whitebark pine to grab some pine nuts in their grizzly coats in Glacier National Park. They had been in the same grade in high school but seeing each other in the national park had been the first time that they’d truly met. After that, Rebecca and Brent began dating and that was it. They knew they were meant to be together.

Amy sighed. Brent had arranged for her to meet with a blind date, a coworker of his, for dinner tonight—despite telling her brother-in-law in the sternest terms that it *wasn’t* necessary! But they were worried about her and wanted her to be with someone and not there as a third wheel, as if being on a blind date would make her feel more comfortable.

They finally arrived at the restaurant and went inside. Darkened with low lights for ambience and soft classical music playing in the background, the restaurant didn’t intrude on Amy’s fine-tuned senses. She figured she could make it through dinner and drinks at least. As long as patrons from the nearby lounge didn’t get too vocal, though she could hear the dance music playing in the background. And as long as the thunderstorm wasn’t too violent.

As soon as she sat on her chair, she envisioned a dark-haired man who was the perfect picture of tall, dark, and handsome, frowning, concentrating on something, alone. The visual sensation faded and for a second, she wished *he* was her blind date. The same music had been playing overhead in the

image she had of him, and she was certain he was here. She wondered why in the world she would have a vision of him. She hoped it wasn't something serious, like when she'd had to save a choking victim in a restaurant when he had taken too big of a bite of meat and nearly died. Luckily, she'd envisioned his distress, located him, and performed the Heimlich maneuver on him.

She took in a deep breath of the mouth-watering aroma of hickory-smoked steaks filling the air. The air conditioner hummed on high and antiqued ceiling fans spun around in a speedy dance to further spread the cold air, chilling her. She shivered.

Then she saw a man who appeared to be her blind-date, Howard Stenson, standing stiffer than a mature oak tree near the hostess stand, dressed in a dark gray business suit. He looked as uncomfortable as she felt as he tugged at his gray tie to loosen it. His gray eyes connected with Brent, and he smiled, then his attention shifted to her. The man had a pleasant face, but a wrinkle etched his forehead. His hair was the same color as hers, a light brown, only it was manicured with the utmost care, not a hair out of place. In fact, she imagined he'd used hairspray to keep it perfectly intact. Whereas the wind had tossed hers around, and she envisioned it could use some major repair work. He was *not* the intriguing man she had seen in her vision.

Howard joined them and with his hand outstretched to shake hers, he smiled at her. He was a grizzly too, but she didn't think he could do well in a bear-to-bear confrontation. He seemed too meek, too mild, too boring. She detected he had no physical interest in her, just like she wasn't interested in him that way. The silvertip grizzly's sense of smell was more acute than a human's, seven times more so than even a bloodhound's. The grizzly had more smell receptors than any other animal that existed on land.

"You must be Amy Rutherford," he said.

"Yes, and you're Howard Stenson." She stood and quickly slipped her hand into his with an extremely light touch and moved it with lightning speed so as not to experience his

uneasy emotions. He wore them like a slip of sheer fabric, while her own were already in enough turmoil. Even though bear shifters' senses were heightened compared to humans, hers were through-the-roof sensitive. She suddenly envisioned a dark movie theater, smelled popcorn, and knew she wasn't alone. She thought she'd be there tonight, even though she had no plans to go to the movies.

The dim lights shuddered as a burst of lightning hit close by, a flash of light spearing the inky blackness outside, visible through the large glass windows, and the resulting thunder shook the building and Amy.

"Let's take our seats, why don't we?" Brent asked, guiding Rebecca into hers, while Howard gallantly helped Amy with her chair.

Her sister seemed as nervous as Amy, not about the storm, but about how Amy was reacting to the sensory overload.

Amy knew Howard lived at home with his mother, though there could be any number of reasons he did so. The problem was she wished she could meet someone she liked who was nearer her age, who wasn't already married or divorced with a string of children he was supporting.

She blew out her breath and lifted her menu off the table. What difference did it make? No one would be able to understand her anyway.

"So what did Mr. Roberts say about our tax cut proposals for the Venezuelan operation?" Brent asked Howard.

Rebecca must have kicked her husband under the table for talking business, because as soon as he spoke, his head pivoted towards her, and he sat back in his chair, startled. Then he gave her one of his sheepish grins. At thirty, he still had a baby face and looked perfectly admonished.

Howard looked like he got the point too and wisely didn't answer Brent's question.

"To Rebecca and Brent," Amy said, raising her glass of water in a salute until the champagne was served. "To many more happy years."

“Here, here,” everyone said.

After they sipped their water, Brent leaned over and kissed Rebecca on the lips to seal the toast.

Which forced a shudder of need through Amy. She wasn't jealous of her sister's happiness, yet she wished she had someone in her life like that.

Another clap of thunder struck even closer by, and Amy nearly dropped her water glass, stifling a scream. The blood rushed into her ears at an alarming rate.

“It's just a storm. Nothing to worry about,” a voice said inside her head. A *deep*, manly voice that shouldn't have been there.

Startled to hear him speaking to her psychically, she practically held her breath, listening for any further “conversation,” but not hearing any, she knew then she was going crazy.

Everyone was talking at the table but her. Did anyone even notice?

Rebecca studied her for a moment, then smiled and asked Howard, “So how is your mother doing with her oil paints? Has she won any more contests?”

Rebecca knew what Amy was going through. She was trying to cover for Amy's storm phobia, thank God for small favors. Brent knew too, and when Rebecca ran dry, he jumped into the conversation to keep it going. Howard didn't even seem to notice Amy wasn't really there. At least her family was keeping him entertained.

Glancing around the room, Amy looked for whoever might have spoken to her telepathically. Unless she'd just imagined it, but the possibility someone had linked with her thoughts both intrigued and worried her. That had never happened to her before. Her thoughts should have been private, and she definitely wanted to keep them that way.

Casually, she studied a gray-haired couple speaking at one table. Both were too busy talking to each other. She didn't believe the man could have been the one who had spoken to

her. At a booth, a family of five passed a plate full of stuffed mushroom appetizers around the table. Only the father was old enough to have such a deep internal male voice, but he seemed way too busy concentrating on feeding melted cheese to the toddler in the highchair. Amy switched her attention to another table, this one where two women and two guys focused on drinking and eating, none of whom seemed to notice she existed. She saw a blond-haired guy, well, at least the back of his head, leaning over a table and eating alone. Maybe him?

“The storm is quieting,” the man said telepathically to her with reassurance. *“There’s nothing to worry about.”*

So why didn’t she feel reassured? Because he was real, not a figment of her imagination, and the knowledge he could read her thoughts, her feelings, unsettled her. She continued to scan the faces of the people at the nearby tables. Maybe he was seated in the lounge, or maybe he was dancing.

His smile touched her thoughts.

Her cheeks blushed with heat, and her body temperature had to have risen a good ten degrees.

“Amy, *Amy*,” her sister said, finally breaking into her thoughts. “The waitress is waiting for your order.”

At that moment, Amy wanted to melt into the floor. How long had she been zoned out? It had happened before, but not like this, not on a date, even if it was a blind date. Certainly not because some guy was telepathically communicating with her.

After selecting a ribeye steak, baked potato, and blue cheese dressing on a salad, Amy handed the menu to the waitress.

“Let’s freshen up,” her sister said, and Amy knew she was going to grill her. This was why her sister and brother-in-law worried about her living alone. They thought she needed help; that she needed someone to look after her. She grimaced at the notion.

“I’m fine,” Amy said all the way to the restroom.

“You are *not* fine, Amy. The storm is scaring you to pieces, but something else seemed to have caught your attention. I mean, I know that faraway look you get, like you’ve caught some conversation that has you worried. Or you had a premonition. So what gives?”

Rebecca and Brent already troubled themselves enough about her, and she knew if she mentioned a stranger had telepathically communicated with her, Rebecca would have a fit. Who was he? What did he want? Was he evil?

Wasn’t it like a strange man inviting himself into her home, but really worse, invading her most personal thoughts?

Yes. And she couldn’t tell her sister the truth. If she did, she would ruin their anniversary celebration.

No one in the bear sleuth was like Amy. So even though she was a bear like all the rest of them, she was a total oddity still, as if she belonged in a different kind of category of weird. It didn’t matter that some other person was psychic like her. He still wasn’t a shifter.

“Nothing. Yes, it’s the storm. You know me and...well, storms,” Amy told her sister.

“Did you ever go and see the psychologist that I had recommended? Patrick Pascal?” Rebecca asked as they passed several more tables on their way to the restroom.

“You mean the one who was murdered in the strand of whitebark pine trees?” Amy asked.

Rebecca stared at her for a moment. “Oh, right. But I recommended you see him way before that happened.”

“No, I hadn’t seen him.”

“Amy.”

“I have PTSD from the car accident during the storm. All right? I’ve read about it. I understand about these things.”

“You feel guilty about the accident.” Rebecca pushed open the restroom door.

Amy frowned at her sister. “We are discussing this in the restroom at a restaurant while I’m on a blind date celebrating your anniversary with Brent?”

“I just think if you see a psychologist, he might give you some way of coping better with storms. And yes, I can never talk to you about this. Because you’re zoning out so much tonight, it’s really on my mind,” Rebecca said.

They entered separate stalls, finished their business, then left them and both washed their hands at sinks next to each other. At least no one else was in the restroom at the time, for which Amy was grateful.

What Rebecca wasn’t saying was that she thought the psychologist could help with Amy’s psychic condition. “You know a psychologist wouldn’t believe I’m psychic. And that’s a big part of the issues I’m having.” Like now she was hearing a voice specifically speaking to her in her head!

Rebecca raised a brow. “You could prove it to me fairly easily.”

Amy rolled her eyes and left the restroom, her sister trailing behind her. “If I could easily prove such a thing, I’d make headline news. My visions are unpredictable, and you know that.”

Suddenly, she had a bizarre image of a bank auditor shaking David Shader’s hand. She nearly ran into a couple before Rebecca grabbed her arm and pulled her out of their path and they stopped walking.

“What now?” Rebecca asked.

“David Shader’s bank passes their government audit.”

“What?” Rebecca said.

Amy shrugged. “I told you my visions are unpredictable. I have no idea why he would be important to me right now.”

“You’re not dating David in this vision, are you?”

“No. He barely notices I’m a customer at the bank. Or maybe he’s not interested in me because I have a reputation.”

This time Rebecca rolled her eyes. “Because you’re psychic.”

“Right.” A few members of their bear sleuth knew about Amy’s ability. Though most didn’t believe in them. She didn’t really share about them either, unless it was something that was so important she had to—like when one of the she-bears went into labor and Amy needed to contact her mate right away to go home and take her to the shifter clinic. The image just popped up in Amy’s head and what could she do? She had to warn him. Of course after the fact he wanted to know how she knew, but he didn’t believe she had a premonition about it. At least her sister and Brent totally believed in her abilities. Then again, she was always revealing something to them that she shouldn’t have known about, so they had no choice but to believe in her ability.

“You haven’t spoken to Howard once. Don’t you like him?” Rebecca asked.

“Sure, he’s...he’s a nice guy.” Though he hadn’t seemed to notice Amy hadn’t talked to him once. At least she didn’t think so. She wasn’t interested in Howard.

Part of her knew the unknown clairvoyant who had been speaking to her in her mind meant danger, his thoughts dark, brooding, yet soothing. Something deep inside of him saw the evil of the world and kept it at bay. She had her own demons to fight. No way did she want to see his also. Yet, part of her wanted to get to know him better, someone like herself, who could see into a person’s sinister thoughts, but had learned to avoid them. Could he show her how to shield herself from malevolence? Maybe he didn’t know how to either. Maybe the darkness had consumed him, like she feared it would her.

“Amy?” Rebecca patted her shoulder.

“Yes?”

“I asked if you wanted to return to the table.”

“Oh, yes. Sorry. I didn’t sleep well last night.”

“Did the nightmares return?”

When did the nightmares *not* return? The storm, the accident, the screams, the silence. After ten years she figured they should have gone away.

Amy tried giving her a convincing smile. “Nah. I drank too much water last night. I had a nightmare about looking for a bathroom and couldn’t find one. It really disturbed my sleep.” Which was true, but she still had the nightmare too.

Rebecca nodded. “You’ll tell Brent and me if you have the nightmares again?”

“Of course.” *Not.*

When they returned to the table, Howard hurried to pull out the chair for Amy.

“Thanks,” she said, but her mouth dropped open when the clairvoyant asked, “*Is he a good friend?*”

My, my, aren’t we nosy? Yet, she sensed male possessiveness. Why? Because she was like him? And he thought she should be with him? She scoffed at the notion. What would he think if he knew she was... She hesitated to think of being a bear shifter. He could read her thoughts!

She swallowed hard. He saw her. He had to be close by. Or maybe not. If the images seeped into her thoughts, she could see people and places even when she was far from the scene.

The conversation between her sister, Brent, and Howard started up again, and she noticed everyone at her table looked at her as if they waited to see if she’d make an intelligible response.

The male voice laughed inside her head. A good-natured, honestly amused laugh, irritating her to the core.

“Excuse me?” she asked, trying to ignore the voice in her head.

“I asked if you would like to dance after we eat our meal,” Howard said.

“Oh, no, I never dance.”

“*Never?*” the psychic prompted.

Amy couldn't conceal her annoyance, and frowned, then looked around at some of the tables farther from her. "*Get out of my head and stay out!*" She turned to Howard and amended, "Well, maybe just one." She wanted to turn into— she stifled the thought at once.

She swore both Rebecca and Brent sighed with relief.

The unknown man smiled.

She sensed it just like she could hear the laughter when he telepathically communicated with her. Not wanting to dance, to absorb the vibrations of the heavy music, her senses were acutely attuned to everything around her, not just because she was a bear but because she could hear the sounds even more distinctively with her "gift." She hoped she could manage one dance, before she experienced overload, to pretend for once, she was normal like everyone else.

Cedric Shader knew he shouldn't have contacted Amy the way he had, not without speaking to her in person first, revealing he had the same ability as her, then shared it with her at some later time. But he was certain he wouldn't see her again, and the thought of reaching out to another person like himself overwhelmed his better judgment, particularly because of the job he did.

Sometimes the way in which he investigated a murderer's crime left visual imprints in his memories, and though no one else would ever know, someone with her abilities could perceivably catch sight of them if he let his wall down to his compartmentalized thoughts by accident.

Yet, he couldn't ignore how the storm was frightening her. Calming her fear had been tantamount, though he worried he might scare her even more. But his reaching out to her had taken her mind off the storm. Despite attempting to hide his gruesome work from her, he sensed she'd gathered something of what he was about. Even so, she still seemed intrigued to learn who he was.

Danger shadowed his actions, yet he felt compelled to get to know the woman better. Who would understand the work he did better than someone who had the same abilities? The notion was more than idiotic; he could endanger her life too. The possibility always existed that one of the murderers he chased down might learn who he was and target his friends or family.

She was—a bear shifter, like him. He felt a sense of relief wash over her because she had thought about being a bear—naturally, because she was one—so many times and he had picked up on it. But he'd cloaked that part of himself, never revealing the truth to her. He was so used to keeping that part of him secret in his thoughts, just in case anyone else could read them, he hadn't considered how much of a relief it would be to her to know he was also one. She'd even thought about shifting into her bear and chasing him off, which had amused him. He wasn't part of the bear sleuth she belonged to, so she didn't know him. On the other hand, he didn't know her either. Except that he'd smelled her scent and realized she was the bear he'd seen running in the park and now he'd seen her in her human persona.

He sipped his wine while he studied the tall woman with pretty light brown hair, her black dress clinging lovingly to all her curves, seated at the table. What would it be like to love a woman like that, who could be a growly bear like him and a psychic all in one?

Earth shattering, he imagined.

She squirmed in her seat and strained to listen to her companions' table conversation, but her eyes searched for him, time and again. Would she be pleased with what she saw?

Again, he admonished himself for wanting to get any closer than this to her. But he was already losing the battle when Howard took Amy into the other room to dance after they finished their meals, his hand barely touching her elbow. Cedric wanted to shove him aside and take his place.

Right away he knew the guy wasn't good enough for her. She needed a man who could understand and connect with her special abilities. A bear who would fight off her suitors and win the she-bear's affections.

With a glass of gin and tonic in hand, Cedric moved further into the room to watch her dancing with the guy. People chattering nonstop, loud music, and unspoken verbal messages assaulted her receptive senses all at once. He sensed the bombardments and her inability to block them.

Reaching for her hand with his mind, Cedric took hold. She gasped. Attempting to reassure her, he smiled. He'd never met another female clairvoyant before, never realized how easy it would be to connect. For an instant, he dropped the walls he'd constructed around his feelings.

Mentally, her hand didn't grip his back, instead, her mind reeled with confusion.

Wanting her compliance so he could help her, but more than that, he craved her trust, he implored, *"Take my hand, and I'll attempt to shield you from some of the surrounding noise."*

At first, she balked. He wasn't surprised, nor did he blame her. After all, this had to be a totally new experience for her, as it was for him.

Which gave him a thought. If he explained how he'd never met a female clairvoyant before and that he only wanted to assist her, maybe she'd realize he wasn't...wasn't what? After a relationship? He nearly laughed at himself. How could anyone like him, the world's most confirmed bachelor, ever consider an association with a woman like Amy?

"I've never met a woman like you before who's like me. I sense your discomfort. Will you let me help you?"

"I'll...I'll get through this by myself. Thank you. It's...well, it's rude to barge into someone's thoughts and..." She glanced down at her hand, and he let go. *"Thank you."*

Stubborn. Independent. Just like him, but he wasn't letting her out of his sight when he knew how potentially dangerous it was if she didn't block out some of the stimuli. *"I'll be right here if you need me."*

She glanced around, but didn't spy him standing with several others, sipping cocktails while Howard eased her through the crowded dance floor.

As soon as Cedric's touch withdrew from her, he could feel her discomfort level escalating higher and higher.

Bodies continually bumped into her, and Howard's hand holding hers didn't seem to help.

Her breathing rate increased, and her thoughts began to blur.

“Breathe more slowly, Amy. Breathe,” Cedric pleaded, slamming his glass down on an occupied table, startling the couple seated there. He shoved through the dancers in his path, attempting to reach her before she passed out.

She wasn't going to make it on her own. Lights against a black velvet night appeared in her mind's eye, just as Cedric stepped up beside her and the music ended. He smelled her delightful scent and again recognized it from his jaunt with his brother through the woods.

“Hi, Howard. I'm an old friend of Amy's.” Cedric grabbed her arm, bringing her mind out of the darkness, shielding her from the onslaught of sensations. “We went to school together, and, well, you don't mind if we dance, do you? We haven't seen each other in years.”

He noticed then that Amy's brother-in-law was advancing across the dance floor in human-grizzly bear mode. “Amy?” Cedric asked, trying to force her acceptance before Brent intruded.

She nodded, finally acquiescing to his strength. A small bit of triumph welled up in Cedric's chest. “Will it be all right with you, Howard?”

“Yeah, yeah, sure.” Howard didn't seem all that interested in Amy, until another guy butted in, then he wasn't happy about it. Grizzly bear male pride.

Cedric hoped Howard didn't realize he shouldn't have known his name. All Cedric cared about now was helping Amy, convincing her that he could teach her ways in which to cope. He swept her away into the swirling dancers, away from her family, and the safety she'd always known. He sensed in her the lightness that could illuminate his darkness. She didn't deal with the crazies like he did, didn't see the dark part of their natures, their twisted minds. She avoided them rather, like he should have done.

But he realized too, she needed him, even if only for a brief time, so he could teach her how to harness her abilities. She required help to fight the feelings that overwhelmed her in places like this, hemming her in on all sides, crushing her ability to think straight. She needed him, and the feeling beleaguered him.

Others desired his assistance, but this wasn't the same. In fact, for a fleeting instant, *he* needed *her*, the feel of her hand on his shoulder and the other in his hand, sharing a moment of tenderness, her large green eyes studying his, trying to fathom who and what he was. A feeling he thought dead, stirred deep inside him. The desire to belong, to share his life with someone, instead of living his lonely existence, swamped his empathic abilities. He wanted to stamp out the feeling, avoid entanglements, keep everyone away from what he did.

He had a job to do, find killers and put them behind bars. A dangerous business that precluded his having too many close friends that could put them in jeopardy too.

“Cedric Shader,” he offered, unable to shake the desire to protect her sensitive senses in the noisy environment.

She glanced back at the edge of the dance floor where her sister, Brent, and Howard stood watching her as if she were the Crown Jewels and the mystery man was going to steal her away.

“Your family is mighty possessive.”

“They’ll be upset when I tell them I didn’t know you before tonight.” She looked over every bit of him, as if she were memorizing every detail. Despite not revealing any outward emotion, her thoughts didn’t hide her interest in him physically.

The idea definitely boosted his ego. No entanglements, he reminded himself. “Then don’t tell them we don’t know each other.”

Her gaze riveted to his, and her hand gripped his tighter. “I don’t lie to them.”

Yet, he'd heard her telling her sister she was fine, when he knew that was far from the truth. "Then you'll tell them I met you through a telepathic communication." No lies, but he had the sneaking suspicion her family wouldn't want him near her again if they could help it.

"You're one of us. I...hadn't expected that." She looked down at his shirt, her hair caressing her flushed cheeks, making him wonder how it would feel to have the silky strands against his bare skin.

"Yes, I was surprised to learn you also were one." Which was another reason he was feeling the overwhelming need to protect her. "I'm from around here. I went to Midway High." He hadn't wanted to reveal too much about himself, but already the urge to win her attention, to gain her trust got the better of him.

She tilted her head to the side slightly and seemed somewhat relieved that this had been his home, at one time. "So did I. How old are you?"

"Thirty."

"Oh."

The sound of her disappointment quickly fed into his own. "Too old?"

Her brows lifted. "We wouldn't have been in the same classes, or actually not even at the same school at the same time."

"How old are...twenty-five." He nodded, hearing her thought. "Are you feeling better?"

"How do you do it?"

He sensed her incredulity like a small child finding some new discovery for the first time. "It takes practice, but I would like to try and show you how to overcome the feelings, to block the sounds and distractions when you want." He wondered why she hadn't learned to do it on her own unless something in her past had upset the process. Or maybe the control he had over his abilities was unusual, and others that

had their abilities were more like Amy. Then again, a childhood friend had helped him practice with his.

“What do you do? Workwise?” she asked.

“Pardon?” He hadn’t expected her to ask that question, and all at once, he was at a loss for words. Had she picked up on what his job entailed? He could feel the gentle tugging at his thoughts while she attempted to read his mind, but there was something more she was trying to determine. His deeper feelings?

Once he told her what he did, he was certain it would make her flee. No way did he want her to know his business in town.

Thankfully, she didn’t have a chance to rephrase the question before the music ended, and Brent closed in on him, then offered his hand. He measured Cedric, and when they shook hands, his grip was firm, intense, as if to say Cedric would have to answer to the brother-in-law if he hurt Amy. He looked a little surprised to discover Cedric was a bear too.

“Cedric Shader,” he offered, shaking her brother-in-law’s hand, wanting to show he wasn’t afraid of him, using the firmest handshake he could manage without turning it into a wrestling match. “Amy and I used to go to Midway High together.”

“I vaguely remember you. Your twin brother is David Shader, right? You look similar to him.”

“Yeah. He stayed here; I left.”

Brent was a good three inches taller than him, though Cedric was six-one. Her brother-in-law had a good deal more bulk, but physical strength had never been a deterrent to Cedric getting his own way. Brent continued, “You’re my age. I would have remembered...”

“We studied at the library a few times,” Amy lied, then held her head, cradling the pain. “I’ve got to go, Brent. I told Rebecca I couldn’t manage any more than two hours. I’m way past my limit.”

Cedric could tell Amy couldn’t handle much more of the noise in the place, but *he* wanted to be the one to rescue her.

Glancing back at Howard still standing at the edge of the dance floor with Rebecca, Brent said, "Howard said he would like to take you to the movies."

Amy groaned. The movies. She didn't appear to be able to handle another minute of anything other than peace and quiet.

Wishing he could have been with Amy tonight, Cedric grasped her hand and walked her toward Howard and her sister. "I would like to see you again, Amy, if that would be all right."

He knew he shouldn't have asked her, but something about her tugged at a part of him that had been numb for years. A part of him longed to be free, to love, to feel something for someone who needed him as much as he needed her.

Brent hovered over them, just within earshot, waiting for her answer.

"I...I can't," she said, and pulled her hand away from Cedric's, severing his connection to her.

Then he knew she'd seen the darkness he worked with every day. An ice shard of hurt slammed into him, although he knew in his heart he shouldn't want for more. What he could give her would never replace what he would take from her, should she have wanted to be part of his life.

With the best face he could muster under the circumstances, Cedric smiled. "Maybe some other time, Amy." He hoped for his sake she would change her mind, but for her sake, that she would not.

As soon as Amy had said no to seeing Cedric further, she sensed she'd hurt his feelings. At times like these, she hated her empathic abilities. Yet, a darkness crowded into his soul. She felt pain, sorrow, and regret. And something more. Within a few seconds, she'd seen images of gruesome murders. But then, she had seen he did some kind of police work, tracking down killers, probably using his telepathy to do so. Something she could never have dealt with. Wouldn't she be swept away into the black void with a man like him? She had her own issues to deal with.

Later, once she was sitting beside Howard in the movie theater—she'd belatedly agreed to go with him to appease her sister and Brent—she watched the nice peaceful melodrama, very little background noise, just two people yammering at each other on the screen, and Howard crunching buttered popcorn from time to time. Dull, boring, and perfect for her overwrought nerves, even though she truly would have preferred being home alone and working on her computer to get somewhere with one of her PI cases.

Coward, she chided herself even now. She needed to get out and face her fears and issues with this psychic business. Cedric seemed at peace with his. She needed to learn how to do that too.

She hadn't always been like this either. Not before the accident. Back then she'd known she would live forever. Nothing could hurt her, or her family, friends, nothing. Until the storm and the accident.

No matter how hard she tried to get Cedric out of her thoughts, she couldn't. She could still feel the way his mind had shielded hers from the music and voices, drowning them out until all she felt was his calming words, like a warm blanket keeping out the chill on a cold winter's night. From the connection they had made—though she'd tried to break free from it—the warmth still lingered in her bones.

When he'd touched her, he'd kept most of his feelings hidden from her, avoiding swamping her with them. Except she had sensed the darkness swirling around inside him, the turmoil he faced. He'd wanted to get to know her better, much better. And she shouldn't, wouldn't attempt it.

Locating men and women who'd skipped out of paying child support and alimony and other private investigator issues, that's all she wanted to do to pay the bills, but her all-consuming mission beyond that was finding the killer of her parents, proving once and for all that she hadn't imagined the shot fired in the night. She definitely wasn't interested in Howard, or some clairvoyant/empath who seemed too needy himself. How could she help him when she couldn't even cope with the world herself at times?

Yet some perverse part of her mind kept toying with the way he looked, his dark brown hair swept back, and she could just imagine the wind catching it and framing his face, his dark brown eyes having a pretty amber ring around them, the way his hard body had pressed against hers when they had danced together, holding her possessively close, keeping her emotions in check, saving her from passing out. But he seemed torn between helping her and keeping his distance. She didn't need one devil of a sexy guy, rugged, sturdy, a saver of lost souls, a bear like her, yet who was somewhat lost himself in the psychic struggle.

She didn't need anyone else in her life who thought he or she could help poor Amy. So why did she say the next thing she did that went against everything her mind told her not to do? "*Cedric, can you hear me?*"

There was no response, only the conversation between the characters in the movie. Howard looked totally absorbed in the

show, only pausing to stuff a few more popcorn kernels into his mouth.

How did he feel about her?

Nothing. To him, she was a non-entity. Just like he was to her, she had to admit.

After the movie, Howard dropped her off at her apartment and he acted uneasy, as if he were trying to decide if he should kiss her or not. Smiling, she grabbed his hand and shook it. "I had a nice time, Howard. Give your best to your mother."

Seemingly relieved, he smiled back. "Maybe if you're free next Friday night, we can go out."

She wanted to say no, but her backbone became rubber all over again. "Sure, give me a call, and maybe we can do that."

No, no, no, she wanted to say. *We don't have anything in common. You didn't even notice I wasn't part of the conversation the whole dinner through. You didn't even want to hold my hand in the theater or act in any way like you were with me on the date. Why would you even want to go out with me again?*

"It's nice to get away from my mother sometimes," he added. "I'll give you a call."

Okay, so that was the reason.

With that, he left, and she walked inside her apartment and locked the door. She flipped up the light switch, but the place remained shrouded in darkness. *Great.*

Three times this spring, storms had knocked out her electricity. Make that four. She shut her door and reached into her purse, but she realized she didn't have her phone. She'd never used it while at the restaurant and must have left it charging in the bedroom. She headed through the living room, thinking she'd go to her bedroom closet and check her circuit breaker.

Thankfully, as a bear she could see fine in the dark. She glanced at the couch and chairs and saw pillows tossed on the floor. Books from her bookcase were strewn all over her living

room floor and when she glanced at the kitchen, she saw broken glass on her kitchen floor, sending a rash of chills through her. Someone had been in her apartment. Hell, someone could still be in her apartment!

Break-in, intruder, danger came to mind. She heard someone coming down the hall and she ducked into the kitchen and crunched on the broken glass.

“Get out of your place now, Amy,” Cedric urged.

Now he bothered to listen to her? Where the hell was he?

The sound of breaking glass in her bathroom forced her blood to boil. Immediately, she wanted to grab her gun and stop the maniac from seizing her computer from her bedside table if he had a mind to. At least she had backup copies of...

“Amy, get out of your apartment!” Cedric fairly shouted in her mind.

Shit, too late.

She could hear the intruder walking into the living room and kicking some of her books on the floor. She could sense his fury, his singular focus, but she couldn't determine what he was looking for because anger and frustration clouded his thoughts.

“Amy, where are you?” Cedric asked.

“In the kitchen. There's no place to hide.” Amy couldn't slip out of the kitchen through the window over the sink. It was placed too high up and out of reach. Damn, as soon as she saw the pillows and books on the floor, she should have returned to her front door, unlocked it, and left the apartment pronto. She should have raced to her apartment manager's office and called the police!

“No, where is your place located?” Cedric asked.

Oh, sure, that's what he needed! Her address. Duh!

“105 Scott Drive, Templeton Apartments, Apartment 5B. But you won't make it in time.” Not unless Cedric was right outside her front door.

Thunder overhead shook her fanlight set, and the man swore under his breath, apparently rattled. More books tumbled to the floor in her living room. God, she wished she could get to her gun. But running through the living room to her bedroom wasn't a brilliant idea. Unfortunately, the only way out of her apartment was through the front door, exposed fully to the living room, or the back patio door, off the living room also.

Since he'd already broken stuff in her kitchen, she hoped he wouldn't return there.

Instead, she tried to stay still so she wouldn't crunch on any more glass and give herself away. In the meantime, she attempted to read his thoughts.

Was he an ex-husband who wouldn't support his kids? Maybe. Or was it just a random break-in and not someone who was looking for whatever evidence she had on him? But she couldn't read his thoughts. They were angry, scrambled.

A dim light wavered in the living room. A flashlight beam.

"Stay put and out of sight, Amy."

She didn't have any choice. There was no walk-in pantry or anywhere else to hide in the kitchen, though he could have found her anyway if there had been.

After what had happened to her parents, she'd learned how to use a gun, had a license even, learned Kung Fu, and had earned a black belt. Even at that, police warned the best defense was to flee in the face of danger, not try and fight it. The intruder didn't know she was also a bear shifter. But the shifters had to be careful about attacking a human as a bear. If humans learned of it, bears could be hunted down wholesale. If her sleuth leader heard of it, he would be royally pissed. If she didn't kill the intruder outright, she could end up accidentally turning him. Then she, or bears in her sleuth, would have to kill him. That would mean covering up the whole thing afterward.

More books crashed to the floor in the living room, damn him. But then the man headed toward the kitchen.

“No,” she telepathically said.

“*I’m nearly there,*” Cedric assured her.

So was the intruder.

She jerked open a drawer and fumbled around for a butcher knife.

The man stopped, the thin prick of illumination from his flashlight poking into the dark kitchen, but he wasn’t advancing any further. He was wearing all black clothes, a hoodie, a black ski mask. She could only make out his blue eyes as he glanced around the kitchen, looking for her. She couldn’t even tell what color his eyebrows were because they were hidden under the ski mask. That would have given her a clue as to his hair color. He was tall and muscular, about six-three in height.

At least she seemed to have stopped him in his tracks. But then he chuckled, his voice deep and ominous. “You can come out now, Ms. Rutherford.”

That sent more chills cascading down her skin.

He knew who she was. It wasn’t a random burglar. This was *so* not good. Her stomach clenched, and she tightened her grip on the knife.

Despite his bravado, he didn’t move into the kitchen. Did he know she had a weapon’s license, which meant, she had a gun? If it was the man who had broken into her apartment before and stolen her gun, at least she had hidden this one better and he might not believe she’d bought a replacement.

The next thing she knew, someone was at the front door trying to get in. *Cedric*, but the door was locked.

“*Can you get to the door?*” he asked her telepathically.

The man swore under his breath and darted for the back patio door. He panicked when he couldn’t get the sliding glass door open, slamming it to the side several times, apparently not realizing it had a metal security bar down below.

“*I’m coming!*” she said.

Chancing that the burglar was too busy with trying to escape through the patio door, she dashed for the front door. The problem was the patio door was situated straight across the living room from the front door and was an easy shot if the man had a gun and wanted to shoot her.

Panicked herself, she reached the front door and fumbled with the lock, and then finally managed to twist it correctly. The intruder jerked the patio door open at the same time and bolted outside just as Cedric shoved the front door aside. He started after the burglar, only the debris in the living room tripped him up.

Amy ran down the hall and stumbled over clothes and drawers discarded on her bedroom floor which infuriated her. When she finally reached the closet, she shoved aside her clothes to reach the circuit breaker panel. She flipped the main breaker switch.

Instantly, the light in her living room, kitchen, bathroom, and hallway turned on, and she was glad the intruder hadn't broken all the lights or damaged the wiring somehow. Also, she was glad her place wasn't experiencing an electrical outage.

After backtracking through the mess, she ran down the hall, and tried to feel Cedric's presence but she didn't sense anyone. He must still be chasing after the bad guy, but she didn't even want to think on that scenario.

"Amy!" Cedric shouted from the direction of the patio, sounding slightly short of breath.

"I'm okay!" Worn to a frazzle, all she could think about was cleaning up the mess, arming herself, and going to bed.

Cedric was already calling the police on his cell phone when he walked into the living room dripping wet from the pouring rain.

When she saw him and realized he was okay, she was so relieved. She hurried to grab a towel for him from the linen closet in the hallway.

"Thanks." He dried off his face and arms.

“You’re welcome.” She took the towel and set it aside. “I didn’t think you would be so close by, but I’m grateful you were.” She picked a book up off the living room floor.

“I envisioned the break-in in progress, but I had to get your address.” His dark eyes softened when he caught her look. Without hesitation, he removed the book from her shaking hands that she was trying to put back on the bookshelf, wanting to do something, anything to put her life back in order. He set it on the floor, then pulled her against his body and hugged her tight.

She would have resented his action—if he had been a veritable stranger—but he didn’t really seem like one, not when he could know her thoughts, and when he’d risked his life to come to her aid. Brent would have done the same for her, but she didn’t know anyone else who would have done that for someone he didn’t know well at all. Instead, she appreciated his warm embrace.

“I couldn’t believe I told you I was in the kitchen—duh.”

He chuckled. “I recognized your frustration with yourself. It was an honest mistake.” Then Cedric held up his finger. “Yeah, Rowland, this is Cedric,” he said to the deputy sheriff over the phone. “No, no clues on the case yet, but, well, I’m at 105 Scott Drive, Templeton Apartments, Apartment 5B, and there’s been a break-in. The occupant’s name is Amy Rutherford. No, the intruder got away. Yeah, she’s okay.”

Cedric smelled of spice and felt warm against her body, his heart beating at a quickened but reassuring pace, and his hand rubbed her back with the same kind of moral support.

“She’s a friend, and no, I wasn’t out on a date with her tonight. She...let me know that she needed help.”

She tried to pull free, so that Cedric could talk to the deputy sheriff without distraction, and she could clean up the mess, but he shook his head and wouldn’t release her.

“Just a minute, Rowland.” Holding his hand over the mouthpiece, Cedric said, “We need to leave things as they are

so the investigators can dust for prints and take some photos of the crime scene.”

“It’s just a break-in. They won’t bother dusting for prints. It’s probably an ex-husband who isn’t paying support money for his children and looking for any evidence I have on him.”

Cedric stared at her for a moment, then shook his head. “Okay, listen, Amy goes after guys who don’t pay child support. You know? Fifteen minutes? All right. We’ll be here.”

She pressed her hand against his chest, not pressuring him to back off, but just rested it, not sure what she wanted to do. She was so glad she was here with her or she would be a lot more upset over the man breaking into her house. Then she thought of the deputy sheriff he’d talked to, and that annoyed her. “Did you have to call Smith?”

Cedric took her hand and led her to the couch, sensing the animosity in her words. “You don’t like him?”

“Let’s just say he and I don’t see eye to eye.”

“He’s my contact here while I’m staying in Kalispell.”

“You’re working on a murder case?” That would explain what she’d seen in thoughts—the darkness—a crime scene.

He studied her inquisitive look and nodded. “Yeah, but it’s...”

“Classified.” She guessed, not really expecting him to be able to tell her what he was working on.

“Something like that.” He straightened the cushions on her couch and sat down beside her.

“The killer’s a he, and he lives here,” she said.

Cedric raised his brows to hear her tell him more about what he already believed. So much for it being classified.

Cedric was surprised Amy could use her abilities to learn what he was up against. He hadn't been sure she had the ability to work it out since she couldn't block his reading of her thoughts. He took a deep breath. "How do you know about the killer? I didn't think you did any kind of investigating like that with your abilities yourself." Which could put her in more danger.

"Sometimes, like if I hear a child's missing, I help search for him or her. Truthfully, if I hadn't consciously tried to avoid using my abilities in the first place, maybe I would know what really happened to my parents. I...I still can't remember everything that happened that night."

He didn't want to push the memories. He sensed it had something to do with her terror of storms, but after what had happened tonight, he didn't want to force her to talk about something she wasn't ready to discuss. Though he really did want to know what had happened to her parents. "Do you have a list of the names of the guys you're after who might have wanted to burglarize your place?"

"Yes, I always keep a copy of the information on the cloud."

"It never hurts to be prepared."

"I've had this happen once before."

He didn't like the sound of that. "They caught the burglar, and it was someone you had been investigating?"

“No, they didn’t catch whoever it was. I have no idea who it was. Are you staying with family?” she asked, and he recognized the ploy to change subjects to one she probably felt more comfortable with.

“My twin brother, David. My parents live here also, but they hadn’t expected me to return home this soon and they’re having some renovations done on their place. So I’m staying with David while I’m investigating the murders.”

“If you don’t live here normally...”

“I travel a lot. Living out of a suitcase isn’t half what it’s cracked up to be, though it’s nice having clean towels and a made-up bed every morning.”

She smiled, the first time he’d seen her face light up like that. It reminded him of a sun-kissed Caribbean beach, beautiful, pristine, and serene.

“I was thinking you ought to stay with your sister and her husband tonight.” He hoped Amy would go along with his suggestion. He couldn’t imagine her staying here alone after what had happened.

“On their fifth wedding anniversary? No. Way.”

Okay, he could understand that. Now for the hard part. “I don’t think you should sleep”—he cleared his throat abruptly—“be alone tonight.”

“I won’t be.”

He tried to read her mind, but she smiled, and he realized for the first time since he’d found her, she’d figured out how to block him from reading her mind. “You won’t be sleeping alone?”

“Nope. Smith and Wesson will share my bed with me the rest of the night.”

“Ahh. And you know how to shoot a gun.”

“I have a license to prove it.”

“You’ve shot a man before.”

She tilted her chin up, and the smile sparkled in her bright eyes. “Every Sunday night, but only in self-defense.” She returned to the bedroom, checked under her mattress, and found the gun was gone. She strode back to the living room. “Damn it. He stole it.”

“Do you have the serial number? You need to report it to law enforcement.” The doorbell rang, and Cedric jumped up from the couch. “It’s Rowland,” he announced before opening the door, trying to break the bad news gently. He couldn’t help but be curious as to why she disliked Rowland. He’d always seemed to be a reasonable sort to Cedric, and he was a good friend.

“Let him in,” she said, and added under her breath, “for whatever good that will do. I’ll get the gun’s serial number.” Then she took off toward the bedroom.

Cedric opened the door, and faced Kalispell’s finest, Rowland Smith, small-town deputy sheriff who broke a federal kidnapping case wide open earlier that year. Six-one, the guy was big of heart, always attended the local charity ball, the type of guy who would stop and help a driver fix a flat or drop by closing nights at the Dress Boutique to escort the elderly Winston twins to their car. Appearance-wise, he was blond-haired, blue eyes, in great physical shape and the women really liked him, so Cedric really couldn’t understand why Amy thought he was so distasteful.

Instantly, Rowland gave Cedric a look like he thought Amy was a hard case where he was concerned. He glanced into the living room and pursed his lips when he saw the mess. “Are you sure she is okay?” he asked, genuinely concerned, but the irritation still edged his words.

“Yes, she is,” Amy called out. “Your friend was even a witness, so maybe you’ll believe me this time.”

Rowland smiled and shrugged a shoulder at Cedric.

“*Rowland didn’t believe you about the other break-in?*” Cedric asked her telepathically.



AMY SHUT her mind off from Cedric's probing thoughts. He frowned at her when he and Rowland joined her in the living room.

"Do you believe this is one of the cases you've been working on, Ms. Rutherford?" Rowland asked.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, you never call me that. Don't go making a big deal of things to make an impression on Cedric." Amy folded her arms.

The tips of Rowland's ears reddened.

"Have the two of you known each other for long?" Cedric asked, his voice amused.

She glared at Rowland, ignoring Cedric. "Listen, Rowland. We both know you're not going to take me seriously."

Rowland raised his blond brows. "I do take this seriously. Just because we haven't yet determined who it was that broke into your place two weeks ago..."

"That's not what I'm talking about!" He damn well knew it. Normally not one to hold grudges, Amy couldn't let go of this one. Then she pulled a slip of paper out of her pocket. "The thief stole my Smith and Wesson. Here's the serial number."

Rowland shifted his feet and glanced at Cedric. She sensed Cedric trying to find out why there was such animosity between her and Rowland. But the deputy sheriff focused on the mess in her living room and the current crime instead of the past.

Rowland cleared his throat. "You think it's one of the deadbeats—"

"Yes, like last time. It might be the same guy since you never found him," she said. "This guy called me by name. I was hidden, but he knew I was there, hiding in the kitchen. The main reason he didn't come into the kitchen was because

Cedric was suddenly pounding on the door and the guy hurried to go out the back way as fast as he could.”

“Hell. Do you still keep the list of people you’re investigating in your safe?” Rowland asked.

“You bet. And my journal entries about my parents’ murders also.”

Rowland stiffened and again glanced at Cedric.

Cedric perked up. “What’s that all about?”

“I’ll tell you about it later,” Rowland said.

Amy rolled her eyes. “Yeah, and I’ll give you the real version afterward.”

“Are you staying with your brother tonight?” Rowland asked Cedric, and she could tell he was thinking Cedric was staying the night with her. In fact, she sensed he was dying to know about their relationship.

She also knew Rowland would tell his best friend Brent, that Cedric had been Amy’s overnight guest. Then who knew what Brent would do.

“I told Cedric he didn’t need to stick around.” Amy yawned, the drinks at dinner, the sleepless nights, the late hour, all were taking a toll on her.

Two more deputy sheriffs arrived, and Rowland put them to work.

“I’ll stick around until everyone’s gone,” Cedric said, retaking his seat on the couch next to Amy.

She closed her eyes, unable to keep them open, and leaned against the couch back. She hadn’t meant to fall asleep. The hushed male voices lulled her, wrapped around her, giving her a sense of security that she hadn’t felt in a long time, and she drifted off.

Cedric motioned to Rowland to join him in the kitchen. “What’s the deal with her parents?” He couldn’t contain the irritation in his voice and realized at once how much he already felt the need to protect her.

Not to mention he had to know why Amy thought the whitebark pine murders had been committed by a man and that he was a local.

Rowland Smith had been like so many others in the beginning. When confronted with the concept of Amy's and Cedric's unique abilities, he and others had balked at believing about their special insights. Cedric sensed right away that Amy believed her parents had been killed and not by accident. She truly believed they'd been murdered. She lived in a world of non-believers, and he'd certainly had his share of aggravation over the years fighting the same prejudice. But Cedric had proved to Rowland how accurate his psychic senses had been and after helping him solve some cold cases, he'd definitely come around to believing in Cedric's unique ability.

Rowland crossed his arms against his broad chest. "Okay, look, ten years ago, her parents were killed in an auto accident. Initially, she'd had a fight with her parents because she didn't want to attend Mayor Barnes's anniversary party since it was mostly a grownup party. Plus, you know, she's sensitive to group functions. They homeschooled her on and off over the years before it was even the thing to do. She got her degrees in criminology online later. Anyway, her parents didn't want her staying home alone and dragged her to the event. She had a big fight with them at the party and said the noise and people were closing in on her. Her father told her to get used to it, that if she didn't ever try, she would never be normal."

Cedric could imagine her frustration, being forced into a situation that bothered her, but unable to make anyone understand her needs. "Were you there that night?"

“No. I just talked to some of the folks afterward to understand her parents’ frame of mind.”

“How did they die?”

“Like I said...a car accident. We’d had bad storms that night, the roadways were flooded, their car hydroplaned, and crashed into a concrete pillar. She felt guilty for causing the scene at the party and consequently forcing her parents to leave the function early. Maybe if they’d left later, they wouldn’t have died. Maybe they would have. There’s no way to know. Anyway, somehow, Amy imagined someone shooting out one of the car’s tires, forcing her dad to lose control and crash the car. The psychologist I spoke with—who, by the way, did not see Amy, so it’s not a case of patient confidentiality—said Amy is most likely projecting her own guilt onto a fictional, villainous character who caused the accident.”

“But you checked out her story? About the car’s tire?”

“There was no need to. She said they fought on the way home, her father was furious with her, and she couldn’t help feeling she was at fault for the whole accident. You know, when people get angry and they drive, more accidents happen. So in a way...”

Cedric stared at the glass shimmering in a million broken crystals on the tile-simulated linoleum floor. “So why did you bother to talk to people after the party? If it was just an accident...”

“It wasn’t part of any criminal investigation, if that’s what you mean. Several people told me how sorry they were about her parents’ deaths and everyone I spoke to mentioned they’d heard the fight between Amy and her father at the party. The Rutherfords were well liked in the community. Mrs. Rutherford helped out at the Women’s Crisis Center—”

“Kind of like Amy going after deadbeat husbands,” Cedric said, having a lot of respect for her.

“Yeah, but I wish she wouldn’t. Most are just bums, but some are pretty bad news. Her parents owned the Whitebark

Pine Rustic Furniture shop that her mother managed, but her dad was also the executive assistant CEO of Titan Revolution, a mobile app developer.”

“Did the Rutherfords have any enemies?”

“Nope. Sorry to disappoint you, but this is one of those cases where it was a combination of things, nothing more sinister than a family’s squabble and bad weather. Oh, and one of the other deputy sheriffs did note that the tires were really threadbare, adding to their vehicle’s slippage on the road. Her father probably hadn’t had time to replace the tires.”

“But the tires had blown out?” Cedric asked.

“Sure, once they slammed into the curb and hurdled over it.”

“Nothing more to it than that.”

“Nope.” Rowland looked at Cedric curiously, then shoved his hands into his pockets, which meant he was changing the subject. “So, what’s up with the two of you? I’ve never seen you interested in a woman.”

Cedric fought smiling. “You’re one of Brent’s best friends.”

Rowland raised a brow. “Meaning?”

“Nothing’s going on between us. The lady was distressed tonight at Brent’s and Rebecca’s anniversary dinner because of the noise at Brannigans and the accompanying storm. I stepped in to assist.”

“Ahhh.”

“Nothing else.”

Rowland glanced back at the living room. “Yet you’re here.”

“We have sort of a...connection. Anyway, I sensed she was in danger, and came to—”

“Her rescue.” Rowland smiled. “Couldn’t have happened to a nicer guy. You know, maybe she could be the one for you.”

Brent's always saying how she needs someone to take care of her. Maybe you need some looking after too."

"Not in my line of business."

"Hey, boss." Joe Salazar stalked into the kitchen, a bulldog of a man, his skin tanned and weathered, was the best ribs chef in all the state of Montana—after hours. "All done here."

"You checked the outside? Did you find out how he got in?" Rowland asked.

"Broken bathroom window."

"All right. If everything's been dusted, you can pack it up."

"Will do."

Rowland looked back at Cedric. "Are you staying the night? Purely a professional question. Someone either needs to stay here with her until her window gets patched up, or she needs to go to Brent's house."

"She told me it's her sister and Brent's fifth wedding anniversary."

Rowland nodded, understanding. "Okay, tell her to drop off that list of names she's working on by my office tomorrow, earliest."

Cedric walked Rowland to the door, said goodnight, then shut and locked it. Turning back to the couch, he found Amy was still sound asleep. He'd only gone to Brannigans because he'd had a real sense that he had to go there for some purpose. He thought it had to do with the person who had committed the murders, but he hadn't read anyone's thoughts in the restaurant about the murders. Amy's thoughts had caught his attention—her fear of the storm, and the fact she was an empath and telepathic like him. She'd lured him like a mermaid sang out to a sailor adrift at sea. She'd caught him in her web of need, and though he knew he should break free, part of him wanted her to devour him whole.

Cedric carried the sound asleep Amy to her bedroom, skirted the debris without jarring her too much, laid her in bed, removed her high heels, then covered her with the green floral

comforter. Tomorrow, he'd help her clean up the mess. But tonight, he'd serve as her personal bodyguard.

First, however, he had the onerous task of calling his brother and telling him why he wasn't coming home for the night. That was sure to get a laugh out of him, at Cedric's expense.

Cedric located a spare blanket and pillow in a linen closet, then headed for the living room. After removing his shoes, socks, shirt, and trousers, he stretched out on the couch.

He touched the contact number on his phone and after several rings got his brother's answering machine, then a groggy voice broke in on the mechanical one. "Hey, what's up, Cedric? Did you find a girl?"

His brother was being facetious, and Cedric had no problem playing along. "Yep, she's gorgeous, brown-haired, green-eyed, sexy, and well, we just connected." Hell, he wasn't lying about any of it.

"You're not coming home." David spoke as if he was making a statement, but the question still punctuated the air.

"No. I'll talk to you later. I know you've got to work early at the bank in the morning with the auditors coming in."

David's sheets shuffled, the mattress creaked, and his brother said, "What's up, Cedric? Why aren't you coming home?"

Now worry laced his words.

"Nothing I can't handle." Already Cedric wasn't sure if that was so.

"Cedric, you know I won't be able to sleep if you don't tell me what's going on. Is it the case you're working on?"

Cedric loved his brother. He always wondered why, since they were twins, he didn't have his ability, but David always worried about him over it. "The lady needs my help for the night, that's all."

Dead silence.

Cedric sensed the thoughts swirling through his brother's mind, but so many mixed together he couldn't capture the essence of any, except David was anxious about him.

"Really, nothing to concern yourself with."

David was known to exaggerate circumstances and started in on Cedric. "The last time you got involved with a needy woman, it nearly got you killed. Dad had a minor stroke, Mother nearly had one, and..."

"I survived. And neither Dad nor Mom had strokes. This... well, it isn't the same, exactly." But it was, in a way, except the woman was like him, a telepath, and somehow that made it somewhat all right, didn't it?

"The killer you're after is after her," David guessed.

"No, her house was broken into."

"Then you were seeing her, and...well, who the hell is she?" David sounded totally frustrated with Cedric.

"You said you weren't interested in her." Cedric hated letting David know who she was because he was sure his brother would make a big deal of it since he had already told Cedric she was trouble. Is this what he was referring to? Her parents' deaths, the break-in at her apartment before? Maybe even the seriousness of the cases she might be working on as a PI?

"Whoa, what? Who is she?" David asked.

His brother wasn't dropping the subject. "Amy Rutherford."

Again, prolonged silence.

And then Cedric felt a sense of relief wash over his brother. "You told me that you weren't interested in her." But Cedric wondered if his brother really was but had been afraid to ask her out.

"She says her parents were killed in an auto accident. She claims they were murdered. They owned the Whitebark Pine Rustic Furniture shop that her sister, Rebecca, now owns and manages."

Okay, so David knew all about her case. Was that the trouble David thought she was in? “Yeah.”

“You’d graduated high school a year early and had gone away to college at that time, but I’d stayed home another year before I went to college. Everyone said she had a fight with her parents and helped cause the accident. You don’t really believe her claim, do you?”

“I’m staying here because her apartment was broken into.” Cedric *wasn’t* going to get into the other issue.

“Bring her here. Then she can feel safe. The two of us can watch over her.”

“Hell, David, she’s sound asleep in her bedroom, it’s pouring rain out, and she doesn’t even know I’m here.”

“What?” David sounded shocked.

That did sound kind of wild, even for Cedric. “I’m staying on the couch. Well, I mean, Rowland Smith knows I’m here.”

“Great, the whole sheriff’s department of Kalispell, Montana knows, but the lady herself doesn’t?”

“She’s like me, David. You know, telepathic.”

“Yeah, I know. That’s what really concerns me.”

After her apartment had been broken into that night, Amy snuggled against her pillow, her mind drifting between sleep and semi-alertness. All she could think about was Cedric, the way he had towered over her, and had the same intense eyes as Brent did, full of expression, but dark brown, not blue like Brent's. Cedric had the same broad shoulders, but he wasn't as meaty, yet she felt he had the same kind of physical strength and would use it if he needed to. His face was much more angular, like chiseled from fine marble. His dark hair curved around his ears after the wind had swept it from being combed back, not cut short like Brent's, giving him more of a wild, untamed look.

She thought of the way his body had felt against hers when they danced, the way his leg had pressed gently between hers, gauging her reaction. She hadn't pulled away, and he'd seemed torn once again between pressuring her further and stepping back. But he'd kept the closeness between them, swallowing her up, like she'd wanted to do with him. He'd thoroughly made her forget everything else around her.

But he had the control she didn't have over her emotions, and she'd balked then. Now, she wanted him back. She thought of the way he'd come to her rescue and chased after the burglar, potentially risking his life, and had even called the sheriff's department to help investigate the break-in. Now half asleep, she wondered where he was.

"Cedric."



CEDRIC HEARD AMY'S VOICE, soft as a summer sunset, sinking into his thoughts. But he didn't answer, sensing she didn't realize he was attempting to sleep on her couch in the living room. He knew he shouldn't get involved with her, but more than that he feared her rejection, if things didn't work out between them.

"*Cedric,*" she repeated as if testing the syllables of his name, as if trying too to see if she could reach him. The worst part was no matter how much he wanted to deny the feelings existed, she'd hooked him from the onset.

"*I have nightmares,*" she said as if to herself, but he was sure she hoped he would be listening. "*Bad nightmares. Can you help teach me how to get rid of them?*"

He sighed heavily, fearing he'd give her new ones more vicious than she could imagine, if he let down his defenses, and she caught glimpses of the gruesome images he had seen in his line of work. Closing his eyes, he avoided responding, though he couldn't help berating himself for not saying something. Still, he felt she would be afraid that he was still listening in on her, not always, but when she called his name, he was drawn to her, yanked from whatever task he was doing, and pulled into her world. Even at the theater.

He scoffed under his breath. Sitting beside her during the movie, munching on his buttered popcorn, Howard had been oblivious to the treasure next to him.

"*It's always storming...in my nightmares. Always.*"

The storm. When her parents had died?

Listening to the thoughts she voiced, sleep-filled and fading, he knew she needed to sleep, but if he voiced his opinion, he was sure he would wake her completely.

"*Storming,*" she said, her thoughts slipping away.

Darkness.

For a while, Cedric attempted to concentrate on his own mission, the real reason he was there—he had to remind himself—catching the Whitebark Pine Killer. He couldn't always pick up on a killer's thoughts, but when the crime was committed in his own hometown, he had to help. Seeing his brother and parents again had been the highlight of coming home but having to explain why he was staying with Amy Rutherford—a woman he'd never met before tonight—proved harder than he thought.

Luckily, David wasn't also Brent's best friend.

At six the next morning, Cedric woke to a knocking at the door, urgent, but soft as if the person standing on the doorstep didn't want to wake the whole household.

Cedric shoved on his pants, stalked to the front door, and peeked out the peephole. What the hell was David doing at Amy's apartment at six in the morning? Cedric unlocked the door.

"Is she awake?" David asked, dressed in pale gray sweats and sneakers, his brown hair wet from a shower.

"What are you doing here?"

David's gaze turned to see the books strewn all over the floor in the living room and his eyes widened. "Damn."

"He broke her bathroom window. It wasn't safe to leave her alone here last night." Cedric moved into the living room and gathered up handfuls of books.

David began to pick up more books beside him. "Sorry, Cedric, I just hadn't expected all this. When you said he broke in, I thought the two of you had scared him off. I had no idea he had trashed her place. Did you see him?"

"Yeah. I chased after him. He was wearing all black and was pissed off that I had followed him. Scared too—which was what had filled his thoughts. I couldn't sense what he had been after."

"Did Amy have any ideas?" David asked.

“Maybe. She runs down parents who aren’t paying child support.”

David shook his head. “Some of those are druggies. Bad news.”

They finished picking up the living room, then walked into the kitchen.

“Damn,” David said, looking at the glass on the floor.

“Yeah, it’s a mess too.” Cedric found a broom and dustpan in a closet, then began to sweep up the shards of glass.

“Listen, Cedric, I know you and the way things are. When I asked you if you believed her story about her parents being murdered, you sidestepped the issue. What do you think, really?” David asked.

“Really? The truth that everyone in town has been denying all these years?” Cedric shrugged. “Truthfully, Rowland has a good explanation for everything. The truth is I don’t know.” Cedric wanted to believe her. Did believe her. Yet was it because he wanted to when no one else would? But he couldn’t tell her so without proof, not just to appease her. “He should have investigated her story further though, you know. He should have checked the tires for bullet holes.”

“So you *do* believe her.”

“No, I’m just saying that if he’d checked the tires like he should have, the whole matter could have been cleared up one way or another.” Cedric continued to sweep the broken glass into a dustpan.

The phone rang in the living room, and both Cedric and David turned. For a moment, Cedric couldn’t decide whether to answer it, and then try to explain why he was in Amy’s house to whoever the caller was, or not, and let it wake her.

Instantly, the phone stopped ringing, and Amy said, “Hello?”

Which forced a chill down his spine. Had she heard his brother and him talking about her? That he didn’t believe her

about the accident, and he hadn't even heard her version yet? He figured she wouldn't be happy with him.

She joined them in the kitchen wearing a pair of pale blue sweats and slipper boots and looked sexier than hell. How could a woman wear something like that and look perfectly huggable first thing in the morning? She glanced at David and then Cedric, who was still posed over the broom and dustpan. She raised her brows and walked back into the living room, the phone to her ear. "Yes, Rebecca. Of course I'm all right, why wouldn't I be?"

David whispered, "I've got to run. Tell me what happens, all right? Already the suspense is killing me."

"Good luck with the bank audit."

"Thanks, I might need it." David left the house, and Cedric continued to sweep up the floor, figuring if nothing else, he could get her apartment looking halfway orderly, and then he would wait until someone replaced her bathroom window before he left.



AMY TRIED to focus on her sister's voice, but Cedric's brother headed out the door, and she paused to consider how much David looked like Cedric, only his hair was paler in comparison, and his eyes, a lighter shade of brown. But he seemed friendly enough about Cedric being here, as evidenced by the lopsided, sheepish grin he gave her when he glanced at her. Bet he never would see her the same way again, as just another bank customer. Not when she'd caught his brother up in this mess. She couldn't believe Cedric had actually stayed at her place overnight.

"Amy! Snap out of it. What are you thinking about?" Rebecca said.

"Sorry, Rebecca. It's early. Why did you call me so early? Didn't Brent take off the day? You both should be cuddling with each other still this morning."

“Damn it, Amy.” Rebecca never swore, so it meant she was really angry with her. “Brent had to run in to take care of a matter at work, and Rowland Smith called him there. Why didn’t you tell us you had another break-in? Rowland said not to worry, that you had a friend staying the night. Brent stormed down to Howard’s office at work and tore into him, thinking he’d spent the night and hadn’t alerted us about what had happened. But Howard didn’t have a clue as to what he was talking about. So then Brent called Rowland back and gave him an earful. Rowland said the guy was the one you danced with last night, Cedric—whatever his name was. What’s going on? Why didn’t you come over here?”

“The night of your celebration? No way.”

“Amy...”

“Listen, I’m fine.” Amy glanced at Cedric as he continued to clean up the kitchen for her. She really appreciated him for it.

“You always say that when you’re not.”

True. What could Amy say? She’d been glad Cedric had stayed on the couch to protect her, but she was afraid of being in a relationship with him?

“What’s going on with you and this Cedric guy?”

“He’s just a friend.”

“That you had never met before last night. I know or you would have mentioned him. And you don’t do one-night flings. So what gives?” Rebecca asked.

“He has abilities like me.”

Dead silence. Amy knew that would end the questions, for a moment. “Rebecca?”

“I’m still here. I can’t believe it. So what’s going on with him and you?”

“Nothing. He helped me last night when too much music and noise bothered me at the club. That’s why he danced with me.”

“So that confirms that he didn’t know you before last night. How did he end up at your place?”

“He read my mind about the break-in in progress.”

“Jeez, Amy. No one said that the man had still been inside your place when you showed up. Did you see him? Do you know him?” Rebecca asked.

“I saw him, but...” Amy was going to say she didn’t recognize him, but there was something familiar about him. Still, she couldn’t really say who he was. “I didn’t recognize him.”

“Is this Cedric...is he safe?”

“He’s working with the police to catch criminals, kind of like what I do, so yeah, I would say he is as safe as guys go.”

Cedric smiled at Amy.

“Great,” Rebecca said, not in a good way.

Amy sighed, straightening a couple of couch cushions. “He’s not one of the bad guys.”

“He’s not after the Whitebark Pine Killer, is he?”

Amy glanced back at the kitchen. Cedric looked at her and, in that instance, she had a peek into his thoughts, and she knew for sure that’s just who he was looking for. She had seen he was going after a male killer, but until now, she hadn’t realized it was the one who had killed three males in their thirties and forties, no known connection between them, and left them lying next to the native whitebark pine trees, a pine nut tucked in the victims’ shirt pockets. The newspapers had dubbed him the Whitebark Pine Killer. All of the bodies had been found in the Glacier National Park. Still, she knew that’s who Cedric was after. She targeted mostly non-dangerous perps. Cedric went after the really bad crud.

“He could be.”

“Brent wants to talk with him after work. Where’s Cedric staying? Well, normally.”

“Oh, for heaven’s sakes, Rebecca. Brent is *not* giving him a lecture. Listen, I’ve got to call the apartment manager and have her replace the bathroom window, or my bodyguard will never feel it’s safe for me to stay by myself.”

“The burglar broke your bathroom window?”

“Yes, that’s why Cedric stayed the night.”

Amy felt the tension crackle over the phone line. Her sister wondered if she and Cedric had shared her bed, and frankly, it was none of her business. “Rebecca, I’ll call you later on this afternoon. I have to speak with my apartment manager. We’ll talk later.” She hung up, not giving her sister time to object, needing to get this done so Cedric could get back to his work. She pulled up her contact list on her phone and called her apartment manager. “Libby? It’s Amy Rutherford, Apartment 5B, and, well...” She tucked straggles of hair that tickled her cheek behind her ear. “I had another break-in.”

“Which window?”

The seventy-year-old woman was sharp as the thorns on a rosebush, platinum blond, was in great shape, and had more energy than most twenty-somethings Amy knew. Not only that, but Libby wouldn’t be sending a maintenance man around for the task, she would be the one replacing the window.

Which meant now it was time for Amy to get rid of her empathic bodyguard, *before* Libby believed she needed to have an apartment wing-dig featuring the soon-to-be married Amy and Cedric. Ugh.

Amy told Libby all the details of the problems last night, hung up, then intended to release Cedric from his bodyguard duty. But when she entered the kitchen, she found him mopping up the rest of the glass on the floor, as domestic as they come, only since he lived out of a suitcase normally, she was surprised to see him handle the mop with such finesse.

She leaned against the doorframe, folded her arms, and watched his arm and back muscles ripple while he swept the damp mop back and forth, his attention focused on the job.

She couldn't help having heard him when he had talked to his brother about her parents' death and how he didn't believe her story, though it irked her he hadn't even listened to her version. She thought he would have been a little more open-minded, being that he was telepathic like her.

No matter. Somehow, she had to get her shirtless bodyguard out of her apartment before Libby arrived with a new windowpane.

She cleared her throat.

Cedric turned and her gaze quickly devoured his bare chest, very lightly haired, and well-sculpted, but it was the raised white skin in an irregular pattern only inches away from his left nipple that really caught her eye.

“Good morning, Amy.”

She sighed deeply. “Thanks for everything, Cedric.”

“But? I definitely hear a *but* in the conversation.” His dark brown eyes fairly sparkled with amusement while his lips edged up.

Pulling her hair back in a tail, she frowned at him. “You’re making this really difficult for me. You’ve been super, cleaning up the intruder’s mess, staying here with me and watching my back, helping me out at the club last night, and I owe you big time.”

“But?”

He leaned the mop against the wall, and she swore she saw a predatory gleam in his gaze.

“My landlady is coming over and, well, I don’t want to give her the wrong impression.” Amy waved at his bare chest.

“Oh, I see. So you want me to hightail it out of here before she arrives.”

“Well, I feel badly that I haven’t offered you breakfast, or at least a cup of coffee for your efforts. But she’s kind of with the old school, marriage before, well...” She felt her face flush with heat.

Cedric laughed, the kind of laugh that came from the gut.

Embarrassed, Amy's whole body warmed even further. "Well, she'll most likely think... I mean, she tends to jump to conclusions and the next thing that'll happen is she'll have an engagement party for..." She stopped speaking when Cedric smiled. "All right. Well, I'll take you out to dinner to thank you for all your help before you leave the area," she said, her brow furrowed.

"Leave?"

"Sure, you'll catch the killer and then you'll be out of here."



"AH." Cedric knew something was bothering Amy about him this morning, but he couldn't fathom what. Not after all he'd done for her. Was she afraid she would grow attached to him, and he would leave? That was his job, and yeah, he could see her reluctance to get involved with him in a relationship. He certainly had reservations, but more to do with keeping her out of harm's way.

"All right, how about this. I'll go home and shower, do some digging into some things, and pick you up for lunch, around noon," he said.

"I can fix..."

"How about I take you out someplace? Diamondbacks?" he asked.

"It's supposed to be my treat. Besides, I'm not much for going out. Last night was enough for a—"

"I can help you with blocking the feelings, Amy." He had every intention of doing so. Sure, he would soon leave town on another job, once he helped solve this one, but he wanted to leave her with a way to control the feelings that overwhelmed her so she could cope at any function she wanted to attend. "It would be the perfect opportunity for me to give you some tips."

“All right.”

“You said the killer was a male from around here,” he finally said.

“Right. I probably heard it on the news.”

He shook his head. “I’m sure most assume the killer is a male, but if the killer is, we have no idea if he wasn’t just some random hiker coming through the area.”

“What was the significance of the pine nuts found in the victims’ pockets? Does anyone know?” she asked.

Cedric stared at her in surprise. The police had not revealed that detail to the public. And they didn’t have a clue whether the killer was a male or from the local area.

“He had a class ring from our high school with a bright blue, oval, crystal stone in the center. Sapphire. He was born in September. He’s local. He went to school here and he’s your age. But then they said he went to the University of Montana.” She frowned at Cedric. “Don’t tell me. None of this has been shared with the public.”

“Correct.” He was beginning to believe she had envisioned a glimpse of the murderer. “But the ring? No one, not even the sheriff’s department, knows about that.”

“Oh.” Amy rubbed her temple. “God, I must have had a vision of him, or at least of his hands—his ring. But not one, both—a high school and then a college ring and they sort of blurred like one over the other as...as I was seeing his hands on...a bottle of rum. Bacardi. He...he was pouring it into some guy, can’t see the guy, like it’s a college prank, but he was wearing the high school ring back then. And then he was placing the pine nuts in the pockets, different jacket pockets of three different men and he was wearing the...the college ring.”

“Hell.” He thought about it for a few minutes. “We don’t normally wear jewelry very often as shifters. He must be human. Describe his hands to me if you can recall them.”

“He had clean nails, cut short, large hands. His skin was freckled. His skin was very white, not tanned.”

“At least that’s a clue. I’d ask what his arm hair color was, but it might not match the hair on his head. Or the color of the hair can change. So we might not be able to determine the color of his head hair from that,” Cedric said.

“Exactly, but it was light, blond, barely noticeable except for a little bit of sunlight glinting off the strands.”

Cedric smiled at her. “You’re good at remembering details.”

“Thanks. All I saw was his hands and his arms, and so it was easy to get all the details. I just wish I had seen more—his face, heard his thoughts, knew more about him.”

The doorbell rang and the sheer look of panic that streaked across Amy’s face was precious. She had been caught with a half-naked man in her house.

“Hurry, go out the back door!” she quickly said.

He wanted to ask her more questions about what else she might have seen concerning the killer. No one had ever shoved him out the door to avoid being seen with him since he was a teen and had been caught at Karen Ryder’s home when he wasn’t supposed to be seeing her. He yanked his shirt off the couch, but then changed his mind about dressing and running. Stalking toward Amy, he grabbed her shoulders and pulled her close. “Another lesson.” He didn’t say anything further. He just...kissed her.

Cedric felt protective of Amy. She was feisty, but fearful of her abilities and he wanted in the worst way to share what he could with her so that she could successfully face the onslaught of voices in her head. But as soon as he began kissing her, she calmed, her focus centered on his lips, which brought a smile to his. She licked his lips, pressed his mouth for entrance, and literally took charge. He loved it and let her in, slid his tongue over hers, connected in a physical and emotional way, and for the moment had chased away her demons.

They finally broke free of the kiss, the person still knocking at the door, and he tugged on his shirt. She looked a little dazed, her lips red, her smile small, interested, and the best part was for a moment, she hadn't thought about anything but him, his mouth on hers, how much he warmed her, how he felt against her body, heavenly, just as he had felt about her.

He thought he could do this forever, sleep with her, bring her out of her nightmares, teach her how to be more like him, compartmentalizing the bad from the good. Wouldn't that be an even bigger mission to accomplish?

Something to do for one of their kind? Something that was good, rather than always dealing with the bad in his line of work? He thought his brother would say no, that Cedric needed to leave her alone, and just keep up with business. That she was trouble, and he would get himself into more difficulties than he could handle while being with her.

But Cedric didn't feel that way at all. He knew she was someone who needed help. And he wasn't going to forsake her. Not only that, but he suspected she was right. Something wrong had happened to her parents and it hadn't been an accident. Which meant he had a new investigative mission to take on. He hoped she would agree. He would have to convince her to share all she knew and all that she suspected, despite knowing she would have to dig it all back up.

What if the person who had broken into her apartment had something to do with her parents' death because she wouldn't let it go? What if it didn't have to do with the men she was investigating? Did she have something in her place that might be a clue to the man's identity? The other break-in at her home had never been solved either. Could this one have something to do with that one?

Amused, he smiled at her, then he kissed her in parting. "I'll slip out the back way."

She agreed and headed for the front door, and he took off through her patio door. But he waited just outside until he heard who the person was before he left to make sure Amy was safe.

Management. The manager. "What happened? Who did this?" the manager asked, and Amy let her into the place and shut the door while Cedric slipped around to the front of the apartment and took off in his car.

He felt a cheeriness he hadn't experienced in a long while. A connection, though he told himself it could be a bad idea. Still, he would do anything he could to teach her how he controlled his thoughts and learn who was after her, who had killed her parents—if someone had, before he left her for another mission.



AMY HATED that she had to deal with yet a new threat—the business with the man who had broken into her place and

explain to her manager why it had happened when she had no earthly clue!

“Amy, you’re a great tenant, and you always keep the place clean, except when someone is breaking in, so what’s the story?” her apartment manager asked.

“I told you. I have no idea, Libby. If I was to venture a guess, I would say that it has to do with one of the ex-husbands I’m chasing down, or maybe even has to do with my parents’ deaths.”

The manager shook her head. “Don’t go there. If this truly does have anything to do with your parents’ tragedy, you could get yourself in a world of hurt. Let it go. Isn’t that what your sister says?”

“Yeah, but she wasn’t there with me when it happened. She didn’t see what I saw. I was the only survivor.” And Amy had experienced visions of it ever since. It had to be important. Like a dream where she would be trying to sort out the whys and what-fors until she had the answer. She knew it would come to her if she thought about it long and hard enough. Maybe...maybe even Cedric could help her with remembering the day of the accident.

“But the police—”

“Don’t know what they’re talking about.”

“So who is the guy who spent the night with you?” Libby asked.

Amy raised her brows and tried to look like she had no idea what her manager was talking about. Besides, it really wasn’t any of her business, as much as Amy really liked her. Libby was always giving her plants from her gardens or tips about items that were on sale at the various stores where Amy shopped. It was like Libby had taken her on as a special case and Amy wondered if her sister had talked to Libby about watching out for her.

Libby smiled and patted her shoulder. “It’s all right. I know he stayed overnight to protect you. You never date anyone. He’s the bank vice president’s brother, isn’t he? I

don't know his name, but he sure looks just like him. I'm glad he stayed, just in case you had any more trouble during the night. At least he could have stopped the intruder from doing any more damage to your place."

"Right."

"So who is he? A boyfriend? I've never seen you with anyone before."

"You are right. He's David Shader's twin brother, Cedric, so he's one of the good guys."

"I'll say. He's not bad looking either."

Amy was glad he had stayed there on his own. She might not have agreed to him staying if he'd asked her, thinking she was fine and not wanting to impose on his generosity. Though she suspected if she hadn't sensed his presence there, she wouldn't have been able to sleep well at all.

And yeah, he definitely wasn't bad looking.

Amy's phone rang and for some reason she thought it would be Cedric, hopeful even, but instead she saw on the caller ID that it was her sister. She suspected Rebecca would still be unhappy about the break-in at her apartment. Amy really had hoped her sister hadn't gotten wind of it.

Rebecca sounded both worried and scolding when she said, "About the break-in, Brent told me to tell you that he would have gone over and taken you to our house for your safekeeping, even if it was just for your peace of mind. It didn't matter at all that it was our anniversary."

Right, as if Amy wanted to go to her sister's house every time anything happened.

"My manager is here now. I need to speak with her about replacing my window." Not that Amy really needed to, but she didn't want to say anything more about Cedric to her.

"I need to see you, to know that you're okay."

Amy had to quash that notion right away. "I am, but thanks, Sis. I appreciate that you are always concerned about

me. There are no storms today, the window is being replaced. I'm good."

"Is this guy, Cedric, that you danced with someone you're now seeing? Dating?"

"Uh, yes, so no more blind dates." Amy wasn't sure just how long Cedric would be here, but at least hopefully her sister would believe Amy had someone in her life for now.

"Howard will be disappointed."

Not at all, Amy thought. "He and I just didn't communicate on the same level." Of course she was referring to the psychic level, but she wasn't about to tell her sister that. Especially when her apartment manager could possibly overhear their conversation and Amy didn't want Libby to know she was psychic. Lots of people were skeptical. Some even feared them. Others just didn't understand and asked her all kinds of questions—like could she control minds or do things for them to learn what others were thinking about them.

"Are you really all right? After the trouble you were having during our anniversary dinner, the storm, the break-in —"

"Yes, I am." And so much better since Cedric told her he could help her with her psychic powers. At first, she wasn't sure about him, but now she felt he really could help her. She just didn't want to see any more of the deputy sheriff. He might be a good deputy when it came to other people's cases, but when it came to her, he was just...useless. "I've really got to go."

"Okay, I'll call you later. If you have any other trouble, and I mean *any*, you call me. All right?" Rebecca was being her older sister insistent self.

"Yes, I will." But Amy had no intention of it. She knew her sister would try to convince her to move in with them, but they needed to have their own lives, and she needed her own also. "I'm fine, really."

"Okay, I'll let you go."

Then they ended the call and her manager said, “I’m staying here until the handyman replaces the window. I was going to replace it myself, but when I looked it over, I realized the intruder broke the frame too. Are you going to have anyone watch over you for the rest of the day?”

“Whoever the intruder was, he’s not going to return. He probably knows several people responded to the break-in. I doubt he’s going to want to return here. He didn’t find anything anyway.” Except her gun, damn it.

“All right.”

About then, a window handyman came with the new window and frame and began to remove the old one and replace it with the new one.

“I’m putting new door locks on your apartment also. New security cameras are being installed today. I want to ensure no one gets in without being recorded this time,” Libby said.

“Thanks. I really appreciate it. It makes me feel safer.”

Libby rolled her eyes. “If I’d installed them in the first place, we could have caught the guy by now.”

“I sure hope we can if anyone does it again.”

Once the handyman finished replacing the frame and window, both Libby and Amy thanked him, and the manager and the handyman left. Then Amy got a call from Cedric, which was totally welcome.

“Hey, the window is replaced,” she said.

“Good. Are you ready for me to come by to pick you up for lunch?”

“I am.” She was really looking forward to it.

“Do you want me to sleep on your couch tonight? I’ll pack a bag this time so I have a change of clothes.”

She smiled. “Just in case I have more trouble?”

“No, well, yes, but so we can work on your issues too.”

Okay, so she really liked that idea. “You’re supposed to help me deal with them in the restaurant.”

“That too. We can even go to a dance club later.”

“No, thanks.” Last night was quite enough for her. Though dancing with Cedric, come to think of it, had been a dream come true. “But yes, bring a bag. I’d love for you to stay the night.”

She normally didn’t like to be thought of as being needy, but she suspected tonight, she’d be anxious the burglar might return for whatever he must be looking for.

That afternoon, Amy dressed up to go out to lunch with Cedric, wearing her favorite blue-flowered boho skirt, matching halter top, and high heeled sandals. Spring was in the air. The day was clear, no storms in sight and she was much more relaxed. Being with her sister and brother-in-law could make her anxious, she realized, because they watched her always, worried about her. Then of course there was the issue of the blind date. But this time, she was with someone she was learning to have fun with and who was like her. So it was different.

When Cedric picked her up, he was dressed for fine dining, wearing a tie and sports coat, which were required attire, no jeans, no T-shirts or sweatshirts. He looked so handsome as he opened the car door for her, but he didn't kiss her or give her a hug or anything. She thought he might. She hoped he might. She should have known he hadn't planned to see her for the long term, which couldn't help but disappoint her.

When they drove to the restaurant, Cedric was quiet and seemed distant and troubled.

About her? Or about the case he was working on? Not that it surprised her. It was hard to have their abilities and not overthink things at times.

“What are you thinking about?” She figured she shouldn't pry, but heck, he pried into her thoughts all the time, though

she had to ask about his business because he hid them very well from her.

He turned and smiled at her. “You’re not prying. You just openly think about things and when you’re worried about me? I can’t help but listen. I was pondering the case I’m working on.”

“Do you have any leads?”

“Many and none. Every time I investigate one, it turns out to be a false lead. But I’ve brought David’s high school yearbooks with me so we can look over them after lunch at your place since you’ve had a vision of the killer and his class ring.”

“Do you want to look over the yearbooks at the restaurant?” She would be happy to try and figure out who the killer was over lunch. She was used to working while she ate her meals at home.

“No. This is a date. Besides, I imagine you’ll need peace and quiet while you try to envision who it is.”

“If you’re sure. If you change your mind, we could look at one of them.”

Cedric smiled. “Yeah, I’m sure, though I have a question about your case. Have you ever considered who might have wanted your parents dead?” Cedric asked. “If there’s a motive, that’s something we can work with.”

“A couple of people might have had a beef against my dad since he had let them go or fired them at his furniture shop. I don’t know. Grievances just of a general nature? Mom? No. I don’t think she ever alienated anyone. Me? I mean I was in the car too, but I can’t think of anyone who had a grudge against me, unless they wanted to get rid of one of the weird kids in school. I tended to zone out when I was getting all this interference in my brain.”

He began to think about what she had said. Her dad might have had issues with someone he had fired. Cedric would have to look into it tomorrow. Her mother hadn’t had any enemies. Still, who knew? She could have been the target. And what of

Amy? Or what if they thought Rebecca had been in the car also?

Then again, there hadn't been any attempts on either of the women's lives after the accident, so Cedric assumed it had to do with at least one of the parents.

"You said your dad had fired some people at work who might have had a beef with him. What was that all about?" Cedric asked.

"A couple of situations that I know about. In one instance, Dad had fired a man for fighting with two co-workers in the parking lot of our furniture shop. They had come to blows and the innocent party ended up in the hospital. Fred White was actually charged with assault and battery. But he was out of jail on bail after that. Dad and I saw him at the grocery store a few days later, which surprised him because Fred didn't live in that area. So why was he at our local grocery store? Fred didn't say anything to my dad, though they'd both made eye contact."

Cedric frowned. "Okay and the police never questioned him about the accident?"

Amy gave him a get-real look. "Remember the part about Deputy Sheriff Rowland Smith not taking me seriously? It was an accident, according to him. Once I became a private investigator, I did look into Fred White's background to learn where he'd been during the time of the accident. He hadn't been in trouble after that. He stayed here for about a year, then finally moved. I'm not sure where to though. He didn't leave a forwarding address and I really couldn't scratch him off my list of suspects."

"I'll look into it to see if I can learn anything more. Is there anyone else that you can think of?"

"Hmm, his accountant that had worked at the furniture shop wanted to date Dad."

Cedric arched a brow.

"My dad told us all about it. He wasn't interested but the woman sure let him know she was. I think she figured flattery

would get her everywhere with him. We all assumed it had worked for her before. What she didn't know was we're all grizzlies and she was only human, so my dad had no interest in her whatsoever. Oh, well, sure, not with any other females either, grizzly or otherwise. She even tried to frame him and blackmail him, so he finally just fired her. He hadn't wanted to. She had a three-year old daughter who was dependent on her mother's income. She was a single parent, but enough was enough. I can't imagine her being involved in my parents' deaths though. Her name is Cynthia Kroger."

"Okay. I'll look into her too. Is there anyone else who might have had a vendetta against either of your parents at the furniture shop?" Cedric signaled to change lanes.

"Maybe. I didn't learn about any other firings or issues he had at the store. My mom actually managed it, but she got along with everyone. My dad was so concerned that we had seen Fred White at the grocery store, that he told me why. Just in case Cynthia tried to stir up trouble with any of us, Dad wanted to let us all in on that situation also. He had nothing to hide. Dad was the Chief Operations Officer for Titan Revolution. Maybe it had something to do with that? I don't know anything about it." She glanced out the window. "Oh, one other thing, though it probably doesn't have anything to do with anything, but the CEO, Michael Warner, of Titan Revolution who was human, had a car accident the week before our accident. Aaron Bridgewater took over as the new CEO. He'd been the executive assistant before that."

"Hmm. You're sure it was an accident? Aaron would have good motivation to eliminate the former CEO to get his job. Since your father was the COO, maybe—and I'm speculating here—your dad suspected the former CEO hadn't died accidentally."

"Then that would be all connected."

"But it could be difficult to prove. What about you, as far as having any enemies?" Cedric asked.

"I was sixteen and I had no boyfriend. No ex-boyfriends. I was kind of awkward at that age. Mostly because of the

psychic business.”

“And your sister?”

“Oh, yeah, Rebecca was super popular. She’d had a couple of boyfriends before she settled on Brent.”

“Ex-boyfriend’s names?” Cedric asked.

“Lonnie Bridgewater.” Amy frowned, thinking about it. “That’s the blond grizzly bear I saw at the park who had been following me. The other was Glenn Frasier, a black bear.” Amy started to do a search for them on her phone. “Lonnie’s on Facebook. He’s an attorney. And Glenn works at a brewery. Neither of them say they’re going with anyone or are married.”

“Did Rebecca ever have any issues with either of the guys after she stopped dating them?”

“Not that she ever mentioned to me. But you know if we think one of them had anything to do with the accident, we should talk to her.”

“I agree. She might not have thought any of this was important. I remember Lonnie from high school. He was a jock and he had rich parents,” Cedric said.

“Yeah, Lonnie was the star football quarterback. I don’t know why Rebecca even went out with him. She was always really studious and liked smart guys. Lonnie didn’t care about school at the time. I guess he managed to turn his life around, graduated from law school, and became a criminal attorney. Brent was just as studious as Rebecca and perfect as her mate.”

“Lonnie was voted the most likely to own the most cars. He always had wheels, which made him a chick magnet,” Cedric said.

“What about you?” Amy asked.

Cedric laughed.

“Okay, I’ve got to see you in the yearbook.”

“I was forgettable. I wasn’t voted on for anything. I was studious, and I learned lots from just listening to other kids’ thoughts. Even back then, I was trying to solve mysteries. Who had stolen the second-grade teacher’s red ink pen that she used to scribble on our papers. Who stole Lonnie’s lunch money when we were in fourth grade. Who was cheating on whom. Who keyed the principle’s brand-new car at the high school.”

“No.”

“Yep. I didn’t report any of it. I wouldn’t have been able to explain how I knew about all that stuff anyway. I figured if I had said anything, the teachers or the principal would have thought I was responsible and I was just blaming someone else for it. But it helped me to hone my skill of listening in on conversations or thoughts while making sure I kept my own private.”

“You weren’t made fun of if you were zoned out while concentrating on things that were going on?”

“Occasionally I was called out in class because of it. Of course everyone thought it was hilarious that I wasn’t ‘there’ when the teacher asked me a question.” He pulled into the parking lot at the restaurant.

“I know what you mean. It was really hard to concentrate on subjects in class all the time.”

“So were you named in the school yearbook for anything special?” he asked.

“I always knew where to find things. So when a teacher misplaced her keys, I could help her find them. When someone left his jacket in a classroom, I could figure out where it was. I found three cats that went missing in our neighborhood at different times. I even got rewards for them too.”

“They didn’t ever think you had anything to do with taking the items and placing them somewhere else, did they?” Cedric asked.

“No. Once they saw where they’d left their missing items, they recalled just how they’d left them there. As to the missing cats, they knew they’d gotten out, and they never acted like I’d taken them so they would have to pay me a finder’s fee. In high school, I was voted as the person most likely to be a private investigator.”

“They had that right.”

“It just seemed to fit. I thought about going into police work, but with stuff going on in my head all the time, I was certain I could never handle it. I needed a job that I could work on at my own pace.”

“That’s why I like what I do.”

When Cedric and Amy went inside the restaurant, she felt relaxed in the darker and more reserved atmosphere. There was some laughter, some chatter, but nothing like last night with all the people, loud music, and conversation pelting her senses. The restaurant had a western theme and was filled with pictures of cowpokes riding the range with their cattle, others sitting beside a campfire on the prairie, the full moon shining overhead. Cowboy boots and hats hung all over the walls. When the server took their orders, they both wanted filet mignon steaks, mashed potatoes, spinach, and tea.

“This is lovely.” Amy was really enjoying herself and was not half as overwhelmed as she had been last night. Though no storm was roaming through the area either, and she was with someone she really liked. Not to mention he was sitting here with her now, not a stranger who was communicating with her telepathically. She kept thinking about the yearbooks though, wondering if she could “see” something in them that would help his case.

“Yeah, I’ve been in here with my brother before for a special occasion, and I figured this place would be easier on your senses, quieter, darker, more calming.”

“Thank you for suggesting it. I really assumed it would be like last night.”

“I can help shield your thoughts if you begin feeling overwhelmed.”

She realized how nice that was. She wished she could control them on her own though.

“We’ll enjoy our lunch and then try to figure out what we can from the yearbooks,” he said.

“Did you try to see anything in the yearbooks when you got them out?”

“I had to run by David’s place to grab them. I didn’t have time to look at them before I came to pick you up for lunch. But yeah, I’m eager to see if we can learn anything from them. Okay, so now, do you want to practice controlling your thoughts so I can’t see them?”

“Oh, yes, let’s do it.”

“First, think of something else,” he said, taking her hand. “Something pleasant. Something you would love to do.”

Her cheeks grew flushed.

He smiled. “Kissing me further?” He leaned over and kissed her mouth, and she loved his warm lips that felt soft against hers. And yes, that was just what she’d been thinking, since she’d been hopeful that he was going to kiss her when he first picked her up.

He was right though. As soon as he kissed her, she forgot about everything that was going on in the restaurant: the chatter, the delivery of dishes to tables, the soft music overhead, the laughter. All of it.

“I hope we can see more of each other like this,” she said. “I really wasn’t sure about you at all to begin with.”

He smiled. “A lot of people aren’t. But that’s because I can get into their heads. Not that I tell them that upfront, but it just comes out in conversation, knowing things that I shouldn’t when I don’t mean to let things slip.”

“Oh, yeah, I know how that is. I try to be really careful about it, but I slip up. Especially with my sister and brother-in-law. She usually gives me a look like I should be careful about what I’m listening in on. But it’s hard to do. I always think they’ve already told me something, because they have, but not

out loud. Still, as far as you are concerned about that part where you were looking in on my thoughts at the restaurant —”

“I was trying to protect you.”

She appreciated that now. “I was surprised you were a—well, one of us.” A bear shifter, she meant, not just psychic. “Believing you were human was another reason I didn’t want you getting into my thoughts. What would you have thought if you hadn’t been one of us?”

“True, but I knew that you were. You let me know so many times that you were, even though you were trying to protect your thoughts once you realized I was listening in on them.”

“I hadn’t realized I had been thinking about it at the first, and beyond that, I wouldn’t have considered I needed to shield my thoughts from anyone or how to do so either.”

The server brought their tea, water, rolls and butter and then left to refill water glasses at another table.

Cedric buttered a roll for Amy and handed it to her. “It’s natural. But really, you did a good job of it once you realized someone was listening in on what you were thinking.”

She was glad she finally had someone in her court when it came to all this psychic business. Trying to explain it to someone who wasn’t psychic was hard, sometimes impossible to do.

“Okay, so how can I put up a wall around my thoughts that will keep anyone else from knowing them? To keep *you* from reading my thoughts even?”

“That’s the second thing I was going to discuss. Compartmentalize. When you knew I was reading your thoughts, you shut them down, and locked them away. You can bring out another box of notions and use those to share with anyone you don’t want to share your true ideas with should you run into someone else with abilities like ours. We can keep practicing together and you can do this when you’re on your own.”

She sure hoped this would work, though she figured she'd need a lot of training at it. She finished eating her roll and said to him telepathically, "*I'm ready.*" Right now was the perfect time to do it. She figured she would need to do it all the time—whether she was around people or not.

Cedric began probing her mind, but she was trying to think of nothing. She believed, if she concentrated hard enough, it would be much easier to practice, but it was harder than she expected it to be. She glanced around the room and thought of the redheaded family at a table near her, all young adults with their parents, it appeared—mom, dad, two sisters, a brother, maybe. Or cousins. Who knew?

"You're doing it. Blanking your mind doesn't work. Maybe for a few seconds, but long term, it really doesn't work."

That was at least good to know.

"But looking around and filling your mind with things around you, sights and smells, those can help, even thinking of nonsensical stuff, like giraffes riding in hot air balloons drifting in a brilliant blue sky, or giant, green pickles eating a grilled cheese sandwich helps."

She smiled.

"Now, if you don't want to reveal the location where you're at, you don't want to think about where you are. For instance, you see the patrons eating steaks, salads, but not where. Still, you've given me, or anyone else who can read minds, the knowledge that you're at a restaurant. Maybe a steak restaurant. If you look at the decor, it's western. If you think of the way the patrons are attired, it could be a nice restaurant. Though people could be dressed in nice clothes eating at any establishment. Still, it could narrow down where you are."

"Man, this is harder than I thought it would be."

"Exactly. It takes practice. You can envision the steaks and the rest of the meal but think of being at your sister and brother-in-law's house and they're grilling the food. Just

change the location and visualize people wearing different attire. I was lucky when I was a kid because one of my friends, a black bear named Blue Beardsman, had the same ability. For a long time, we didn't realize anybody else had it. But it gave us the opportunity to practice erecting walls around our thoughts to keep them secret from each other. Before that, I discovered he had a huge crush on my girlfriend."

Amy smiled.

"That was in the second grade. But as things got more serious as we got older, it could have been more of an issue. A couple of times it was. I was better at hiding my thoughts from him. He was the one who was always after my girlfriend. It was as if the girl wasn't interesting to him until I became interested in her."

Amy laughed. "So you had a lot of girlfriends then?"

"No. But I just had to make sure that I knew what he was up to with regard to my dating a girl."

"Did you quit being his friend?"

"No. We loved swimming and boating together. We loved hiking and climbing. We really were best of friends. I just don't let him get near my girlfriends anymore."

Amy laughed. "So he didn't settle down either."

"Nope. If he knew about you, he would want to meet you in a heartbeat, particularly since you have the same ability as us."

"Since he can't build better walls around his thoughts, I'm stuck with you." She smiled again.

Cedric chuckled. "He's an FBI agent. Being with me can be a hazardous road to take also."

"I'll take my chances. I think I've stirred up the pot enough that I might even be in a dangerous situation of my own."

"I agree."

The server brought their meals then and asked if they wanted anything else and when they said they were fine, she left them to enjoy their lunch.

“So what do you like to do?” Cedric asked Amy.

“Swim, boat, hike, climb, and fish. But fishing mostly as a bear. I try not to raid beehives since we can get the honey from the store.”

He laughed. “I did that once, raided a beehive. I’d gotten lost—I know a bear getting lost isn’t usually heard of—but I was young, hungry, and I found this beehive. That was the best honey ever. When my mom and dad located me, boy, were they mad at me. Not really, really mad, but they had to make a show of it. They were just really worried about losing me for good. My brother gave me a hard time about it forever because I’d lost my way. I hadn’t ever done so before. I had been out exploring, chasing things, and crossed several streams. Before I knew it, it was dark, and I had no clue where I was.”

“Amazing. I never did anything like that, thankfully. What did your brother say about the honey?”

“He wanted me to show him where I had found the beehive and there was enough left for one small bite just for him,” Cedric said.

She smiled. She really liked Cedric. He reminded her of herself. “Did you and your brother ever fight?”

“Yeah, when I told him things that I shouldn’t have known about.”

She chuckled. “That’s a hazard of having our abilities.”

He buttered another roll. “What about you and your sister? Have you ever had a falling out? The two of you seem so close.”

“Oh, heck, yeah, the hair pulling and calling each other names. Swatting each other as bears and biting each other. Sure. Once, it was over a guy. The funny thing was neither of us were all that interested in the guy, so afterward we wondered why we’d been fighting about him.”

“I know the feeling.”

“You and your brother too? How funny. But you won’t have to worry about him being interested in dating me. So, anyway, my sister and I had a good laugh over it when we realized how foolish it was because neither of us really cared that much for him. Over the years, for the most part, we did things together. I guess I would have to say we drifted apart some after I was in the accident with Mom and Dad. My sister and Brent insisted I was wrong when I told them it wasn’t an accident. I don’t know why my sister was so upset with me over it. So what if I believed something differently than she did? It wasn’t like we didn’t have differences of opinion from time to time.”

“What if she was worried you were right? And if the police hadn’t found any obvious evidence to support a case of murder, that whoever killed your parents would come after you to silence you, if you let on that you knew it was a case of murder? Or maybe she just doesn’t want to believe it could have been anything other than an accident.” Cedric carved up some of his steak.

“That could be, though my sister really sounded like she didn’t believe it was anything other than an accident. I mean, why not tell me she was worried for my welfare if something bad had happened to our parents and it wasn’t by accident? At first, she was just so upset our parents had died, but then later, she was upset with me for believing they had been murdered. She was glad I had made it out alive though.” Amy drank some tea.

“Did she ever blame you for their deaths?”

Amy shook her head.

“But I bet you blamed yourself for their deaths.”

“Yes, because of the fight we had, and we had to leave the party then.” Amy let out her breath. “Thinking it was something other than an accident has nothing to do with me wanting to believe it wasn’t my fault though.”

“It wasn’t. No matter what the reason, one way or the other, you had nothing to do with it. Not unless you hit your dad in the head while he was driving, and he lost control of the car.”

“Of course not. I was seat belted in. Well, and I didn’t throw anything at him either.”

“Exactly.”

“We were all silent on the drive home. My parents were mad at me because I couldn’t control how I was feeling in that overwhelming barrage of voices at the party. I knew what they were thinking. My dad was angry with me, wishing I could learn to deal with it. Mom was angry, wishing she could have visited longer with her friends. But something else was troubling Dad. He wouldn’t let me see into his thoughts. What if he was trying to protect me from some secret?” Amy carved into her steak. “That was one thing my sister told me over and over again. It wasn’t my fault. No matter what I felt about it, it wasn’t my doing. I loved her for it, though I wish she’d trusted more in how I felt about the ‘accident’ not being an accident. Maybe you’re right. Maybe if she believed me, she didn’t want me hurt for saying so, and she felt it was safer if she pretended it was just accidental. She wasn’t with us, so she really didn’t know one way or the other. Maybe she even felt guilty that she’d ditched the party to be with Brent who had just been her boyfriend at the time.”

Cedric cut off several more pieces of steak. “I’m getting the report from Rowland. I’m going to look over it and see if I can recognize anything that would reveal something of what you say. Just anything. The vehicle itself, the road conditions, the tire skid marks, just all of it.”

“Thank you.” She couldn’t believe Cedric would do that for her when he didn’t even know her. No one had ever offered to look into it for her. She did appreciate him for it. “Will Rowland give you the report?” She took another bite of her steak. “Oh, this is delicious.”

“Yes, not only because he knows I’d strongarm him if I had to, but because we get along really well, and I do work for

the various sheriff departments all the time. So they owe me. Now, if I'm wrong, I'm wrong, but if I feel that you're wrong, I'll explain why and then I won't investigate the matter any further unless something else surfaces that I'd missed. And yeah, about the meals here. That's another reason I wanted to have lunch with you here. Their food is out of this world."

"Of course. You have your own jobs to do. You can't be investigating my claims forever."

He smiled. "I'll do my best. This business with the break-in probably had nothing to do with your parents, but I'll keep an open mind."

"You could be right about the other. Maybe I have blown this all out of proportion and it was all an accident, but I still don't feel it was." Would she let go of the notion, unless she had absolute proof it was an accident? No.

Cedric sliced off another piece of steak. "Do you get premonitions?"

"Uh, yes."

"Okay, me too. So did you have a premonition that you would be in danger before the accident? I find sometimes I don't have them, even though it's so annoying when I should have had. Or could have and it would have really saved my bacon."

"Oh, yeah, don't I know it. I did with that case. My chest constricted, I felt I couldn't breathe. I didn't know why though. Later, I realized it had been a premonition of the seat belt confining me during the accident. I'd felt the worst sort of dread. I still wonder if we hadn't left when we did, would we have been all right? Or would we have had the same result if we'd left when the party was over?"

"If it wasn't an accident, then someone might have been out to get them. So I wouldn't believe it would have changed anything. The roads were slick, your parents' tires were threadbare, and you could have still been involved in an accident even if you'd left the party later." He took a drink of

his water. “On another note, are you going out with Howard any further?”

“My brother-in-law’s friend from work? No way! Howard was the most boring bear I’ve ever met. We just didn’t click at all. He was living somewhere else and then ended up here. I figured Brent just wanted Howard to meet someone new—same for me—and maybe we would hit it off. I can’t believe my brother-in-law thought I would enjoy being with him for the evening.” She was amused that Cedric would bring it up.

“Maybe it was because Brent knew Howard is calm and nothing flusters him? He seems like the kind of guy who never is worried about much of anything.”

“Maybe. I just wanted to go home so badly. I felt that I’d kind of messed up my sister and Brent’s anniversary, so to appease them, I went with Howard to the movie. I couldn’t believe you were at the theater too. Unless you were sitting in your car outside.”

“I knew how uncomfortable you’d been and yes, I’d been at the theater when you were. I had to assist you in any way that I could if you were bothered by the movie. He wasn’t helping you to relax at all.” Cedric finished his steak.

“Well, thanks.” She ate some of her potatoes.

“So what did your apartment manager say about me?” He cocked a brow, a smile appearing on his lips.

“*How* did she even know you were there? You slipped out before she could see you.” That had really surprised Amy.

“She peeked out your window when you must have looked away and saw me buttoning my shirt out front before I left in my vehicle.”

“Oh, great.” It was a good thing that Amy hadn’t made up a big story pretending he hadn’t been there then. “She asked about you.”

“And you were embarrassed.”

Her face flushed again. “I try to keep my personal affairs private.”

“You don’t date.”

“I have. But I had told her I was going on a blind date. I think she believed you were him and it had worked out so well between us that you stayed the night. I couldn’t tell her not only were you not my blind date, you were someone I had never met before. How would that have sounded?”

“A quick pick-me-up?” He chuckled. “Just keep her guessing.”

Amy laughed. “Well, she was that. Okay, I’m going to try and protect my thoughts again and you try and break through them.”

“For two minutes. You have to learn to do it for longer periods of time so that you can really block out someone who is bothering you.”

“Okay. Starting now.” She began to eat more of her steak.

He smiled.

She ignored him and ate some of her spinach.

He was working on his spinach too, but she knew he was still monitoring, or trying to, her every thought. She had eaten several more slices of her steak when he finally said, “Time’s up.”

“So what was I thinking of?” She was really hoping she’d get better at this quickly.

“What you were eating. You did great. I was ready to join you for lunch if I wasn’t eating what you were already.”

She smiled. “Okay, try it again.” This time she was thinking of washing her German shepherd. Soap suds went flying, the German shepherd shook the water everywhere, and Amy was soaking wet. Then she thought about leash training her, the dog pulling her as fast as it could, and she couldn’t keep her under control and could barely stay on her feet.

“Time’s up,” Cedric said. “You didn’t have a German shepherd at your apartment.”

“You’re right. She was a pet I owned some years ago, when I was still living at home. She passed on several years ago, but she was such a good-natured dog.”

“Okay, now that’s a good memory to have if you use it to pretend you have a dog to protect you. If someone thinks to break into your place and there’s no sign of a dog, they might believe they are at the wrong place.”

“As long as I don’t think about her greeting and loving on everyone. There was only one man she didn’t like. Something about him made her fur stand on end.”

“Dogs know.”

“Yeah, just like bears do. The man wasn’t a bear, just human, but there was something about him that made her wary. Kids she adored.”

“You’re doing really well. You can practice this with or without me whenever you want. Just let me know, and if I’m close enough and can monitor what you’re doing, I’ll start the clock. It’s a great way to get in the habit of doing it.”

“Okay, thanks, I would like that. Do you want to come over to my house for dinner and watch a movie afterward?” She figured she might as well have another date with him, and she might even get some more psychic “wall” training in at the same time if he was free to join her and even wanted to. She didn’t want to presume too much.

“Yeah, sure. I would like that.”

“We can practice then too.”

“While you’re watching a movie?” He sounded like he didn’t believe that would work.

“I guess it might not work. The food here is great, and you were right about the atmosphere. It has been really lovely. I don’t feel like I need to surround myself by quiet like I normally do when I go out.” She could do a lot more with him like this and truly enjoy herself.

“That works for me.” He finished off his water. “No thunderstorm either, which I’m sure makes a difference.”

“Yes. If one was thundering away right now, I might feel differently. So where’s your friend who always wanted to steal your girlfriends away from you?”

“Blue lives near Loveland, Colorado now. Whenever I’m in Loveland, or he is in Kalispell, we get together.”

“Cool. But you’re not going to mention me to him.”

“No way. I go out of town way too much and he comes up here to visit my brother. I will never speak to my brother again if he happens to mention you to Blue while he’s here. David is his good friend also.”

She laughed.

Cedric paid for their lunch at the restaurant and then took Amy home. Just as he was opening her car door for her at the apartment, he saw her manager peering out her window through the blinds. He smiled and waved at her. She smiled and waved back. He was amused, but he was also glad the manager was watching out for Amy.

He'd been delighted that Amy had asked him to come over to have dinner with her and watch a movie later. He had really changed his mind about getting involved with her. He was involved and he was glad for it.

"Just stay in the living room, if you would, Amy." Cedric carried his brother's high school yearbooks into the apartment, set them on a table, then checked over her place first, ensuring no one had broken in again. He had been a homicide detective, and then he had decided to do contract work to help the police find the bad guys. He preferred doing it like that, using his talent the way he needed to without having a bunch of other tasks to accomplish and being his own boss. Especially if he learned he needed to take on more cases for other law enforcement agencies, which he couldn't do as a detective for one agency.

"All clear," he said, returning to the living room. He'd sensed her anxiousness at once when they had approached her front door and he didn't blame her. He felt just as concerned about an intruder being there and so he wanted to make sure it was safe for her.

“I bet you normally never have to make sure a burglar isn’t in a date’s home first.” She smiled cheerily, appearing much relieved.

He just chuckled, liking her sense of humor. She was fun to be with.



AMY WAS glad Cedric was checking over her apartment first to make sure no one was there. She realized she had been anxious about that and probably would be every time she came home for a while now.

“So what time do you want to have dinner?” she asked as they sat down in the living room to begin looking at the yearbooks.

“Will five or six be all right?”

“Let’s have dinner at five. How about spaghetti and meatballs?”

“That sounds like a winner. Did you smell the guy’s scent who broke into your home? When I chased after him outside, I couldn’t locate him at all. I realize I hadn’t smelled his scent.” Cedric opened one of the yearbooks.

“Now that you mention it, no. With everything that had happened, I never even thought of how he smelled. Why wouldn’t he leave his scent behind?” Amy opened another yearbook and began looking at pictures.

“He’s a shifter wearing hunter concealment and he knows you’re a shifter too. It’s the only reason I can think of. I had to chase a black bear down like that once. He’d attempted to murder his girlfriend when she called it quits with him and she started to see another bear. When he learned that I was trying to track him down, he began wearing hunter concealment. Would any of the guys you’re looking for who aren’t paying child support and/or alimony be shifters?”

“Not that I’m aware of. Though until I locate them, I don’t have a chance to smell them to know for sure.” Amy flipped

through some more pages of the yearbook, not sensing anything from the students' pictures.

“Are any of their wives shifters? How about any of the kids?” He paused at a page in the yearbook, and she glanced over at it.

“Oh, is that you?” She smiled.

“Yeah. My hair was a lot shaggier.”

“You were cute. None of the wives I've met are shifters. Good point though. As for the kids, often the ex-wife comes in to see me and hires me to track down the ex-husband when the kids are in school. But a tryst between a human and a bear rarely results in having kids from such a union.”

“Unless a bear marries a human female who already had kids,” he said.

“But then some other father would have to pay child support, unless he had adopted them. Though he could still owe alimony. I don't have any cases like that right now.”

“Well, it's just something to think about.”

“Because you can't just turn him over to the authorities if he's a bear shifter.” She had run her hand over every page and was halfway through the yearbook she was looking through when she paused.

“Exactly.”

“Hold that thought.” She got her laptop out, trying to sort out what the connection between the three murdered men might have been. She thought maybe they were all from the high school, but the other men were older. “I just had a thought about the lawyer that had been murdered.” She began searching online for any cases the lawyer had that might be public record. “Randy Carson had filed several divorce cases, and, oh, wait, okay, this case I know about. It was about a child custody battle.”

“So the husband got custody rights and the ex-wife put a hit out on him?”

“Maybe. What if Albert and the psychologist heard the shot fired and came to the lawyer’s aid? Except the shooter was still there and killed both of them since they were witnesses to the lawyer’s murder?” she asked. “Or some variation of that?”

“It’s possible but I would think he wouldn’t have stayed in the area, and they wouldn’t have risked their lives when they heard a gunshot in that direction. Plus, they were shot in separate areas. I still think the murders are connected somehow though.”

“They were shot just once?”

“Six times a piece, which to me means that the shooter made it personal. If he’d just shot them once, then that would be a different story.”

“You know, it would be too much of a coincidence that all three men were somehow in the same area, didn’t know each other, but ended up at the same place at the same time.”

“I agree.”

“What about the psychologist?” She looked up the website featuring the psychologist.

“Maybe the person who killed him was seeing him. Maybe he and his wife were getting a divorce and he felt it was the lawyer and psychologist’s fault.”

“And Albert?” she asked.

“I have no idea,” Cedric admitted.

“I can’t imagine they would have seen each other in the woods then. I mean, if he’d called a meeting between the three of them. They’d probably think it was suspicious,” she said.

“Right. Unless...what if the murderer had been blackmailing them? And they were to meet him there and that’s when it happened. He killed them.”

She began looking at the photos in the yearbook, but then when she got to Albert’s photo, the picture suddenly faded from her view.

He glanced over at Amy. “Do you...” Then he quit speaking and observed her.

“No! No!” the dark-haired man said, and Amy knew he was pleading for his life. He was on his knees in the woods, his blue eyes wide, his hands up in the air. Say his name, she pleaded, wanting Albert Matheson to call out the name of his murderer. She knew he was going to die. She wanted to stop the killer from murdering him, but she couldn’t do anything for him. “I didn’t say anything to him about it! I didn’t tell either of them!” And then a shot was fired, and a bullet smacked into Albert’s forehead, blood spreading from the wound. He collapsed on his face on the pine needle covered forest floor. Several more shots were fired—six in total. A high school ring appeared in Amy’s vision worn by the red-freckled man but morphed into the university ring. Then he slipped the whitebark pine seed into Albert’s jacket pocket.

Her focus was suddenly on the yearbook picture of Albert again, and she looked up to see Cedric watching her. “Did you see what I saw?”

“I did. All of it. Albert Matheson was at our high school too.” Cedric pointed to the picture of the dead man. “He was in our year group, the same as the man wearing the college class ring. He was wearing the high school ring first. Our high school.”

“Albert said to the murderer that he hadn’t talked to the two people about something.”

“The other two men who had died, don’t you think? We couldn’t find any connection between the three men before this. Not that this is a clear case of the other murdered men being the ones Albert was talking about,” Cedric said.

Amy took a deep breath. “But if he knew them, if we’re ‘reading’ the vision correctly, the man who murdered them was afraid that Albert had revealed a secret to the other two men relating to our murderer. The other murdered men—a psychologist, Patrick Pascal, and a lawyer, Randy Carson. What would he have needed to speak to a lawyer about but—”

“A crime he had been involved in and needed to secure legal counsel for?” Cedric asked.

“Maybe. And the psychologist?”

“Albert had been bothered about the crime, and he felt the need to get it off his chest,” Cedric said. “The murderer couldn’t allow anyone to learn about what had happened so all three had to be silenced.”

“That sounds plausible.”

“Albert has a living brother. I need to speak with him. The police have already, but he was unable to help them with the case. Maybe I can ‘see’ something that he knows that he’s not talking about, or that he doesn’t even realize is important that could reveal who his brother’s murderer is. Let’s see if we can sense anything about anyone else,” Cedric said, glancing at the yearbook.

She went back to looking at pictures in the yearbooks, but neither of them had any visions about anyone else.

“At least we might have discovered a connection between the three men who were murdered. We need proof though to know for sure,” Cedric said. “I’ll inform Rowland.”

“All right. If you want to leave these here, I’ll keep trying to read something more from the victim or anyone else in the books, if anyone else was involved after I get some of my own work done,” Amy said.

Cedric closed up the last yearbook. “Sure. If you discover anything, let me know. I’m going to take off and see what else I can learn about your case or this one.”

“I sure will. If you’re near enough or listening to my thoughts, you can see it for yourself. That was amazing, by the way. I didn’t think that you could see a vision that I was seeing at the same time.”

“You paused when you were looking at Albert’s picture. You appeared lost like you were having a vision, so I tried to ‘listen’ in. I was surprised that I could see it too. I never could do that with my friend, Blue. All right. I need to go.” He kissed her goodbye, but then paused at the front door before he

left. “I’ll be returning for dinner, but if you have any trouble at all, call me. Or tell me with your unique gift.”

“Thank you.”

He suspected acknowledging that her ability to communicate with him in that way was a gift that meant more to her than anything. He kissed her again and then he had to leave and try to get a handle on this whole situation, including her cases with the burglar, her parents’ accident, and his own killer case.



AMY REALIZED how much she was missing out on with not having a man like Cedric in her life. Sure, she’d dated, but it never had been anything like the time she’d spent with Cedric. Just the fact he knew how she was feeling about the pressures of hearing everything in her head, and he would help her, but working together on a case like this made Cedric truly even more special.

For now though, she hoped that he’d find who the Whitebark Pine Killer was right away. Her needs were a lot less important than catching someone who could continue to kill people for whatever his reason. Unless the killer did so to silence witnesses to some other crime he had perpetrated, and he didn’t commit any more crimes after that.

She sat down at her computer and started searching the database she had access to while trying to locate another man who wasn’t paying child support for three kids. The wife was working two jobs, her mother sitting for the kids so her daughter could afford to keep working. Daycares were too expensive. The woman had even moved in with her mom to make ends meet. Her mother couldn’t afford to feed four more people on her disability check. She was just keeping a roof over their heads. If the client’s husband, who was making a decent wage, would just pay the support for his kids, they would be doing so much better.

Amy had been working on the searches for that and switched to another case when she wasn't getting anywhere with that one. The one she settled on next was a simple case of the possibility of a woman cheating on her husband, but her husband needed proof. He said her story kept changing about where she'd been at lunchtime daily—shopping, but no packages, eating out with her friends, but most of them worked and she never paid for her own meals, and she'd become withdrawn and closed off with him so he was just suspicious.

She needed to watch her when it was lunch time and since the woman always took a really late lunch, this was perfect timing.

Amy got in her car and drove out to the couple's house to watch and see if his wife would leave for another luncheon. The husband had already left for work at eight that morning, so Amy figured she'd keep watching the house until his wife took off in her car and then she'd follow her. Amy really thought the woman would be going to a restaurant, maybe not to have lunch with her girlfriends, but to dine with a guy. She hadn't expected her to drive to a hotel that didn't have a restaurant! Unless there was some other really good explanation for it, Amy suspected the worse.

Thirty minutes later, Amy was watching the hotel to see if the woman she was tracking would leave with a man, or by herself. Families were coming and going. Couples too. Single men in business suits also. Casually dressed men. She assumed if it was tryst between the wife and a lover, the lover would be alone. So she concentrated on those men.

Then a man wearing a suit arrived at the hotel close to the time Amy's client's wife had entered it and came out.

A minute or so later, the woman Amy had been following came out of the hotel. She glanced in the man's direction, smiled, and then headed for her car. He smiled back and climbed into a Jeep.

Hmm, it appeared the client was correct. His wife was having an affair. Amy got the guy's license plate number, and

she would learn who he was first. But then she followed her client's wife back to her home. Like before, the wife was home for the rest of the day, there for when her husband came home for dinner like nothing out of the ordinary had happened today.

Amy returned home and started going through the yearbooks again and found the two men, well, teens at the time who had dated Rebecca. Lonnie Bridgewater and Glenn Frasier. But when she studied their pictures, she couldn't get anything from Glenn. Lonnie Bridgewater, she envisioned, was a criminal attorney now, currently representing a person suspected of murdering his mother and father. Rebecca had told her Lonnie had been Albert's best friend.



CEDRIC WAS at the sheriff's office meeting up with Rowland about Amy's parents' accident, trying to learn if it was or wasn't, even though he was supposed to be looking into the Whitebark Pine Killer murders. But he couldn't help himself with wanting to learn the truth about Amy's family.

Rowland shook his head. "I thought you were looking over this other matter for us." He handed Cedric a small file, since the sheriff's department thought that the car accident was just that—an accident.

"Yeah, I came by to talk to you about a couple of other things." Cedric glanced around the busy, noisy office.

Rowland motioned to the breakroom. "Come into my office."

Cedric followed him in there and shut the door.

"Okay, so what do you need to speak to me about in private?" Rowland asked.

"Did you smell the burglar's scent when you went to Amy's house after the home invasion?" Cedric needed to warn Rowland that the burglar could be one of their own kind.

"Hell, no. I didn't even think about that."

“Yeah, neither of us smelled him and he must have had a very good reason for wearing hunter’s concealment.”

“Because he knew she could smell his scent after he was in the house and maybe even knew him.” Rowland rubbed his chin. “Okay, so that takes this burglary case in a whole different direction.”

“Right. If...when we catch him, we’ll have to make sure our own people take care of him.”

“Exactly. I sent out word to look for the gun he stole from Amy in case he tries to pawn it. I checked police reports and canvassed other renters and homeowners to see if anyone had witnessed anything in the area. No one else’s place was burglarized, and no one saw anything. Also, since Amy said he called her by name, it sounds like it’s a lot more personal.”

“He must have been looking for something she had on him, that’s what I keep figuring.” Cedric looked through the file on Amy’s parents’ accident. “There were two witnesses that saw the accident.”

“Yeah, they came upon the scene after the accident had occurred.”

“So had they seen anything? Another car that continued on its way past the accident and didn’t stop?” Cedric asked.

Rowland shook his head. “They didn’t say anything about that. They were too worried about the occupants of the vehicle and hurried to get Amy out of the totaled car.”

“You didn’t ask.”

“Well, no, I wasn’t there. And the other officers on the scene didn’t ask specifically because it appeared to be a case of her father driving too fast for the weather conditions and he lost control of the car and crashed.”

Cedric frowned. “So someone could have shot out a tire and continued on past while Amy’s parents’ car swerved and hit the concrete pillar but witnesses didn’t report it.”

“It’s possible a car traveled past their cars that the witnesses didn’t mention.”

“Because no one asked them about it.” If Cedric had been in charge of the investigation, he would have been asking a lot more questions just to rule out any possibility the case hadn’t been an accident. Especially since the only survivor believed it wasn’t an accident. Cedric was surprised Rowland hadn’t had someone question the situation in more detail, particularly because he really was known for his investigative skills.

“Okay, so Amy was unconscious at first when the ambulance took her to the hospital. After that, I spoke with her, and she was in shock. Her sister and Rebecca’s boyfriend, Brent, were there with her, but no one said anything about it being anything other than an accident. It wasn’t until about a week or so later, that Amy said it *wasn’t* an accident,” Rowland said.

“You didn’t speak again to the witnesses?” Cedric asked.

“One of the other deputy sheriffs did. I was in the middle of a domestic violence homicide at the time.”

Cedric figured Rowland might have asked the right questions then if he’d done the questioning.

“About the current whitebark pine murders,” Rowland said.

“Yeah. I’ve been thinking about that after we didn’t smell the burglar in Amy’s apartment. We smelled tons of scents in the woods where the men were murdered. But what if the murderer had been wearing hunter’s concealment when he killed the men?” Cedric asked.

“Oh, that would be just great. I had thought that was one way we’d be able to single him out. We couldn’t use it as evidence in a court of law but at least we would have someone on our suspect list. Everyone else we had as potential suspects have been marked off our list, airtight alibis, DNA didn’t match, didn’t fit the profile.”

“My brother and I ran out there the other night as bears to see if we could learn anything more about the places where the bodies were found. But I need to go again to visit all the sites. I only went to one and wasn’t able to really investigate.”

“Because you were with your brother just having a jaunt in the woods.”

Cedric smiled.

“Okay, tell me what happened,” Rowland said. “I don’t need to have your abilities to know you’re not telling me everything.”

“I saw a she-bear in the park.”

Rowland raised a brow.

“Amy to be exact, but at the time I didn’t know it was her. David told me later.”

“Aww. I’ve never known you to get distracted from work over a she-bear.”

Rowland was right about that.

“I’ve been looking into the three male victims and there hadn’t seemed to be any connection between them. They were hiking separately, not together, and found dead days apart. Their families and friends said they didn’t know the other men. But Amy envisioned Albert’s death,” Cedric said.

“What?” Rowland said.

“We were looking at David’s yearbooks, and Amy saw Albert and then began to have a vision. The murderer was wearing our school class ring. I actually was able to ‘see’ her vision with her.” Cedric explained what they had seen and one possible scenario about the connection between Albert and the other victims.

“But we would need proof.”

“Right. Well, I’m going to speak to Albert Matheson’s brother, George, to learn if he suspects anyone in his brother’s murder. I know your staff spoke with him but—”

“You might see something that we can’t learn any other way? That’s why I wanted you to help us with this case.” Rowland slapped him on the back. “Let me know if you learn anything.”

Cedric arrived at George Matheson's home and hoped he could learn what he might know about his brother, Albert's death. After knocking on the door, George opened it and stood in the entryway of his place holding a can of beer and just eyed Cedric, his expression sullen. Cedric had learned George's wife was working as a nurse at a hospital so she wasn't there. George didn't look really eager to talk about this again—with another investigator. Then George finally stepped aside and let him enter his tidy house, a half circle of couches and chairs around a coffee table and a large flatscreen TV on one wall.

"I'm here to try and learn who killed your brother," Cedric reiterated from his phone call earlier.

"Do you have any leads?" George sounded hopeful.

"Maybe. We believe Albert had seen a criminal attorney."

George motioned to the living room and they both sat down—George on a recliner, Cedric on a couch. "Oh, yeah?" George asked.

"Do you know what Albert would see an attorney about?" Cedric asked.

"A criminal matter?" George shrugged.

"We believe he was also seeing a psychologist."

George drank his beer. "Oh, yeah?"

“All three men are dead now.” Cedric hoped George would reveal something in his thoughts if not out loud, but he was a blank slate. Either he didn’t know anything about what his brother had been up to, or he was avoiding thinking about it, maybe in denial. Or Cedric’s speculation about the connection between the three men was wrong.

George crushed the beer can in his hand and leaned forward and set it on the coffee table. Then he settled back against the chair again. “Okay, Albert and I didn’t care for the police. As I’m sure you know, he had been arrested numerous times for stealing from shops to support his drug habit. But... you’re not exactly a cop, are you? What exactly are you? A private investigator?”

“I’m not a PI. I do...special investigations for the police. If your brother was seeing a psychologist, do you have any idea what it would have been about?” Cedric asked.

“Nightmares maybe? He was having nightmares.”

“From something that had happened recently? He witnessed a crime maybe? And was afraid to report it to the police?” Cedric asked.

“Nothing recent. Nothing that I know of. He has had nightmares for years.”

“What...kind of nightmares did he have? Do you know?”

“He couldn’t tell me. He would come to see me looking like he was half-dead and say it was because he wasn’t sleeping. When I asked him why, he said it was because of nightmares but he didn’t remember what they were by the time he fully woke. He’d had drug issues for years. I...I thought the nightmares might be about some of the drug deals or other stuff he’d witnessed.”

“What about the criminal attorney? Why would he consult with one, if he had?” Cedric asked.

George got up from the chair and Cedric thought he was going to ask him to leave, but instead he asked, “Do you want a beer?”

“No, thanks.”

“I’m grabbing another.” A few minutes later, George returned with another can of beer. “I don’t know why Albert might have been seeing a lawyer. He didn’t tell me the police were charging him with anything recently. He hasn’t been using for a year now and he hasn’t been in trouble with the police that I know of.”

“Right. They would have said if he’d been in trouble recently when they began investigating his murder. He wasn’t. Did you know he was best friends with Lonnie Bridgewater?” Cedric figured George would know about it.

“Yeah, in high school, so? That was ten years ago.”

“They didn’t continue to be friends?” Cedric asked, remembering the two had been thick as thieves, always together.

“Hell, what do you think? Lonnie’s dad was the CEO of Titan Revolution. Lonnie became an attorney. What was Albert? A petty thief and drug user. So why would they have continued to be friends?”

Cedric agreed. “Why were they even friends in high school then?”

“Albert wasn’t using drugs in high school, but he was a pushover. Lonnie was a master manipulator. Whatever Lonnie wanted, Lonnie got. He liked to have Albert around to be his stoolie.” George took a swig of his beer.

“Albert drove Aaron Bridgewater’s Desoto, didn’t he? He was always driving Lonnie around in it at high school.”

“Albert? Yeah. He loved driving it and Lonnie loved being driven around places like Albert was his chauffeur. Albert wouldn’t have ever had the chance to drive a classic car like that otherwise, unless he’d stolen one.”

“What about the night of that party where Lonnie and his parents were in attendance ten years ago?”

“Get real, man.” George shook his head. “I have trouble remembering what went on last week. Besides, I didn’t go to a party like that, ever.”

“Did your brother chauffeur Lonnie over there that night?”

“Like I said, I wouldn’t remember something like that unless something remarkable had happened.”

“Something memorable like the Rutherfords’ car crashing into a bridge pillar during a storm and they died?” Cedric hoped that jogged his memories.

Suddenly, George recollected that night—in *his thoughts*—Albert coming home in the middle of the night drenched, his hands and shirt greasy, and he was visibly shaken.

“I don’t know anything about it,” George said.

It was times like these when Cedric was glad he could listen on someone’s thoughts. Not always, but right now, it was great. “Lonnie and Albert changed out the tires on the Rutherfords’ car with thread-bare ones.” At least Cedric assumed they had. “When the Rutherfords were driving home, Lonnie shot out their tire and they crashed, the impact killing both Mr. and Mrs. Rutherford. Albert was driving the Desoto that night. Their daughter survived with injuries.”

“No. Albert wouldn’t have done that.” But George beads of sweat had popped up on his forehead. “Besides, the police said it was an accident. It was all over the news.”

“We don’t believe it was an accident. Several witnesses saw Lonnie’s Desoto. Albert was the driver. Lonnie was the shooter. For ten years, they kept the secret. But Albert had a conscience. If Albert hadn’t been driving the car, Lonnie wouldn’t have been able to shoot the tire and the accident wouldn’t have happened. Not to mention they’d changed out the good tires for bad ones.

“Albert must have seen the psychologist first. The psychologist recommended Albert see a criminal attorney because of the Rutherfords’ deaths. There’s no statute of limitations for murder. If Albert had come clean about what Lonnie had done when the accident first occurred, he could have gotten off with no charges, most likely. But Lonnie’s now an attorney. His dad is still the CEO of Titan Revolution. They couldn’t let their names be dragged through the mud.”

George set his empty beer can down on the table. “Okay, listen. I was two years older than my brother. I was never there for him. He couldn’t deal with the consequences of his actions, though I loved him. Mom and Dad were gone. He came to me that night sopping wet, crying, grease all over his hands and clothes. He wouldn’t tell me what had happened. I feared the worst. That he’d been involved in a hit and run. But the next day, I learned there were no reports like that, no murders, nothing. The Rutherfords’ fatal car accident, sure, but there hadn’t been a hit and run. He wouldn’t ever talk to me about what happened that night. He managed to graduate from high school somehow and got into drugs, couldn’t hold down a job, and he just wasn’t the same after that night.

“I guess I should have pressed him harder to tell me the truth. I guess I really didn’t want to know what had happened. But why would Lonnie want to kill the Rutherfords?”

“Maybe to get back at their daughter Rebecca whom Lonnie had dated, but then left him to date someone else. Or maybe it had something to do with Aaron Bridgewater taking over as CEO after the original CEO died in an accident the week before the Rutherfords’ deaths. Maybe the CEO had confided in Mr. Rutherford about something that Aaron couldn’t allow him to reveal since he became the CEO next. Mr. Rutherford had been the COO, Chief Operating Officer of the company.”

“If Lonnie killed my brother—”

“We’ll take care of it.” Cedric didn’t want George to take matters into his own hands and end up going to prison for it.

“I take it you haven’t spoken to Lonnie about it yet.”

“No. I need to do that as soon as I can, but I suspect he’ll lawyer up.”

“So they’ll get away with the murders,” George said, angry about it.

“No. If Lonnie committed the murders, we’re taking him down.” The bears, not the police.

“If you do learn Lonnie was behind this, I want to know.”

“As soon as I know for sure.” Then Cedric thanked George, recognizing Albert’s death had taken a toll on his brother too and left. But he wondered if Lonnie’s friend, Glenn, knew anything about what had gone on that night. Had Glenn been with Lonnie and Albert also that night?

He called Rowland after that. “We need to look into Michael Warner’s ‘accidental’ death. I want to see the files on that. I may be wrong, but I’m wondering if Mr. Rutherford’s death is connected.”

Rowland sighed. “Okay, come by and I’ll get it ready for you.”



THAT NIGHT, Cedric joined Amy to have dinner and watch a movie with her, bringing an Italian bottle of Sangiovese red wine with him, and she was so glad to see him. It had been a long day and she wanted to finish off the night with Cedric. She really enjoyed spending her evenings with him.

She served up spaghetti and meatballs and parmesan garlic toast for dinner while Cedric poured glasses of wine for them. Then they sat down to eat.

“I take it you didn’t learn anything more from the yearbooks,” he said.

“No. Unfortunately, I didn’t. Have you talked with Glenn Frasier about the accident? I’m thinking he had become friends with Lonnie after Rebecca had broken up with both of them.”

“I tried after I spoke with Albert’s brother, George,” Cedric said. “Glenn wouldn’t talk to me.”

“And Lonnie?”

“Ha. He’s a criminal attorney so he knows not to talk when it could get him into trouble with a judge or jury. When I tried to speak with him about Albert, he immediately lawyered up. His attorney advised him not to speak with me. How was your day with your cases?” he asked, sounding interested.

She rarely talked about her cases with her sister or brother-in-law since they hadn't wanted her to work at a job like that in the event someone was dangerous. Because Cedric was in the business of solving crimes, she felt comfortable with talking to him about her work.

"Well, first, I was trying to track down an ex-husband who isn't paying support for his three kids, but I wasn't getting anywhere, so I began working on another case. I was trying to determine if a wife is having an affair." She took a sip of her wine.

"Did you find any evidence of it?" He took another bite of his spaghetti.

"She has been going to lunches daily with her friends this past week, supposedly, but not paying for the meals. So I followed her to a hotel at lunchtime. There's no restaurant at that location."

Cedric smiled. "Maybe she had takeout delivered."

"Yeah, well, that might be. I think I found the man she's seeing, if he's the one who was with her. He's a reputable lawyer with a big law firm and has a wife and two kids. I mean, it's possible there's a perfectly legitimate reason why she's at a hotel during the lunch hour and that the lawyer she followed out of the hotel and smiled at was just a coincidence. Or maybe she met him there to work out divorce papers to serve to her husband. I'm going to follow her again tomorrow and see where she goes."

Cedric shook his head. "It would be difficult to explain that away. I doubt most reputable lawyers work on divorce papers with their client at a hotel."

"True. But I can never leave anything to chance."

"I totally agree."

"So what did you do today?" She hoped he had learned something more about the murders of the men in the park, but also that he learned something about her parents' accident that would settle what had happened one way or another.

“I looked into your accident case. I ran by the accident scene searching for any evidence pertaining to the accident, like a shell casing, or anything else, but a lot of years have gone by so I didn’t find any physical evidence at the scene. I’m going to talk to witnesses tomorrow to see if they saw another vehicle drive by when your parents’ car spun out of control. Also, I checked out one of the Whitebark Pine Killer crime scenes the other night and realized I’d smelled a number of people had been there. I asked Rowland if he had smelled someone other than police officials who had been at all three crime scenes, but he realized he hadn’t—well, just the hikers that had found the victims also. That doesn’t make any sense unless there are three different people committing the murders.”

“Or someone was using hunter’s concealment during the killings,” she said, feeling a little lightheaded over the notion.

Cedric reached over and squeezed her arm. “Right. I’m going to the other two scenes and see if I can gather any information. Sometimes I can get premonitions like you by seeing past events. Sometimes I can see future events.”

“After we finish eating, we can run as bears there tonight. I can see if there’s anything I can envision about the scenes also. Afterward, we can return here and watch the movie.”

He sipped his wine. “I thought I’d go after we watch the movie—”

“I’m going with you.”

He agreed. “All right.”

She loved that she didn’t have to work very hard to get him to agree. But since he was helping her with her case, she wanted to help him with his as much as she could.

Cedric told her everything he had learned while talking to George.

“You are really good at making up suppositions and then getting someone to talk.”

“I saw it in George’s thoughts. I knew Albert was involved in changing out those tires. That Albert had been having

nightmares for years. And George said he knew something bad had happened that night.”

“Yeah, murder.” She sighed. “At least we’re getting somewhere with this.”

“Absolutely. I’m starting to believe that the former Titan Revolution’s CEO’s death could have something to do with your parents’ death also.” Cedric pointed to a file on the end of the table. “That’s the information on Michael Warner’s ‘accidental death’.”

“Oh, you are so good at this! I always wondered if there was something to it after my parents were killed, but reports said Michael Warner was intoxicated so I figured that’s all there was to it.”

“Well, we will sure investigate every detail we can.” Cedric forked up another meatball. “This spaghetti is so good.”

“It was my family’s favorite. I hoped you would like it. Thanks for bringing the wine. It’s perfect with it.”

He ate another slice of parmesan garlic bread. “It is. I love this too.”

After dinner, she put the leftovers in the fridge, and they sifted through the file on Michael’s accident.

“My dad said Michael drank one drink at parties. No more than that. He just wasn’t a heavy drinker. And he wouldn’t have left work and drunk half a bottle of rum in his car.”

“So your dad mentioned he thought there was something wrong about it?”

“Yeah, but if something had happened in his life that my dad didn’t know about, then maybe that was the reason for him drinking so much,” Amy said.

“True. The car rolled four times after he lost control and left the road. But the thing about it is from the photos you can see there’s no rum all over the interior of the car when it rolled. The car’s interior was dry.”

“Oh, good point. Which wouldn’t make any sense. The bottle would have been tossed about too. It didn’t even spill on the floor where they found it.” She pointed to one of the pictures. “Like it had been—”

“Staged.”

Chills ran up her spine. “That means what? Someone ran him off the road, then set the bottle of rum in the car after that?”

“But before that, someone poured half the bottle of rum down his throat. Drinking that much too quickly affected his breathing, heart rate, body temperature and gag reflex and led to a coma and death—not the head trauma he had received. Though the combination wouldn’t have helped. Then the perpetrator or perpetrators hightailed it out of there before help arrived,” Cedric said.

“Then...then the bottle wouldn’t have had Mr. Warner’s fingerprints.”

“Unless the person who did this thought of it at the time. But if he was in a hurry to leave so no one found him at the scene, either his fingerprints will be on the bottle, or they might have been careful and were wearing gloves at the time.”

Amy sighed. “Unless it was murder. But the sheriff’s department claimed it was an accident. So they didn’t save any ‘evidence’ because like with my parents’ accident—they believed it was just accidental. Damn it.”

“Yeah, that’s what I’m afraid of.”

“Okay, well, let’s go run as bears. All right?” Amy said.

“Yeah, let’s go. Dinner was delicious.”

“Thanks. So was the wine.”

They got into Cedric’s car to drive out to the park. Once they arrived there, they had to hike in before they could strip off their clothes, hide them, and then shift into their bear fur coats.

She thought he was so sweet when he hid her clothes with his so she could shift quickly and didn’t have to take the time

to hide her own clothes.

He was beautiful to look at when he was naked, muscular, tanned, tall and when he shifted into his bear, he was the same bear she'd seen with David the other night. The two brothers had effectively chased off the blond bear that night. David was in her sleuth, but grizzlies didn't normally run in packs like wolves did. She would know their scents, which would identify the shifter and then she'd recognize their bear self if she could smell him, but she hadn't seen all the bears in their fur coats.

Cedric nudged her muzzle with his and she licked his back and then they headed for the first of the crime scenes. When they finally reached it, they sniffed and searched all around it. She smelled Rowland's scent here, but he had probably been in his human form investigating the murder and not here as a bear.

Tons of scents—humans', a few bears', wolves', cougars' had been left behind. They'd probably smelled the blood on the ground. Even Cedric and David's scents were there, but more recent than the humans' scents. They both paused, taking in the scene where the body had been found by hikers.



WHILE CEDRIC LOOKED over the first crime scene closest to where they had hiked into the park, he felt himself drawn into an escapable vision of a dense fog filling the area as cool air mixed with the warm air in the woods. *He saw Albert pacing, not hiking like they thought he'd been. He was dressed for hiking—hiking boots, backpack, water bottle, which had made them think that's what he'd been doing out there. But instead, he was walking back and forth as though he was waiting for someone. A meeting that ended up with him taking several bullets.*

A twig snapped and Albert turned around. Cedric's vision was gone. He glanced at Amy.

As a she-bear, she took a deep breath and nodded. *“The vision ended before we could see who he was waiting for.”*

“The murderer.”

“I’m sure of it.”

Cedric loved that they could communicate with each other telepathically when they were bears. *“Are you ready to move onto the next crime scene?”*

“Yes. I just wish we could envision who the murderer was.”

“Me too, though I’m glad we have at least had some visions.”

“True.”

Then they ambled to the next crime scene. It was about five miles away from where Albert had died. The mortician had said the psychologist had died the day before Albert had. When they arrived at the spot, Cedric nuzzled Amy, making sure she was all right with this. He figured she hadn’t been involved in trying to envision crime scene details before and might be bothered by it, though as he read her mind, he only found her concentrating on her surroundings as bears would.



AMY COULD SMELL a bunch of human scents, Rowland’s, Cedric’s, his brother’s, and she realized she wouldn’t be able to help with this as far as determining who the murderer might be by scent. Many of the human scents had been at both crime scenes, but they were probably just the investigators, and she didn’t know their scents.

Cedric and Amy roamed around the area, trying to pick up any visions of Patrick Pascal.

They were there for about twenty minutes, and Amy hated that about her visions. That she couldn’t just force them to appear so they’d see what had happened to Patrick. She

glanced at Cedric. He was moving his large head from side to side, smelling the air, trying to come up with a vision also.

She wondered if she was blocking on any visions, trying too hard to see anything. But she realized Cedric wasn't getting any either. Maybe he was having the same trouble.

"I am. Are you ready for the last crime scene?"

"Yes. No luck here."

"With me either."

Then they left together, still listening for any sign of humans and other bears. But they didn't see anything that would worry them. When they arrived at the last crime scene about three miles away and checked it out also, they saw a male blond grizzly snooping around. He saw them then and looked a little startled, then stood on his hind legs in an aggressive manner.

"Let's go home and watch the movie like we had planned," Cedric said to Amy, eyeing the bear.

"All right." She didn't want him to get into a fight with the blond bear.

They travelled all the way back to where they'd hidden their clothes. When they finally reached them, they hurried to dress, then returned to his car and headed to her place. "That was Lonnie, wasn't it? Did you smell his scent?" she asked.

"Yeah, it's Lonnie Bridgewater. I still can't believe David and I went to high school with these guys. I want to speak to Glenn, Lonnie's friend, and see if he can shed any light on all this."

"I think Lonnie's the one I saw as a grizzly in the woods before. Do you think we're blocked for some reason and that's why we can only see the visions about Albert?" Amy asked.

"You know you can't force them. Something calls to us, and we see what we see," Cedric said.

"Have you ever tried to force visions?"

He nodded. “Yeah. Lots of times. Like trying to learn who a murderer is or where a child has disappeared to. That’s why I know that I can’t force the visions. But sometimes I can speak to someone about something, and they start thinking about it and I can read their thoughts. That’s what happened with Albert’s brother until he shared with me. Otherwise, he wasn’t forthcoming about the night of your parents’ fatal car crash.”

“Glenn, Lonnie’s friend, might not know anything.”

“True.”

Once they reached her apartment, she poured glasses of water for them. “So what kind of movie do you want to watch? A spy thriller? Sci-Fi? Fantasy? True stories—crime? Historical?”

“It’s totally up to you. I don’t know what you can handle.” He took the water and drank it.

She thought he was sweet to worry about that. “Oh, TV is fine. It’s all just movie magic. I can’t hear what’s in their thoughts. Just what they’re saying in the script.”

He picked up the controller. “Okay, then how about”—he flipped through the channels—“a fantasy?”

“Yeah, that one sounds good. I wanted to see it but never got around to it.”

He started the movie and then they sat down on the couch to watch it, their legs touching. She felt really comfortable with Cedric. Maybe because he knew her secrets unlike other men she’d dated. She had always worried if they had known about her, then what? Her sister had always said she had to keep that secret. With Cedric, she didn’t, and she loved that. She never thought she would find someone who was one of the good guys who would have her ability.

“My brother doesn’t always think of me as one of the good guys.” Cedric took a drink of his water.

She stared at Cedric for a moment, then frowned. He was listening to her thoughts? *Great*. She couldn’t shut them down all the time, even if she was trying to.

“You have to work at keeping your thoughts from me until it comes naturally. Otherwise, even though I’m not trying to do it, I just can’t help myself and I want to know how you’re feeling about me, about us, if you’re upset about something, or comfortable. It’s just something I have difficulty controlling.”

“Okay, I understand.” He was only being nice about making sure she was okay. That was the last thought she was going to have about him.

He smiled. He didn’t think she could do it! Cedric reached over and pulled her close and this was awfully nice.

Once she was invested in the movie, she thought only of the elves and the humans, the fighting between them, the anger she felt at the elf who had befriended the humans, then tried to assassinate their king. But then there was treachery on the part of the humans who enlisted dwarfs to fight against the elves. It was fast paced, lots of action, great dialogue and characters.

“I agree,” Cedric said. “I feel just as angry for all the treachery, but that’s what makes it so good and unpredictable.”

She frowned at Cedric.

“Sorry, I guess you were thinking it.”

She laughed. “Seriously?” So he had thought she was talking to him about it? Maybe he didn’t have as much control over his ability as she thought he had.

“Yeah, I told you I can’t help myself. I’m not used to having a lady friend who has my abilities. This is a new experience for me.”

She sighed. “All right.” Then she leaned against him again. He wrapped his arm around her, and they cuddled on the couch as they continued to watch the movie. This was really nice. She was even thinking how great it would be when Cedric stayed overnight. But this time she wanted him to join her in bed.

He glanced at her.

She smiled at him. Yeah, she thought it “out loud” so he could decide if he wanted to or not.

“Hell yeah, I want to.” Then they watched the movie until the end. He was smiling from ear to ear.

Once Cedric and Amy finished watching the movie—the bad guys getting it in the end and the good guys prevailing, that was her kind of movie—they both agreed they had liked it. They rose from the couch, and he said, “I’ll grab my bag from the car and be right back.”

Cedric figured her manager might be busy by then and wouldn’t be watching Amy’s place when he went outside. He grabbed his bag out of his car and noticed the apartment manager peek out her blinds. He smiled at her and waved, then went back inside Amy’s apartment. “I suspect your manager knows I’m staying the night, by the way.”

Amy shook her head. “She’s watching me like a hawk.”

“Which can be a good thing if you have any further trouble. Are you worried about what your manager will think?”

“It’s too late for that. I’m sure she was watching out her window for us when we went out for lunch earlier and then you’re here again tonight.”

“She was. When I was coming around to your door, we waved at each other.”

“I think she’s worried about me now. It’s not a bad thing. She probably wants to make sure she can call the police first and ensure I don’t get hurt. I just hope if that happens, your deputy sheriff friend doesn’t arrive here first.”

“Rowland’s really not so bad.”

“Oh, I didn’t think so either until he didn’t agree with me about the car accident my parents and I were in. Then I changed my mind.” She led Cedric into her bedroom.

“He has to have facts about everything. Hard evidence. Not supposition. It’s not just because he’s a deputy sheriff and he has to have evidence that will support a case in court, but he has already gone the subjective route and gotten himself into trouble.”

“Rowland? No way.”

“Yeah, the last couple of times that he had gone on gut instinct, he was wrong both times. Some people are just excellent con-artists and convinced him they were the good guys when they needed to be locked up. So he had to harden his feelings and not go strictly by instinct. Now, being bears, we certainly have that for our backup, and we can sense, smell, notice things that humans don’t, of course. His gut instinct is usually right on track, like it is for many of us. The problem was that he got involved with a woman who was a con-artist first class, believed her, no matter that all the evidence either seemed contrived or was based only on what she had told him, and he got burned by it. Then he believed a sixteen-year-old girl who steered him away from the facts in an investigation that was leading to the conclusion that her boyfriend was the guilty party. She lied about the whole thing and was actually the master manipulator in the case. From then on, he was wary of anyone who said he or she believed something had happened without any supporting evidence.”

“Like in my situation.” Amy seemed to finally understand.

“Exactly. It still would be the same anyway. Without evidence, he couldn’t do anything about it. There couldn’t be a trial to bring the perp to justice.”

“By the same token, has he ever had a situation where he believed someone’s story based on his instinct and sound judgement and he found his assumptions were accurate?”

“Mine. But that’s because he knows I have insight that he doesn’t have. So if I hear through my psychic senses that someone really did commit a crime, was thinking about it, or

thinking about committing another one, sure, Rowland believes me. Now in the past, he hadn't always. Once I started taking cases on and helped them to both close out cold cases and current ones, they realized I was damn good at my job."

"I guess that's what I need to do then. Just catch the man who caused my parents' car crash, and the deputy sheriff can have his man."

"No way do I want you to even attempt something like that. You could get yourself killed. You have no idea if it truly is Lonnie. But whoever it was has every idea who you are," Cedric said.

"What if I set a trap for him and you and Rowland could catch him?"

"No. As far as your psychic issues go, we'll work on it so you don't have that much trouble with it. I wish I had known you in school. I would have been your friend. You were a bear like me and that was rare enough. But that you have my gift too? I wish I had known you and we could have worked out some of these issues together way back then. You think you were weird? Between that and all the hormonal stuff, and being a bear too? I was definitely weird."

She smiled. "I can't imagine you being weird at all."

He glanced at the clock on her wall. "Oh, crap. I was supposed to have dinner with my family and totally forgot about it."

She laughed. "Sorry. I guess it's too late for that."

He glanced at his phone and then texted his mother. "Yep. I just said I had work to do, and I would get with them another time."

"Work to do."

"Yep. I'm on guard duty after I checked out a lead." He got a text back and smiled when he saw it was David. Then he texted back. "That was my brother. He said he knew just where I was."

"He doesn't have our gift, does he?"

“No, but he’s pretty intuitive. I’m sure he figured out just where I am.” He got another text from David and laughed out loud. “Okay, so he says he just drove by your apartment because he was late to Mom and Dad’s for dinner and saw my car parked here. He wanted to make sure you were okay but skipped dropping by when he saw I was here.”

She scoffed. “I bet he thinks I’m just a nuisance.”

“He wouldn’t, and I certainly don’t think so at all. I find you fascinating and a challenge.”

“Do you really want to stay the night?”

“Yeah, and if you start talking in your sleep in your thoughts, I’ll keep you company.”

“Oh, what an awful idea. I mean, that I could keep you awake or wake you up by doing that,” she said.

“It will be a unique experience for me if it happens.”

“Well, don’t keep me up by talking to me.”

He chuckled.

She grabbed her pajamas from a drawer. “I’ll take a shower and then you can.” She showered first and came out of the bathroom wearing pajama shorts and shirt, then he took a fresh pair of boxer shorts with him into the bathroom, showered, wanting to make love to her, but wondering if she wanted the same thing.

He dried himself, pulled his shorts on, then returned to the bedroom. She had the lamplights on, and she was waiting for him under the covers. She smiled at him, welcoming him into bed. He joined her on the soft mattress. Then they were together, their bodies pressed against each other, a light kiss on the lips to begin with, their gazes connecting and holding, before their kiss transformed into something much more passionate and pleasurable.

He ran his hands over her T-shirt and covered her soft breasts with his palms, her nipples tightening into taut peaks. He loved touching her, kissing her, breathing in the essence of

her. Smelling her vanilla, sweet she-bear, and womanly scents, her pheromones calling to his, he felt his body roar to life.

She slid her hands over his buttocks and the intimate touch made his erection jump against her thigh. She smiled up at him with such a sexy allure if he'd had any doubts that she wanted to make love to him all the way, he didn't now.

“No, I want this,” she said, and he realized he hadn't hidden his thoughts from her like he was used to doing with everyone, even though only his friend Blue and Amy had his abilities that he knew of. He'd let down his guard when he never thought he would with anyone ever.

She smiled again. “Good. I love you when you're vulnerable, strong, powerful, sensitive, and mine. At least for tonight. I don't want to just sleep with you,” she said, pressing her body against his.

He groaned in complete surrender. He was glad she wanted the same as him because listening to her whispered breath against his chest and her heart beating at a soothing rhythm, while breathing in her delightful scent, he'd have a hard-on all night long otherwise.

She crushed her mouth against his as if proving her point about how much she wanted this between them. He didn't need any encouragement. He was all hers. Then he framed her face and deepened the kiss. He soon lifted her pjs shirt up to expose her breasts and moved his mouth to her nipple, sucking on it, hearing her intake of breath, then he moved his mouth to the other.

She slid her hands underneath his shorts and cupped his buttocks, which prompted him to slide his hand down her pajama shorts and begin to caress her womanly bud. Immediately, her hands tightened on his buttocks, distracting him a bit, but he wasn't about to stop what he had started—

“Better not,” she said in her thoughts.

He smiled, pulled off her pj shorts and shirt and his own shorts, then kissed her stomach. He began to stroke her nether region again, his own arousal burgeoning and he wanted to

surge into her now. He knew that what he felt for her was way more than sex, a meeting of minds, of bodies, of souls. He didn't think he'd ever find someone who was so perfect for him.

She was so lost in the feelings swamping her, that he didn't think she'd read his mind that time. He continued to ply her with his strokes and kissed her mouth again, their tongues touching and tasting, sliding slowly over each other.

She moved her hands to his shoulders and squeezed hard. Her heart was beating so furiously and tensing so hard, he thought she was about to come. Then she cried out.

She spread her legs and pulled at his hips to get him to join her. He didn't wait a moment longer to oblige and found her wet and receptive as he pushed his engorged erection into her and began to thrust. She accommodated him perfectly and he thought he could lose himself in her and never give her up. Ever.



CEDRIC WAS one big grizzly bear, Amy was thinking as he thrust into her and he suddenly slowed his thrusts and peered at her, as if he was afraid he was hurting her. Oh, but he was so right for her. "Don't stop," she said, demanding him to finish. They were perfect together, she thought.

She couldn't believe he hadn't guarded his thoughts from her better, but even now he was thinking about her, about where this would lead, and she realized he had no intention of going on jobs far from here ever again. Not while they were together.

She loved that he'd feel that way because she was certain if someone needed his help, he'd be gone. Which was heroic. She didn't want him to feel like he always had to stay with her if someone really needed his assistance. But right now? At this moment in time? He was here with her all the way, making himself at home, making her feel a hundred emotions at once

—relief, sexy, loved, protected, fulfilled, happy, and so many more.

Then he stopped and she worried her thoughts were swamping his—off-putting maybe even.

But then he began to kiss her, and she realized he just wanted this to last, and she loved that he wanted to. “Nothing you think of will make me want to stop making love to you,” he said, then was thrusting into her again until he came, grinding his body against hers and growled loudly with satisfaction.

“Wow.”

“Yeah, same for me,” he said, pulling her into his arms and cuddling with her. “I can’t control what I’m thinking of when we’re making love.”

She laughed. “Neither can I, but I thought for sure you could always control your thoughts.”

“It appears you have that effect on me.”

“So if you begin to think of some other woman when you’re making love to me...”

He smiled and kissed her forehead. “It would never happen, but if it did, I’d be in big trouble.”

She laughed. “You sure would be.”

They grew quiet for a while and just snuggled against each other. Then she sighed. “If I begin to talk in my sleep, don’t talk to me, but if you want to do more of this in the middle of the night, I’m all for it.”

“Hmm, you have a deal.” Then he kissed her generously on the mouth and they settled down to sleep, though she wasn’t sure she was going to be able to sleep while curled up with him. “Am I bothering you because you’re used to sleeping alone?”

She tightened her hold on him. “Stay right where you are, and we’ll sleep just fine.”

He chuckled. “All right then.” He closed his eyes and was thinking about how glad he was to have come home and met Amy.

She was glad she was still hearing his thoughts, feeling the same way about him.



WHILE HE WAS TRYING to get to sleep, Cedric couldn't believe that he would miss out on his parents' dinner because he was so wrapped up in a she-bear with problems that he'd forgotten about it. Knowing his brother, he would tell them what was going on. Maybe not about the psychic business, but he might, just in case they were worried about him. He had never expected to come home on a mission and end up in bed with a sexy, psychic she-bear and making love to her, whom he was falling for fast.

Cedric was glad Amy felt comfortable with him, which was half the battle of gaining her trust to help her deal with all the psychic issues she was faced with.

For a while, he laid on the mattress with her cuddled against him, his arm wrapped around her in bliss, thinking that this was so much better than just sleeping in the guest room at his brother's house.

He listened to Amy's thoughts, but she was envisioning sheep jumping over a fence and counting them. He smiled. At least she wasn't trying to read his thoughts any longer, which he thought she might attempt to do. She also wasn't thinking about the intimacy shared between them, and he wondered if that was really why she was counting sheep, trying not to reveal her most intimate thoughts to him. He hoped when she woke in the morning, she wouldn't regret having had sex with him tonight.

He closed his eyes, yawned, felt her slipping off to sleep, and saw the vision of the car in her mind—her parents yelling, the car sliding, tires exploding, the car slamming into the barrier, airbags inflating, deflating, and silence.

Hell, she was having the nightmare about the car accident.

He thought of waking her from the nightmare, but then she began thinking of him talking to her at the club, and then having dinner with him, all a jumble of thoughts. For a while she was there, then at the movie theater, the apartment and facing the burglar. She was trying to see the man, his hood up, a mask on. She couldn't see him. She wanted to...shoot him with her gun. But *he* had her gun.

Then her thoughts switched to the run she'd had at the park and seeing the blond bear, Cedric and David chasing it away, but she was running from them after that.

At least the car accident nightmare seemed to be gone for now. He wouldn't wake her unless the nightmare returned and persisted, or she had another intruder at her apartment.

He listened again for Amy's thoughts and realized she must be deep in REM sleep. He couldn't access any thoughts when a person was in REM sleep. But then he realized he wouldn't get any sleep either if he kept trying to learn what she was thinking!

He usually didn't use his ability except for his work. He tried to keep out of people's heads otherwise or he'd never get anything done. He couldn't believe he had no control over his thoughts when he was making love to her!

Then he must have fallen asleep only to wake and see she wasn't in bed, and he realized he must have woken when he heard her moving about in the apartment. He got up to see what was going on, concerned for her. "*Amy?*"

"In the kitchen getting some milk. I'm fine. Do you want some?"

He stalked into the kitchen and said, "Yeah, sure. Is anything bothering you?"

"I just woke, thinking about your case and my cases, and couldn't get back to sleep so I thought some milk might help."

"I was just worried when I heard you in the kitchen and then saw you were gone." They drank their milk, and he took her hand and walked her back to bed. "How do you feel now?"

She climbed back in bed with him and snuggled up next to him, smiled, and said, “Dreamy.”

The next morning, Cedric and Amy woke in each other's arms as if it was the most natural thing in the world to do, which kind of surprised him. He figured they would have separated at some point during the night. With Amy, he wanted to hold onto the intimacy all night long and she seemed to also.

He kissed Amy's forehead and she sighed. "I guess we both need to get up and start working at our jobs," Amy said.

He smiled. "I would like nothing better but to stay with you here like this for the rest of the day."

"Except there is a murderer on the loose that you need to catch."

"Yes, and your clients are waiting for results on their cases too."

She smiled at him. "Then we'd better make breakfast and get to work."

Once they showered, then dressed, they went to the kitchen to make eggs, bacon, toast, and coffee. They soon served up breakfast, grabbed mugs of coffee, and sat down to eat their food.

"So what are you going to do this morning?" She picked up a slice of crispy bacon.

"I'll talk to the two people who witnessed your parents' accident. I've already made appointments to see them at their homes this morning."

“Oh, wow, thank you.”

He leaned over and kissed her cheek. “I want to know the truth also. That’s one thing you’ll learn about me. I keep after a case until I know the truth one way or another.”

“Me too.” She buttered her toast and then coated it with marmalade.

“I figured that. So what are you working on first thing this morning?” He drank some of his coffee.

“I have a new client meeting with me about custody rights for her children. I have several things I need to do today. I’ll probably try to catch the one woman at lunchtime to see if she goes out on another supposed luncheon with her girlfriends if nothing more vital comes up. I really want to learn what that is all about and finish up the case.”

“I don’t blame you. I’m dying to know also.”

She laughed and then they finished breakfast, kissed each other goodbye, which was certainly nice for him when he was getting ready to do his job.

“I’ll call Rebecca about meeting with her to discuss her ex-boyfriends. Don’t be surprised if we meet some resistance,” Amy said.

“Because it’s all in the past?”

“Yeah, and because I doubt she’ll like it that you’re helping me to look into our parents’ accident.”

“Duly noted. We may have a hostile witness on our hands.” He kissed Amy again and really could get used to this, then they both headed out to do their work assignments.



ONCE CEDRIC LOCATED the first witness’s residence he needed to visit, he knocked on the door. Cedric introduced himself to the middle-aged man, and then said, “Mr. Miller, I work with the Kalispell’s Sheriff’s Department, and I have a couple of questions about an accident you witnessed off US 2 North. Did

you see any cars in the vicinity when the Rutherford's car ran off the road?"

"That was ten years ago." Mr. Miller sipped some of his coffee and eyed Cedric with interest.

Cedric just hoped the man might have remembered something more that he hadn't mentioned before to the police investigators, but it was so long ago, that he hoped he wouldn't have forgotten more of the details instead. "I know it's a long time ago. I just had a couple of questions about it. I'm just following up on the case."

"Okay. Why don't you come inside. Do you want a cup of coffee?"

Cedric shook his head. "No, thanks."

Mr. Miller sat down on the couch and motioned to Cedric to take a seat across from him. "All right. So, as to anyone else being in the vicinity at the same time, I did see a black car speeding by them. It slowed down a little, probably worried it might hydroplane into them. I mean, I couldn't understand why the black car was driving so fast in that torrential downpour in the first place. At the time, I even wondered if maybe the water they sent splashing across the road had helped cause the accident.

"I saw a flash of light, but it was raining so hard, it was difficult to see, and lightning was striking all around. The wind was blowing hard too. Wind gusts would sideswipe me, and I had trouble controlling the wheel at times. That night I had just taken my dog to the vet for an emergency visit. She was terrified of storms, so when I left the animal clinic, I was trying to calm her down while I was driving her home, which further distracted me. Anyway, the black car sped past me and then passed the Rutherfords' car. The Rutherfords' car tire blew, and they lost control, sailed off the road, and ran straight into the cement bridge pillar. After that, the car behind me and I pulled over and checked on the occupants. The girl was unconscious but alive. Her parents were already dead."

"The flash of light that you saw, could it have been from a muzzle flash?"

The man's eyes narrowed in thought. "It could have been, or a flash of lightning like I said before."

"Thanks so much for answering my questions."

The man frowned at him. "Are you concerned that it wasn't an accident?"

"I'm just checking out the facts since I wasn't there during the original investigation." Cedric thanked him again.

When Cedric arrived at the second witness's home, he met with the woman in her fifties, who was surprised to be questioned about an accident that had happened so long ago. They sat on her front porch while Cedric talked to her.

"Did you see any vehicle passing the Rutherfords' car on that stormy night?"

"I could barely see the road. I was following the taillights of the man in the car in front of me and you know how it is. His car was kicking up water too and making the visibility for me even worse. Then I heard this terrible boom. The guy in front of me slammed on his brakes and pulled off onto the shoulder. Thinking he'd blown a tire, I was going to pass him when I saw the accident ahead of him, off the shoulder, so I pulled over too to see if I could assist in any way. I had a blanket in my car and used it on the young girl."

"But you didn't see a car passing her parents' car?"

She thought about it and then her face brightened. "Taillights. Yes, I saw taillights in the passing lane up ahead. I remember the car speeding past me, thinking that the driver was an idiot for passing everyone on the road in that heavy downpour. But you know how some people won't slow down for any kind of weather condition."

"So true. Did you see a flash of light coming from the speeding car?"

"I saw lots of lightning. Oh, you mean like someone lighting a cigarette on a dark night inside the car?"

"No. Like a muzzle flash of a gun being fired."

The woman's eyes grew big. "I saw a flash of light, but I couldn't say that it was anything more than another fork of lightning. But I did see the speeding car passing the car that was involved in the accident. At least its taillights."

"Did you see the color of the car?"

"No, but the car ahead of me might have seen it."

"About the taillights. Do you recall their shape? Round? Long and rectangular? Unusual in any way?" He didn't figure he'd get lucky with that, but what if they had been unique? It could narrow down what kind of car it was.

"Oh, like three round lights stacked in a column on each of the fins?"

His brows shot up. That was pretty damn unique. He pulled out his phone and found an image of a black 1957 Desoto Adventurer and showed her the taillights shining brightly in the dark.

"That's it!" she said. "The speeder who was passing the car involved in the accident, he applied his brakes once, his lights glowing brighter. Then the other car blew the tire and swerved off the road. For a moment, I thought the passing vehicle had hit the other one. That it had caused the accident. That it was even a hit and run, but everything was so chaotic after that, I didn't think on it again."

"You've been very helpful. Thanks so much, Mrs. Brighten."

"You're welcome. I hope that helps."

"It does." Then he left her house, and he wasn't sure what to think. Both witnesses had seen a flash of light that they had thought was lightning, but what if it had been a flash from a gun that had been discharged? They had both seen a car passing the Rutherfords' vehicle when the accident occurred. It was such an unusual car, he needed to ask the first witness if he had seen the same kind of taillights. He called him up, identified himself, and asked Mr. Miller the question. "The second witness to the accident said that she saw taillights of a car that was passing the Rutherfords' vehicle. She couldn't see

the make and model of the car or that it was black since she was behind you. Do you remember seeing anything like that?”

“Oh, yeah. Thinking back on the taillights, it was a 1957 or 1958 Desoto. My dad had one a long time ago.”

“Okay, thanks. From the other witness’s description of the taillights, that’s what I presumed it was and showed her the picture and she agreed. I just wanted a second confirmation. Thanks again for helping with this.”

Then they ended the conversation, but Cedric still wasn’t sure if the other car had been involved in causing the accident. Still, if there was a possibility that it did, he had to explore it.

Cedric called Rowland. “Hey, man, so I talked to the two witnesses who had seen the Rutherford’s car accident, and both said they saw a flash of light that could have been lightning.”

“Or?”

“Possibly the flash of a gun being fired.”

“Or lightning like they said,” Rowland said. “Did you learn anything else?”

“The car was a 1957 Desoto Adventurer. They recognized it because of its distinctive taillights. The one eyewitness said it was black. The other couldn’t see the color because she was behind the other witness’s car, but she saw the taillights. She was the first one who mentioned them. When I asked the other witness, he recalled that it was a Desoto.”

“Which means it passed both of the witnesses’ cars.”

“At a high rate of speed for the weather conditions, but the Desoto applied its brakes when it came up beside the Rutherfords’ car,” Cedric said.

“Because there was so much water on the road, and it had to slow down briefly.”

“Possibly, or to take aim at the car and shoot out a tire? The one witness said she saw the water fly up and hit the Rutherfords’ car. She even thought maybe the Desoto had caused the accident by forcing the Rutherfords’ car to

hydroplane. Of course, the Desoto continued on its way and never stopped to help the accident victims.”

“Did you find anything at the accident site?” Rowland asked.

“Nothing there, but I might have if I’d been able to investigate it shortly after it had happened.”

“So what do you want me to do about this? There’s no indication that this black ’57 Desoto or its occupants really had anything to do with the Rutherfords’ accident.”

“I need to learn who owned Desotos during the time of the accident,” Cedric said. Though immediately Lonnie’s Desoto came to mind. But they had to check on any other leads.

“Okay, I can help you with that,” Rowland said.

“Thanks. I appreciate it.”

“Are you going to tell Amy about it?” Rowland asked.

“Absolutely. She needs to know about it.”

“Good. I figure it would be better for her to hear it from you than me. When you do talk to her, learn if she saw the car passing them. Maybe she can recall something more about that night that she couldn’t before,” Rowland said.

“I’ll do that and let you know if she remembers anything else concerning the accident.” Cedric was really glad Rowland wasn’t just dismissing the Desoto incident as unimportant. Cedric would tell her about it when they got together for dinner tonight. Since she was planning on following her client’s wife to see if she was having another luncheon out with the “girls,” he didn’t figure he could have lunch with her also.

Then Cedric got a call from his brother. “Yeah, David. What’s up?”

“We passed the bank audit with flying colors. Do you have time to have lunch with me to celebrate?” David asked.

“Yeah, sure.” They decided to meet at a sandwich shop located near the bank and when Cedric arrived, he got a booth.

David soon joined him, looking relieved. “Hey, brother, great going on the audit.”

“Thanks. It was a real relief. What about you? Any luck on your cases?”

“Maybe. There was a black 1957 Desoto passing the Rutherfords’ car right before it crashed.”

“I wouldn’t think anyone would have a classic car out in that kind of weather. Then again, storms can suddenly pop up when we’re least expecting them. The forecaster will tell us one thing and something else occurs entirely,” David said.

“Exactly.” Cedric got on his phone while the server dropped off a couple of menus and brought them glasses of water. “Okay, so the day of the accident, a few people mentioned how unprepared they were for the sudden storm.”

“Which would account for the Desoto being on the road then. So who gave you this information? Rowland?” David asked.

“Indirectly. He gave me the names of the two eyewitnesses to the accident and that’s when I learned about the Desoto. I’ve got to talk to Amy about it and see if it jogs any of her memories. Rowland’s going to get me a list of people who had classic Desotos registered at the time.”

“Good. What does he think about it?” David drank some of his water.

“He needs more to go on.”

“That makes sense. What about the whitebark pine murders?”

“I haven’t gotten anywhere with that yet. But while I was running with Amy around the crime scenes looking for any evidence everyone missed, I realized I hadn’t smelled one person I didn’t know at any of the scenes. In other words, all were police investigators or the hikers who found them. Those two men had been completely cleared of any wrongdoing.” Cedric told him about seeing Albert in a vision before he died.

“Oh, that’s awful. Do you think it’s someone from law enforcement?” David sounded concerned.

“Or a shifter wearing hunter’s concealment.”

“Damn.”

“Oh, and Amy said the murderer is definitely a man, our age, and he went to our high school.”

David stared at Cedric for a moment, then took a deep settling breath. “And she knew this how? Wait, through a vision?”

“Yes. He wore our high school ring and the University of Montana class ring.”

“Two rings?”

“One blurred into the other. She witnessed it in a vision, and I saw what she had seen. I’ve never seen anything like it—two visions merging into one—the same person, but different time periods.”

“You could never see Blue’s visions like that or vice versa, right?” David asked, sounding shocked to learn it.

“No, never.”

“It’s like you have an even more special connection with Amy.”

“Uh, yeah.” In a lot more ways than that, Cedric was thinking.

The server came to get their orders and Cedric ordered a club sandwich. David asked for a gyro. Both came with potato chips and pickles.

When the server left, Cedric said, “The other thing we noticed was there was no one’s scent left behind when the man broke into Amy’s apartment.”

“Surely, they can’t be related.”

“Maybe not, but what if they are?”

David shook his head.

A few minutes later, the server delivered their sandwiches to the table and then went to wait on another table.

“Well, in other news, Blue is coming this way on a job and wants to visit with us this weekend. He said, since we’re both going to be here, he wants to see both of us.” David ate some of his potato chips. “But he really wanted to tell us he’s being transferred to the office in Kalispell.”

“No. Really? That’s great news.” Cedric really liked Blue, but no way did he want him to meet Amy. “I’m kind of busy.”

“We can just get together for lunch. And don’t worry. I won’t mention anything about you seeing Amy to him, even if you’re not really dating her. You’re just helping her out. Oh, and Mom and Dad want to know when they’re going to meet her.”

“You just said I wasn’t dating her.” Cedric took a bite of his sandwich.

“Yeah, but Mom and Dad think otherwise. I told them you were helping her with her parents’ accident case and trying to help her with her psychic issues. When they learned she’s psychic, they were sure she was the one for you. Even if you aren’t feeling that way—yet. Not to mention you never come here to work on a job and forget to make it to their house for a dinner invite. When they learned you were having dinner with her—”

Cedric frowned at his brother.

“I told them about the break-in at her house. They totally understood why you were staying with her. But they also knew you wouldn’t have if you weren’t interested in her. Speak... of...the...devil.” David smiled broadly and waved someone over to the booth.

Blue was here? At the restaurant? Cedric turned to see Amy headed their way. She smiled broadly at him and her being here made his whole day.

David chuckled. “Yeah, she’s not your girlfriend at all.”

“I thought you had a—” Cedric began to say to her, scooting over for her to join him on his seat.

“I am on a case. Only it’s a different one. Scoot over, David,” Amy said.

Smiling and moving over to make room for Amy on the booth seat, David raised his brows at Cedric, indicating Cedric didn’t need to worry about Blue getting interested in Amy. Cedric might just have to worry about his own brother instead.

“I’m just waiting to hear from the client’s attorney to see if we have enough evidence against the wife in this case. When I saw your car here, Cedric, and David’s car too, I figured you were having lunch together. I had to join you, which is perfect for my cover.” She smiled.

Cedric was glad to be able to enjoy lunch with her too. “David passed his bank audit so we were celebrating. We would have invited you also, but I thought you were working a case over lunch.”

“Oh, congratulations on the bank audit, David. I know they can be nerve wracking,” Amy said. “But I knew you would pass.”

The server came over and asked if Amy would like something to eat.

“A bowl of chili, thanks.” When the server left, Amy asked Cedric, “Have you learned anything about anything?”

Cedric proceeded to tell her about talking to the witnesses who saw the car accident. “Did you see a car passing your father’s about the time you had the accident?” He didn’t want to feed her any details that might influence what she thought she had seen.

She thought about it and then nodded. “Yeah. It was black and had strange taillights. I’ve never seen anything like it before. I saw it pulling up beside us in the pouring rain, the flash of light, Dad swerving, and I glanced back at the other car as Dad drove off the road and saw the other car drive off. It had three lights in a column on both sides of the car. I had strange nightmares about the lights for years, imagining them to be alien lights. Then the car tore down the road before Dad hit the bridge pillar. I don’t remember anything after that. I

didn't even remember the car until you said the witnesses had mentioned it."

The server brought her bowl of chili and a glass of water. Amy thanked her and started to eat her chili.

"And the flash of light?" David asked.

"Yeah, I told Cedric when I first explained to him about the accident that I thought someone had fired a gun."

"If someone shot out a tire, a shell casing would have been left behind," Cedric said.

"Nobody looked for one when the accident occurred. I mean, the perpetrator could have come back and retrieved any if one had been left behind. Anytime. Even that night after the accident had been cleared away." Amy scooped up some more chili but paused.

"True." Cedric hated that that was the case. But he watched her, wondering if whoever she was watching was getting ready to leave. He was dying to look over his shoulder to see the people Amy was observing while on this case. Cedric was focusing on Amy and their conversation, but when she paused to eat her chili, he started listening in on other conversations he could pick up with his enhanced bear hearing.

David stopped eating his sandwich, looking a little left out as their conversation went silent.

"Got to run," Amy suddenly said and jumped up from the booth. "Uh, can you take care of my bill?"

"Hell, yeah, you got it." Cedric wanted to jump from his seat and kiss her, but she was too quick. He glanced back at her and saw a woman and man leaving the restaurant. Was it another cheating wife that Amy was trying to get proof on? Or a cheating husband?

"So what was that all about?" David asked.

Cedric wasn't sure at all, but since Amy had only been able to eat a few bites of her chili, he had the server pack it up to go. "You got me." He found Amy and her work fascinating.

Her bowl of chili! Amy quickly got on her Bluetooth as she followed the couple who'd left the restaurant after having a quick bite to eat. "Save my chili for me, if you didn't already," Amy told Cedric, hoping she hadn't missed him before he left the restaurant, or someone cleared the table.

"Already done. Do you want me to drop it off in your fridge? I can ask your manager to let me in, but you'll need to tell her it's okay. Or I can drop it off at David's place."

Amy smiled. "He might get hungry and eat it. No way."

Cedric laughed. "You seem to know David as well as I do."

"Good guess. I'll call my manager. Thanks so much, Cedric."

"What's the case you're working on?" he asked.

"Proof of cohabitation. An ex-wife was receiving alimony based on her inability to support herself, but if she was cohabitating with a new partner for six months or longer, the maintenance payments could end or be significantly reduced. That's who was in the restaurant. The ex-wife and her new boyfriend. They are definitely living together and have been for all this time. It's not a case of just an overnight stay. Her daughter, who was living with her daddy, told him about the boyfriend living with her mommy when she had to stay on her visitation weekends."

"Kids tell on parents."

“Absolutely. And she’s ten so she can give more details. His daughter told him about all the places they were seeing, and eating out, the gifts he was showering her mommy with. I’ve turned over a lot of the photos of their activities together to my client’s attorney so far. I’ve been monitoring them for six and a half months and this morning I took pictures of them coming out of the house together again. His vehicle is parked at her house every time he’s off work, and then I followed them to a car dealership where he bought her a new pickup truck. I know because I saw him paying for it, but her name was on the document, well, I envisioned it. They went to the restaurant where they often meet up to eat their lunch. When they left, I followed them out, both of them driving to the house, her in her bright red truck and him in his car. I sent the information to the attorney, and he said they got them.”

“Good job.”

“Thanks. I missed checking on the woman in that other case who might be cheating on her husband, but this was a winning move—catching the ex-wife with her boyfriend buying her a new pickup. At least that job is done now. I’ll call my apartment manager and tell her to let you in to drop off the chili. Thanks so much, Cedric. I’m so hungry.”

He chuckled. “You’re welcome. I’ll see you for dinner then.”

“Absolutely.” Amy was so relieved to finish one of her cases. Though there was always a chance where a custody battle over minor children and disputes over finances and property could end up in a physical fight or worse. She hoped that never happened in one of her cases.

Then her sister called her.

“Yeah, Rebecca?”

“Have Cedric check with the Kalispell Tire Company to see if they keep records for a decade ago on the purchase of new tires,” Rebecca said.

“Why? Ohmigod, you don’t think we could have proof that Dad had changed out the tires, proving they weren’t threadbare

at the time of the accident, do you?" Amy asked.

"I really never thought about it back then, but I remember Dad having an appointment to take the car in to get the new replacement tires before the accident. Mom had the appointment written on her calendar and followed him over to the tire shop. I remember because I had to work at the shop that day and cover things. With you digging into this, it made me start to really think about it, and recall that Dad was getting new tires. It made me wonder if the company would have any records dating that far back."

"What about Dad's charge card statements? Would there be bank statements? What about our own files? Do we have any of the old statements?"

"Oh, storage files. I just packed them away and they're in the basement," Rebecca said.

"I need to check them out. I'll call Cedric and meet you at the house then. He might be too busy, and it will be just me, but if not, we'll both be over."

"Okay, see you in a little bit."

Amy called Cedric after that. "Hey, we might have a clue about the tires on my dad's car." She told him about him getting them replaced. At least she hoped he truly had changed them out and the appointment hadn't been rescheduled for a later date, that ended up being after the day of the accident.

"If that's the case and you have proof—"

"Someone had to have switched out the tires that night at the party. Where are you now?"

"I'm on my way to your apartment. I'm almost there. I can drop off your chili and we'll head over to Rebecca and Brent's house in my car."

"Okay, I'm here." She arrived at her apartment and shortly thereafter a knock sounded on the door. Peeking out her peephole, she saw Cedric standing on her front doorstep. When she let him in, he was carrying the container of chili in a bag and gave her a hug. "If we do find that your dad's car had new tires, Rowland will reopen the case."

“Okay.” She hoped he truly would. She took her container of chili and reheated it in the microwave. The timer went off on the microwave and she quickly grabbed her bowl of chili to go. “Let’s go. I’ll eat my chili while you drive. Unless you drive wildly on the way there, I promise I won’t spill any of it.”

He smiled. “I’ll try to drive safely.”

Then they got into his car and headed for her sister’s house. She so hoped they’d get the case reopened as a murder investigation.

She began eating her chili. “This is so good. Thanks so much for paying for it and saving it for me.”

“Unless you hadn’t liked it, I figured you would want it.”

“It’s great.”

By the time they reached her sister’s home, she had finished her chili, and they headed inside. She carried her trash to the door and knocked. Rebecca opened the door and glanced at the chili container in Amy’s hand.

“You didn’t leave me any?”

Amy laughed. “That was my lunch.” She dumped the empty bowl in the kitchen trash container.

They headed down the stairs to the basement and Amy and Rebecca began searching for their parents’ bank and credit card statements for the year that they had died in boxes labeled by dates. Cedric began looking through financial statements for the year prior in case they had purchased the tires earlier.

“Here!” Amy showed them a receipt for the new tires, balancing them, and disposing of the old tires, and the name of the tire company that had done the work.

Rebecca’s eyes filled with tears. “I’m sorry, Amy, for having ever doubted you.”

They hugged each other.

Cedric called Rowland and put it on speaker. “Hey, looks like we have to open the Rutherford case as a murder

investigation.”

“Sorry, Cedric. I was afraid you might say that. What did you discover?”

He told Rowland about the tires.

“Hell, so someone changed out the tires in the parking lot? That was a bold move.”

“Can you check and see if they had any security cameras? The shooter would have to have an accomplice, one to drive, the other to shoot out the tire. We need to ask Rebecca about the guys she dated and broke up with,” Cedric said.

“I’ll check on the cameras. Jilted boyfriends are always suspect. Why did she break up with them?” Rowland said.

“I’ll get back with you on that,” Cedric said, and they ended the call.

“Would you like something to drink?” Rebecca asked Amy and Cedric and ascended the stairs.

“Water please,” Amy said.

“Uh, yeah, me too,” Cedric said.

The kitchen was open to the living room so they could see Rebecca as she poured ice cubes and water into glasses for them. Rebecca carried their water glasses into the living room and handed them to them, then returned to the kitchen and brought out a plate of freshly baked double chocolate chip cookies. Amy wouldn’t pass those up for anything.

Rebecca paused to put the plate on the coffee table. “You’ve eaten all your lunch already, right?”

Boy, if that wasn’t shades of her growing up since Rebecca had become like a mother to Amy when their parents had passed on.

“Of course, I had the bowl of chili, remember?” Amy said, snatching a cookie from the plate before her sister even set it down on the coffee table in case Rebecca thought she hadn’t eaten enough of a meal to warrant having dessert.

“A sandwich,” Cedric said, bringing a smile to Rebecca and Amy’s lips because Amy knew Rebecca didn’t care if Cedric had eaten his meal or not.

Rebecca grabbed a thermos that would be filled with her favorite green tea and sat down in the living room with them. “I didn’t remember who you were from high school until Brent mentioned you had worked on the school yearbook too. You were doing a lot of photography work.”

“Right,” Cedric said.

“I didn’t know you had Amy’s ability back then.”

“No one did. I kept it from everyone. Well, except for a friend, but he was a black bear, Blue Beardsman, who also has our abilities.”

“Oh, wow, that’s amazing. I vaguely remember him. He was always drawing in class and getting in trouble for it,” Rebecca said.

“Yeah, he became an FBI agent and is transferring to Kalispell.”

“Oh, okay. You probably know Rowland and Brent are good friends and he told him you were looking into the whitebark pine murders. I suspected as much when I talked to Amy earlier.” Rebecca sipped her tea.

Amy hadn’t thought her sister would bring it up here.

“Uh, right,” Cedric said.

“Which could put Amy at risk if the killer learns you’re trying to determine who he is and he discovers you’re seeing her on the side,” Rebecca pointedly said.

“It’s something I’ve been concerned about.” Cedric took a drink of his water and put it down on the coaster on the coffee table, then got a cookie too.

“Not me. If I can help him with his case and mine, I will.” Amy had already eaten her cookie and wanted desperately to get another one without anyone noticing.

Rebecca's gaze switched from Cedric to Amy. Amy sighed. To fortify herself, she definitely needed another cookie. She snatched one from the plate. She crunched on the chocolate chip cookie. Her sister's cookies were always perfect. Not too soft. Not too crunchy. A handful of chocolate chips in every bite.

"So now you want to know about the guys I dated," Rebecca said.

"Yeah. So if you don't mind me asking, can you tell me anything about the two guys you stopped dating when you were in high school, and then began dating Brent full time?"

Rebecca glanced at Amy.

Amy shrugged at her sister. "Boyfriends, exes, husbands, they can all be suspects. One of the things Cedric is looking into is to see if anyone Dad or Mom knew, or us even, that had a black Desoto."

"I don't know anything about cars," Rebecca said.

"It would have been a classic. A 1957 DeSoto." Cedric showed her a picture of one on his phone.

Rebecca's eyes widened. She knew someone who had one! Amy wished she'd realized this sooner, but she hadn't remembered until the witnesses had. "Who had one back then?"

"Lonnie's dad. Lonnie would drive it to school all the time. I didn't know that's what the make of the car was. I rode in it a few times while I was dating him. He was such a showoff, but the thing is, I loved riding in Brent's car because it had air conditioning. The Desoto had a convertible top, so Lonnie took it down in good weather. So wait, what exactly happened then? What's this got to do with anything?" Rebecca asked.

"Two witnesses had seen that particular car tearing down the road past them, but then it slowed down just as it came upon your parents' car. Once I asked Amy if she had seen anything else, she recalled seeing the car also. Everyone had seen a flash of light that they had attributed to a flash of lightning," Cedric said.

“Except Amy who thought it was the flash of a gun when it was fired,” Rebecca said, her eyes watering.

“Right. The fact a car like that was oftentimes driven by someone you’d broken up with and was passing them on the road that night seems like a bit of a coincidence,” Cedric said. “Why did the two of you break up?”

“He was kissing another girl while I was dating him. We got back together but then I caught him at it twice with different girls and that was enough for me. He was furious about me breaking up with him. At first, he tried to explain it was the girls’ fault because they came onto him.”

“They forced the kisses on him?” Cedric asked, raising a brow.

“Yeah. Then he changed his story and said I was making a big deal out of nothing. You don’t think he had anything to do with our parents’ deaths, do you?” Rebecca asked.

“I don’t know for certain. We need to determine where Lonnie was the night of your parents’ deaths. Was he driving that car? Or was it someone else’s? Does he have an alibi? These are the questions we need to have answered. Did he ever hassle you about ending things between the two of you?” Cedric asked.

“Passive aggressive stuff. Bumping into my new boyfriend, Glenn Frasier, but he was always wanting to park and stuff. I wasn’t interested in it. Glenn didn’t want to take me anywhere, like on dates or something. My parents didn’t care for either of the guys. Glenn was too cocky, and Lonnie had no ambitions at all. He figured his well-to-do parents would always just support him, though he did go by the shop and asked to get a job. Dad wouldn’t give Lonnie one because he knew we had broken up and he was afraid he thought that would get him an in with me. Lonnie had a human best friend, Albert Matheson. The two of them belittled me for breaking up with Lonnie. Glenn was just not my type. He was pushy, confrontational, controlling. When I quit things with him, he was furious, and I knew I had done the right thing. Then I

began dating Brent. I wish I had met him first and had just dated him.”

Amy wished her sister had too. “Did Glenn harass you for leaving him?”

“When I started to date Brent, that was a few weeks later, Glenn was even angrier. Lonnie was too. It was like they’d been enemies when I began dating Glenn, but once I ended things with Glenn, he and Lonnie, well, and Albert, began to get together and ganged up on the two of us. I was so glad when we graduated from high school, done with all the silly girlfriend, boyfriend issues,” Rebecca said.

“The accident was only a few days after that,” Amy said. “You and Brent were supposed to come with us to the party.”

Rebecca’s eyes widened.

“Yeah, so if Lonnie was driving the Desoto, what if Glenn was the passenger in the car and shot out our car’s tire? He rode with Lonnie sometimes. Like you said, he became friends with him because you broke up with both of them. Well, and what about Albert?” Amy asked.

“Yeah, he was with him all the time, even before Lonnie made friends with Glenn,” Rebecca said.

“If the accident wasn’t an accident and they were in Lonnie’s dad’s car the night of the car crash, one could have been the driver, and one the shooter. I saw Lonnie and Glenn at the party. I don’t remember if Albert was there, but he might have been. What if they thought you were with us? But you weren’t. Had they followed our car from the parking lot? I don’t remember seeing them. Though I didn’t know them that well. I probably saw you with them once or twice when they’d pick you up for a date,” Amy said.

Rebecca was rubbing her forehead. “I...I don’t believe this.”

Amy didn’t say anything, waiting for her sister to have time to process all of this.

“A lot of important people in the community had been invited to the party. Lonnie’s parents would have been since

his dad, Aaron Bridgewater, was the new CEO of Titan Revolution, and of course our dad had to go because he was the Chief Operations Officer,” Rebecca said.

“Hmm, would Aaron have driven the Desoto then to the function? And not Lonnie?” Amy asked.

“Lonnie’s dad had a Mercedes. He might have driven that to the party,” Rebecca said.

Amy pulled out her phone and began searching for pictures of the event.

Rebecca left the living room and brought back her laptop, and they started looking at the pictures of the attendees. “Okay, Lonnie’s parents are right there. They’re so prominent, I figured someone would have taken some pictures of them. There’s Mom and Dad talking to them. No sign of you in any of the pictures that I can see.”

“All the chatter, the music, the thoughts zinging through a million brains was just overwhelming. I was experiencing overload.” That had never happened to Amy before and with the storm going on full force, she couldn’t take it any further. She’d had to get away from all of it. “I...I had a vision. Omigod, I couldn’t remember it before.” Amy closed her eyes. “I saw someone shooting at us in the storm, or at the tires of the car. And then in my vision...I blacked out. I didn’t know what it meant, but it was storming out and I thought it meant it was going to happen soon. I told Mom and Dad. We had a fight about it and that’s when they decided to take me home. I wanted to go because of how I was feeling about the party, but then I was scared that someone was really going to shoot at their car and wanted to stay. That made Dad really angry.”

“Hell,” Cedric said.

“Oh, you never told me that,” Rebecca said.

“I didn’t remember it until now.” Amy drank some of her water.

“I’m so sorry I can’t help you the way that Cedric can. I hope you can forgive me for interrogating you and treating you shabbily in the beginning,” Rebecca said to Cedric.

“You wouldn’t be looking out for your younger sister if you hadn’t,” Cedric said.

Amy so appreciated him for saying so. He could have been offended, but he seemed so easygoing, despite the kind of work he did.

They’d been there for hours when Brent came home from work. Amy figured he’d give Cedric the third degree next, but instead he and Rebecca kissed and hugged each other, and she began explaining what was going on while she went into the kitchen to prepare dinner.

Amy thought it was time for her and Cedric to leave when Rebecca said, “You’re both staying for dinner, right?”

Amy glanced at Cedric. He smiled. “Yeah, sure.”

Amy knew it was a way for her sister and brother-in-law to talk more about this situation, but also to get to know a little more about Cedric. Even though they had gone to high school together, they hadn’t been running in the same circles.

She was glad Cedric was willing to go along with it.

Cedric told Brent and Rebecca about the whitebark pine murders he was working on and now the situation with their parents' accident. He also mentioned the break-in at Amy's apartment. And the business with the former CEO dying the week before the Rutherfords did.

"At the party that night"—Amy held her head, appearing to focus on a vision or another elusive memory—"Lonnie asked where you were, Rebecca. Not Brent, just you. I...I didn't remember that until now. I swear I've repressed so many memories since the accident, but all this digging into the details and Cedric's talking to the witnesses is bringing it back." She sighed. "I wouldn't tell Lonnie that you weren't there."

"So he could have thought all of you were in the car then, if that's who caused the accident," Brent said, sounding like he believed it truly hadn't been just an accident now. "Maybe that I had been in the car too. On our Facebook page, we had both posted that we were going to the party but then we decided to go to a movie instead and have dinner out."

"He was following your Facebook page then?" Amy asked.

"He could have been. Hey, I'm going to throw some steaks on the grill for dinner. Do you want to come and help me?" Brent asked Cedric.

"Uh, yeah, sure." Cedric squeezed Amy's hand, then went outside with Brent, both he and Rebecca exchanging looks

when they saw the intimacy he and Amy had shared. He hoped Brent and her sister wouldn't have any qualms about it.

"You know Amy's been through a lot already," Brent said, starting the grill outside.

"Yeah, believe me, I understand more than most people would."

Brent studied him for a moment, then nodded. "I suspect you would. We just don't want to see her get hurt again."

"I have no intention of hurting her." Then Cedric changed topics. "You know, if the person who caused the accident is a bear, we're going to have to do something drastic about it." Even though Cedric planned to deal with it himself if he could and didn't intend to include Brent in on the act, he didn't want Brent to believe he was excluding him when Amy was his sister-in-law, his family. Cedric realized he wanted to form a bond between them when he normally wouldn't have unless he'd spent a lot of time in the bear's company and had some things in common. But they did have something in common—Amy—and the need to protect her.

"Just let me know what I need to assist with, and I'll be there. Do you really think you can help Amy with the problems she's facing when she's around too many people, violent storms, and too much noise?" Brent placed the steaks on the grill. "Medium rare, right?"

"Yeah, thanks."

"That's what the rest of us like."

"As to your question, yeah, we're making progress already."

Brent added some seasoning to the steaks. "Oh?"

"She's learning to calm her senses when she's experiencing overload."

"Do you think Howard couldn't do that for her?" Brent asked, a hint of a smile appearing in his expression.

"Do you think he could?" It was an absurd question and Cedric knew Howard couldn't deal with her ability any more

than Brent or Rebecca could.

Brent shook his head. “She really likes you.”

“The feeling’s mutual. Listen, I know you’re worried about her welfare should I just up and leave again on another assignment.” At least that’s what Cedric figured they were assuming.

“Wouldn’t you be if you were in our shoes? You left the area and come back for visits, but Amy needs to have roots.” Brent flipped the steaks. “I can see you moving on as soon as you help with this murder investigation, but what if it goes cold? Then what? You’d leave and—”

“This is all new for me too,” Cedric said, “meeting a woman with my abilities who’s a PI, someone who does investigative work like I do, who’s also a grizzly bear shifter. I mean, what are the chances? I’m staying until I resolve the issue with the accident. If the case of the whitebark pine murders goes cold, I will continue to work on it while doing other cases for the sheriff’s department. In the meantime, for as long as Amy can put up with me, I’m helping her to learn how to cope with her special abilities.”

“But the whitebark pine murders are a priority for you.” Brent served up the steaks.

“*Amy* is my priority. There are several detectives working on the case of the murders. I’m doing my own separate investigation into it, but since the accident she was involved in is appearing more and more like a case of murder, I plan to prove who did it. Rowland is opening it up as a murder investigation. I want to learn what I can, especially if a bear is responsible. We need to help solve it one way or another.”

“I hope you stick around after it’s all said and done then, for Amy’s sake.” Brent carried the steaks into the house on a platter while Amy and her sister set out mashed potatoes, gravy, and roasted carrots.

“Yeah, I intend to,” Cedric said.

Brent glanced at him, appearing surprised, then shared an elusive smile with him. “Good.” Then Brent served up glasses

of red wine and proposed a toast before they sat down to eat. “To solving mysteries and putting the criminals behind bars. Unless they’re bears, and then taking them down permanently without the police knowing about it.”

“Here, here,” everyone else said, clinking their glasses together.

“We should set a trap for him,” Rebecca said.

“What?” Amy said.

“For Lonnie. You and Cedric can read minds. You can learn what you can about Lonnie’s involvement,” Rebecca said as they started to eat.

“He’s an attorney. How will we be able to meet with him and learn the truth?” Amy asked.

“We can’t just listen in on his conversations at a restaurant he might go to. We need to present evidence that would elicit a response, at least mentally.” Cedric began eating some of his steak.

“So then we need to devise a plan.” Amy began to eat some of her tender steak. “I’ll try and find out where he goes for lunch or dinner.”

“Just don’t let him know you’re looking into it,” Rebecca warned.

“Right,” Cedric said. But if they learned Lonnie was eating out somewhere any time of day, Cedric fully intended to be there with her—if they could learn when it would occur.

“Do you really think Dad and Mom’s deaths were connected to the former CEO’s death?” Rebecca asked.

Amy and Cedric shared looks. “It could very well have,” Amy said.

“It’s certainly something I need to look further into,” Cedric agreed.



WHEN THEY FINALLY FINISHED A LOVELY dinner with Rebecca and Brent, Cedric drove Amy back to her apartment. “You do realize that my sister and brother-in-law were checking you out,” Amy said.

He smiled. “Yeah, I’m okay with it, if you are. Speaking of family, my parents called me earlier while I was working and asked me to bring you over to meet them for breakfast if that works for you. I’ve never brought a woman home to see them. Once they learned you’re like me, I swear they want to push things along between the two of us.”

She laughed. “Are you okay with it?”

He chuckled. “You bet.”

“I certainly am.” She figured out where this was headed, if things continued as they were going, and she wanted to make a good impression on his family.

As soon as they parked at the apartment, Cedric went inside first to make sure she didn’t have another burglar.

Then she joined him, and they locked up.

They didn’t even discuss what they were going to do next as she kicked off her shoes, and he reached down and took his off by the front door. He unbuttoned the back of her dressy blouse and she turned to unbutton his shirt. They dropped them over the back of the couch, moving toward the hallway—him pulling off his socks; her unfastening her pants. He caught up to her and slid his hands down her pants, pressing her back against his body. Then he pulled her pants down over her hips, and she turned and held his shoulder as she stepped out of them. He tossed them on the recliner while she began unbuckling his belt. She tugged and pulled until she yanked it free, and he cupped her face to kiss her.

Her lips devoured the sensitive sensations he brought to them. Kissing produced a chemical high in the brain and hers was in overdrive.

His pheromones were kicking into high gear too as she pulled his trousers down and he kicked them off. She turned toward the bedroom again, and he caught up to her to unfasten

her bra. She paused to enjoy his kisses on her shoulders, soft, intimate kisses that moved down her shoulder blades until he unfastened her bra and pulled it off. Then he slid his hands around her and cupped her breasts, his mouth on her neck, kissing her skin, her blood on fire.

She turned in his arms and wrapped hers around his neck and kissed him long and deep. She was so wet and ready for him, her heart and his pounding with pent-up need.

“I never do this, by the way,” she said, kissing his forehead, luxuriating in the feel of his body wrapped around hers.

“You mean stripping off your clothes all over your apartment?” He smiled down at her.

“Yes. Do you?”

“On occasion.” He cupped her breast and squeezed. “If I’m in a hurry to be someplace and I need to wear something else, I’ll just start pulling off my clothes and by the time I reach the bedroom, I’m ready to change.”

She smiled and reached down to cup his arousal. “Too many clothes still.”

He agreed and slid her panties down her legs, and she stepped out of them. Then she pulled down his form-fitting boxer briefs and ran her hand over his full erection.

She loved the spontaneity between them as they kissed and chased each other naked down the hall to the bedroom, laughing. She was so glad she’d met him at the restaurant while on a blind date. She had wanted to celebrate her sister and brother-in-law’s anniversary, not with a blind date, and not during a storm. But if she hadn’t gone there that night, she might never have met such a wonderful man who would help her with her psychic issues and would even try to solve her parents’ fatal accident.

They reached the bedroom and fell on the bed in each other’s arms, kissing. He was on top at first. But then she pushed him over her and climbed on top of him and she leaned down to kiss him. It didn’t take long after he was kissing her

playfully that he was on top again. She loved playing with him in an intimate way.

Her body, her mind, every bit of her was totally fascinated with him. From the moment he'd entered her private thoughts with every intention of protecting her, he had formed a bond with her that she wanted to keep forever.

Did she love him already? Yes, she loved him with all her heart.

He paused his kiss and gazed at her with his darkened eyes and then a small smile appeared on his lips. She swore she could never get used to him reading her thoughts.

"I feel the same way about you," he said. "From the moment you swamped me with your feelings of distress at the restaurant, you captured me. I kept telling myself you couldn't deal with the kind of work I do as sensitive as you are and I couldn't, shouldn't see any more of you. But that just wasn't happening. Once we met, I was lost."

She laughed and hugged him. Then they were kissing again.

"I can't believe I found you. Or, well, you found me," she said, pausing for breath and then kissing his mouth again.

"I was afraid of what you might see," he said, crushing her to his chest with a delightful, loving bear hug.

"I could see in your thoughts you had your own demons to battle. And I wasn't sure about getting involved with a bear like that. But the more I thought about it"—she gently bit his lip—"the more I realized you might just need me as much as I need you."

He smiled.

"I'm serious."

"I know you are and you're right. As soon as I let down my guard, you answered me with your light and kindness," he said.

"I ensnared you."

“Captured me.”

“Better,” she said.

He laughed.

She breathed in his masculinity, smelled his testosterone pumping to the max, an absolute aphrodisiac encouraging her to answer the call of their wild bear natures.

Cradling her face in his hands, he gazed into her eyes for the longest moment, then kissed her mouth. She quickly invited him in, and their tongues caressed each other's with hot blooded passion. His hands cupped her breasts and massaged them making them feel uplifted and heavenly. Then he feathered kisses over her mouth, her breasts, her stomach.

He swept his hand down her belly and she was already wet in the place between her legs with heady anticipation.

Once his fingers swept through the curly hairs between her legs, he began stroking and she arched her back in response, groaning softly. He didn't let up his strokes while he began kissing her lips again. He wedged his leg between hers, his erection pressed against her thigh, and he began to rub. His arousal was growing, thickening, hardening. She was torn between concentrating on his erection rubbing against her and his finger working magic on her clit.

“Oh, God, just a little, uh, faster, harder, yeah, there, oh, yeah!” As soon as she came, she realized he'd been listening to her thoughts, her telepathic words guiding him. Wow, now she knew just how great their gifts were.

“For sure,” he said and moved over her before he entered her and then he began to thrust.

Then she was undulating beneath him, meeting his thrusts, loving the intimate connection between them. Wanting this to continue forever. He was so impressive, hot, toned, filling her to the hilt—and being with him like this felt better than right.

He licked and rubbed her earlobe, then thrust again, his tongue leisurely caressing hers.

“You are so perfect for me, exquisite in every way,” he thought, and she was thrilled he felt the same way about her.

And then he released in a powerful final thrust. He groaned with completion, kissed her breastbone with tenderness, and held her close for several minutes. “I have never felt this way for anyone else.”

“Ditto for me.” She caressed his powerful shoulders. “Which is another reason I’m keeping you for good.”

He smiled. “I hadn’t planned to ever let you go.”



AFTER A WILD AND exhaustive night of lovemaking, the next morning, Amy and Cedric headed over to his parents’ place for breakfast. He was thrilled to bring her home to meet them. He was certain they’d make her feel completely welcome.

When they arrived at the one-story ranch-style home, the gardens out front were filled with flowers. She smiled. “The gardens are lovely. That’s one thing I wish I had, but of course with living in an apartment, I just have a small patio. All I can have are potted plants.”

“I have never even tried to grow plants in pots,” Cedric said.

They got out of his car and headed to the front door and rang the doorbell.

His father, John Shader, opened the door and Cedric introduced Amy to him. He was tall like Cedric, his dark hair having a reddish tint, his eyes dark brown, an appreciative smile on his lips. “Amy, it’s so good to see you. You might not remember me, but when you were a little girl, you were coloring pictures in your parents’ furniture shop at one of the kids’ tables your parents had made, and I ordered some of their furniture for my living room. After all these years the furniture is still beautiful.”

“Thank you.”

Cedric introduced his mother, Melissa, as she came into the living room from the kitchen to give Amy a hug. His mother was always so huggable, soft, like a teddy bear, a blond, green eyes and she looked absolutely thrilled to see Amy. "I'm so glad to meet you. David says you have the same psychic gifts as Cedric."

Cedric was glad his parents had made her feel so welcome.

"I do, and I'm so grateful to him for helping me deal with them."

"Oh, Cedric was lucky to have Blue Beardsman as a friend growing up. Though he was always trying to steal Cedric's girlfriends," Melissa said, winking at Cedric.

Amy laughed. "If the girl was willing to throw Cedric over for a different male bear, she wasn't the one he was meant to be with."

Cedric smiled at her, glad she felt that way.

"Oh, absolutely." His mom was always bubbly, but Cedric swore seeing Amy made her even more so. "David says you're a private investigator." Melissa filled everyone's water glasses.

"Yes. I love my work." Amy helped set the table while Cedric made coffee for everyone.

"You know what Cedric does, correct?" John helped to serve up the food, sounding like he was warning her.

Cedric understood his father's concern. It was one of the reasons Cedric hadn't ever gotten close to any woman like he had with Amy. But she made all the difference in the world to him.

"Yes. I'm helping him with his case." Amy took the seat next to Cedric.

"No. Really?" Melissa asked, serving up some fried potatoes and frowning at Cedric.

Cedric knew that look. Melissa was ready to protect Amy from all the evils of the world.

“Yeah. Because of her abilities, she’s seen something about the murderer. He wore our high school class ring and was the same age as David and me. And he may very well be involved in the accident where her parents were killed.”

“Oh, no. Then...” Melissa paused to say anything more.

John said, “She’s a part of the mystery.”

“You’re right,” Amy said. “I see things that I end up being involved in. Like, I wouldn’t see something that’s happening in New Jersey, for instance. It has to be something that I end up being connected to somehow.”

“And you, son? Have you seen anything at all about this man?” John asked.

“I envisioned what Amy had envisioned at the same time. That was quite a surprise. That never happened between Blue and me. But it’s really great too because it validates what we’re both seeing.”

“Wow,” his mom said. “Not to change the subject, but do you have any hobbies?”

“I love gardens. But I just have an apartment for now.”

“Well, once you get a house,”—his mom glanced at Cedric as if telling him he needed to get one for Amy—“I can share some of my prized tulips and daffodils with you.”

Amy smiled at her. “I’d love that. My mom loved growing flowers. I can’t wait to have a garden of my own.”

“I create mosaic garden ornaments—birdbaths, steppingstones, furniture even. Both David and Cedric enjoyed helping me make them until they got too busy with their jobs,” John said.

“I’ll have more time to help you this summer, Dad,” Cedric said.

“Oh, I’d love to learn how to do that too,” Amy said.

Cedric’s father smiled. Amy sure knew how to win over his parents.

After having a delightful breakfast, Amy had to go outside to see John's works of art and Melissa's flowers. "I definitely want some of these for my garden. When I have a home someday."

Then they had to leave so Cedric and Amy could get back to work.

"If you need any help with anything, just let me know," John said.

"Yeah, I'll help in any way that I can also," Melissa said.

"Thanks, Mom, Dad. If I do, I'll let you know."

"It was so good meeting you," Melissa said to Amy, giving her a hug.

John gave Amy one too. "You'll just have to convince Cedric to stay in the area."

"He is."

Both his parents' faces brightened. "You have done what we could never have thought possible." Melissa sighed. "I'm so glad the two of you met."

Then they said their goodbyes and Cedric couldn't have been happier.

"I think that was a good meeting," Amy said.

"Oh, absolutely," Cedric said. "Though my parents have good intentions, I have no plan to include them in solving these murders."

Amy nodded. "I wholeheartedly agree with you there. I love your parents."



AFTER BREAKFAST with Cedric's parents, Amy was off to try and determine if a husband was hiding assets that needed to be divided up equally between both spouses. The wife had been with him throughout his whole military career, moving from one post to another, never able to keep a job for long, having

to start over wherever they ended up. Then when it was time for him to retire, what did he do? He gives his wife the divorce papers and he's already moved in with a woman he'd been seeing for a month. Not only was his wife heartbroken, shaken, and shocked, she was furious. Amy didn't blame her one bit.

Amy was hellbent on making sure the wife got everything she was entitled to during the divorce proceedings. Their three kids were grown now, but the wife had been the one loving him through thick and thin, taking care of the family, raising the kids, dealing with them. He was a finance officer, so he wasn't fighting battles anywhere or anything. Except when he was trying to win at golf, maybe.

Then she got a call from the client who wanted to know where his wife was going for luncheons, and she really didn't want to tell him. Not yet. She wanted to wait until she had more proof of what was really going on to make sure the lawyer Amy suspected had seen the wife was really there for some intimate business, not something purely innocent.

"I haven't been able to confirm anything yet, Mr. Brewer. I'm keeping an eye on the situation though." Which she was, and it was true she really couldn't confirm anything yet.

"But you suspect something isn't right."

"Possibly, but I don't want to say for sure until I know something for certain."

"All right. You've come highly recommended so I'll just try to be patient."

"Thank you. I'll definitely tell you as soon as I have confirmed anything." Then they ended the call. She arrived at her apartment, saw her manager peek out of the window, and she waved at her and went inside.

Then it was time for her to get to work on another case. But come lunchtime, she was checking on Brewer's wife's business to see where she went today.

When it was time, Amy followed Brewer's wife to another hotel. At least this one had a restaurant. She decided to go

inside this time and try and listen in on Mrs. Brewer's thoughts and her conversation.

As soon as Amy entered the hotel, she saw Mrs. Brewer head for the restaurant. Amy would go in to have lunch too then and try to sit in view of the lady and learn who she was seeing.

Mrs. Brewer took a seat at one of the tables and Amy casually took a seat at another table where she could watch Mrs. Brewer.

A few minutes later, to Amy's surprise, a woman joined Mrs. Brewer. A lot of conversation was going on in the busy restaurant, but with Amy's sensitive bear hearing and being able to focus better now with Cedric's training, Amy concentrated on their conversation. Though she was a little disappointed to see the woman because if Mrs. Brewer was having an affair, she didn't believe this luncheon was going to help Amy prove it.

But then Amy saw Cedric enter the restaurant and walk straight to Mrs. Brewer's table. What was he doing here? He suddenly took a deep breath of the air and turned to see Amy sitting at the other table watching him. He smiled. Then he turned to speak to Mrs. Brewer.

Amy frowned. She couldn't believe this.

"You're investigating Mrs. Brewer, Amy?" Cedric asked her telepathically, sounding surprised.

"Yes! What are you doing here?"

"Vanessa Brewer's the sister of the murdered criminal lawyer, Randy Carson."

"Ohmigod, I didn't know that. And the other woman?" Amy asked Cedric.

"She is Mary, the murdered psychologist, Patrick Pascal's wife. They have been sneaking files to me from both the law office and the psychologist's office so I can see if any one man was seeing both men. Why are you investigating Mrs. Brewer?"

“Mrs. Brewer is the one whose husband worried she was seeing someone outside the marriage.”

“Oh. I didn’t realize she was the one you were investigating, or I would have told you what was going on.”

“So she’s really not seeing someone outside her marriage?”

Cedric smiled. *“She’s trying to keep her sleuthing for me a secret from her husband. She doesn’t want to worry him that she might get into trouble for this.”*

“Well, shoot. I mean, it’s good for you if she is able to uncover anything for you. And for me, so I can give Mr. Brewer the good news, but now I need to tell him what she was up to.”

Cedric glanced at Amy.

“Not about what she’s really doing, but that she’s not seeing anyone.”

“How will you explain what she is doing without telling him the real details?”

The two women handed Cedric some files, then thanked him and left. Cedric took the files and joined Amy at her table. “What are we having for lunch?”

Amy smiled at him. “Well, this is a surprise, lunch with you, maybe getting somewhere on your case, and solving my case at the same time. So what will I tell Mrs. Brewer’s husband?”

“It’s easier to speak about something that is closer to the truth. Tell her husband that she had hired a private investigator to look into the murder of her brother. I’ll call her and tell her that it would be a good idea to do that.”

“And you’ll tell her that I was hired to learn who she was seeing? Why else would you have to tell her that she should use the cover of hiring a PI to learn about her brother’s death?”

Cedric cleared his throat and picked up the menu from the table. “I’ll tell her it’s only a precaution in case her husband

wonders what she's been doing, not that you were hired to investigate her.”

Amy took a relieved breath. “Good. So have you learned anything yet about the names of the people who were seeing the lawyer and the psychologist?”

“Not from previous documents they'd passed to me.” Cedric patted the files. “Hopefully, we'll get something from these. We can search them together at your place after we have lunch here.”

Cedric followed Amy to her apartment, and they took the files inside. He checked over the place to make sure it was secure while Amy called Mr. Brewer to let him know she had confirmed his wife wasn't having an affair with anyone. Cedric called Mrs. Brewer to advise her to use the private investigator story if her husband asked her about it.

When Amy got off the phone, she said, "Well, Mr. Brewer is relieved."

"Good. I'm glad we resolved that together."

"Me too."

Then they sat down to compare the files. "I need to run out this evening, concerning the killer's case and then I'll return here. Maybe we could order a pizza and have it delivered." Cedric really didn't want to leave Amy alone tonight, but he needed to go to the Cherry Blossom Festival and see if he could learn if the guy he was trying to track down was there.

"You have a job to do," she said.

"I do."

"Can I help?"

"I'm going to the Cherry Blossom Festival—"

She raised her brows. "You don't want to take me?" She smiled and he already knew that look. He wasn't going to be able to leave her behind.

“I’ll be trying to learn if the Whitebark Pine Killer is there. Everyone’s going to be there.”

“But me.”

This time, he smiled. “Since everyone’s going to be there, I don’t want you to be bothered by all the voices in your head. Besides, if he is there, I don’t want you to be in the line of fire.”

“I understand that you’re worried about someone coming after me. But I’m not going to hide away all the time.”

“Well, that too, but the business about the trouble you’re having with large crowds could be an issue.”

“I’m coming with you. Then we can get pizza at the festival.”

Well, that decided that. He sighed. He needed to concentrate on the crowds, but he was afraid he was going to end up spending the whole time helping her with crowd control in her head. “Okay, if you’re certain you’ll be all right.” He wasn’t sure it was a good idea. He could envision working hard to try and protect her from all the conversations going on and miss hearing what he needed to hear. He would also need to keep an eye out on her in case anyone had the notion of harming her.

“I will be.”

All at once, he realized the reason she wanted to go with him might have been because she hadn’t wanted to be left alone at the apartment. That she felt relieved he’d be watching over her and he felt bad that he’d even considered not taking her with him after what had happened at her place the other night.

“You know, you could stay at my brother’s house tonight until I return,” he said.

She rolled her eyes. “No, thanks.”

He smiled. He was glad she felt safe with him and didn’t want to bother his brother.

“No one has any idea what the killer looks like, do they?” she asked.

“No. Not a clue. That’s why I might be able to help with this while I read people’s thoughts,” Cedric said.

Then they began to go through the files that Mrs. Brewer and Pascal’s sister had turned over to Cedric, looking for any common names for individuals that had seen both the psychologist and the attorney.

“Albert Matheson had spoken to Patrick Pascal a week before the psychologist was murdered,” Cedric said, his name standing out because he had also been murdered.

“Albert. Okay, here, look at some of these records for the lawyer then,” Amy said.

Then Cedric found it. “Here it is. Carson, the lawyer, had spoken with Albert two days before his death. I haven’t found any other men who had seen both professionals shortly before their deaths.”

“I haven’t either. We have the connection between the three murdered men then. Now we need to find a way to prove his friend Lonnie had murdered my parents in the first place, if he is the one responsible for all of this.”

Cedric nodded. “I agree.”



WHEN CEDRIC and Amy arrived at the Cherry Blossom Festival, they found the square filled with people having fun, watching the singers perform, men and women dancing on stage, and food and drink being sold at various stands. Kids were getting face painting done at several makeup artist tables. A juggler was showing off his balancing acts, some kids were twirling hula hoops to music and the one who lasted the longest won the prize.

“Now that’s something I could never do,” Cedric said, his arms folded across his chest as they watched the kids.

Amy smiled. "I could never get the hang of it either."

Then they saw a group of kids playing musical chairs and the person in charge would remove a chair so that one of the kids would be without a chair as soon as the guy in charge quit playing the music. The music stopped and all the kids scrambled to get a chair, leaving one little boy without. He went to sit on the sidelines with the others who had missed out earlier in the game.

"I loved that game when I was a kid," Amy said.

"Did you win a lot?"

"Nope. It was just fun for me. I usually lost out about the middle of the game, but I loved seeing the rest of the kids fighting over chairs when I had to sit out."

"I loved it because I always won." He smiled at her.

She frowned at him. "No. Always?"

"Yep."

"You cheated! Or you were way too aggressive."

"I knew just when the person stopping the music was going to make his move and I was always aware of where a vacant chair would be. Plus, I was fast."

She laughed. "I knew you had cheated."

"How are you doing?" Cedric took her hand and held onto it. "I don't want to lose you in the crowd." But he also wanted to be able to comfort her if the voices became too much for her.

"I'm good, thank you. But I need to concentrate now."

He arched a brow.

She smiled. "I can help you."

He hadn't considered that. He'd only thought she'd be overwhelmed with too many thoughts and too much noise and conversations, the music, just all of it.

He began listening to people's conversations, but he was looking for a man who was alone. FBI profilers had said he

would be unmarried, no children, and no close friends.

They both were quiet, and she headed for the craft booths, pulling him along with her. “I figure we can browse the crafts and listen to people’s thoughts at the same time, and we wouldn’t look so suspicious.”

“That’s a good plan.” He liked working with Amy. She had a good head on her shoulders.



AMY WAS glad Cedric was holding her hand because he really seemed to help her deal with all the noise and commotion going on around her.

“I’m glad I can help,” he said.

She sighed. “You’re supposed to be listening to others, not me.”

“I can’t help but listen to you when I’m worried if you’ll be okay. I’m glad you’re feeling fine.”

“Well, thank you.” At one of the craft booths, she found a neat, quilted pan handle holder for a frying pan that really needed one. Besides, it was decorated with a grizzly bear snacking on cherries, and it was made by a grizzly bear in her sleuth. “Thanks, Sara Jane.” How could Amy resist? She paid for her purchase and then moved to the next booth, and she smiled. “How are you, Mrs. Mayfair?”

She was also a grizzly bear in Amy’s sleuth who had been selling crafts ever since they began having the festival. Amy loved how she also featured both grizzlies and black bears in her creations.

“I’m good,” Mrs. Mayfair said. “And you?” She smiled at Cedric.

“Oh, I’m great. Thanks. So this is Cedric Shader. His brother is David at the bank.”

“Oh, of course. I remember the two of you when you were little tykes. You do bear an uncanny resemblance to your

brother. What brings you back to Kalispell?"

"Work, ma'am. I'm helping the sheriff's department with a case."

"Oh, my. They're lucky to have you. Maybe you're thinking of staying a while longer now, eh? We can always use another one of our kind here."

Cedric smiled.

Amy figured Mrs. Mayfair was speculating away about him and her since he was holding Amy's hand.

Amy began looking at the aprons Mrs. Mayfair was selling. She loved one the best that had a grizzly bear eating honey from a beehive, a cherry blossom tree blooming in the background. "I'll take this one. It reminds me of someone who raided a beehive as a cub." She glanced at Cedric, and he chuckled.

Then she paid for her purchase, and they walked over to a group of artists who were doing caricatures. "Mr. Boston, this is Cedric Shader." Mr. Boston was a black bear.

"Ah, yes, you're helping the sheriff's department on a case. Take a seat and I'll do your portrait. Bears and humans or just humans? Or just one or the other?"

"Both," Amy said. She'd never had one of these done, so for a fun memory of the time she spent here with a grizzly, she figured both would be perfect. Mr. Boston did the most remarkable work, and he was quick too. "Do you have a picture of your bear?" she asked Cedric.

"No, not on me."

"He already knows what I look like. How about Cedric's brother at the bank?" Amy asked Mr. Boston.

She realized afterward Cedric might not want to get a portrait of the two of them together. Before she could ask him the question, really not wanting to put him on the spot, but wanting to do what was right, he said telepathically to her, "*Yeah, I do.*"

She shook her head at him. She had to learn to hide her thoughts from him. He smiled.

After Mr. Boston finished their masterpiece, they both thanked him, and Cedric paid for it.

“You do realize everyone in my bear sleuth will say I’m dating an out-of-town bear, right?” she asked Cedric.

“I was born and raised here, so I’m not really an outsider. Besides, you’re not seeing anyone else, right?”

“So true or my brother-in-law wouldn’t have set me up on a blind date.”

They got slices of pepperoni pizza and cherry coolers to drink and sat down at one of the tables to eat. She was really enjoying the time with Cedric and not minding the crowds at all. She couldn’t believe how comfortable he made her feel around them.

But then Rowland called Cedric and she wondered if he had news about either the murder case or her parents’ accident.



“YEAH, Rowland, what have you got for me?” Cedric asked.

“There was only one ’57 Desoto Adventurer registered to anyone during the time of Amy’s parents’ accident, Aaron Bridgewater.”

Cedric filled him in on what Rebecca had said about her ex-boyfriends and how Lonnie also drove the Desoto.

“Okay, so that’s a little more of a coincidence.”

“And they were at the party Amy and her parents were at. Not only that but Rebecca and Brent were supposed to be there. They told everyone they would be and decided not to go at the last minute.”

“So you think the ex-boyfriends, Lonnie and Glenn, had something to do with this?” Rowland asked.

“Possibly.” Cedric also filled him in about Albert seeing both of the other murdered men in the woods shortly before they were murdered. “I still feel it might have more to do with Aaron getting the CEO’s job after the former CEO died.”

“Okay, I’ve got to go. Thanks for confirming this for me.”

“You’re welcome. Amy might have been right all along about her family’s accident. Talk later.”

Amy reached over and squeezed Cedric’s hand.

“Don’t look now, but I see Lonnie over where we bought our food. I didn’t look straight at him or make eye contact or anything,” Cedric said. “He’s too far away for me to see his thoughts.”

“I won’t look that way. I wish I could say something to him and see if he’s the one who had anything to do with my parents’ accident.” She frowned at Cedric. “Okay, I’m done eating if you’re ready to look at some more arts and crafts.”

“I am.”

“Have you ever been to one of these?” she asked him, trying to get her mind off Cedric having spied Lonnie here.

“No. I’ve never been here when they’ve had one of these. Coming here with you was perfect for my first-time experience.”

“Oh, I’m having a blast with you. I’d go with Rebecca and Brent, but I was a third wheel and the noise bothered me. I’m glad we’re able to do this together. Especially when we’re on a mission.”

He smiled at her.

“You owe me a movie theater date, by the way.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, after my movie date experience with Howard, I need to know how you would fare.”

Cedric laughed. “It would be a vastly different experience for you, believe me.”

“That’s exactly what I wanted to hear. So really, do you think Lonnie could be here just to enjoy the festival?”

“My intuition tells me no, but I could certainly be wrong.”

“My intuition tells me the same thing since his name keeps coming up in the investigations that you’re doing.”

They did try to maneuver around the park so they could get closer to Lonnie and see what he was thinking, if they could. But they wanted to do it as covertly as they could. She swore no matter which direction they took to work their way around to get closer to him and listen to his thoughts, he was keeping his distance from them. Normally, they wouldn’t have to get really close to him, but because they were both being bombarded with sounds, they needed to.

“Is he worried about us?” she asked Cedric.

“Yeah, like he’s stalking us while we’re trying to stalk him.”

“And he wouldn’t, unless he had something to hide.” At least that’s what Amy sensed about the grizzly. But neither of them were getting anything from the encounter. “About tonight, after the festival—”

“Do you want to go for a bear run?”

“Yeah. You read my mind.” Amy smiled at Cedric.



THAT NIGHT while Cedric and Amy were running as bears, they wanted to explore farther out from the crime scenes. Cedric couldn’t help but want to continue to search for clues concerning who had killed the men and Amy seemed to be just as willing to do the same. About a mile from where Albert’s body had been found, the last victim in the triple homicide, Cedric smelled the distinctive order of a metallic item and the pungent smell of nitroglycerin.

Amy nudged him and he assumed she must have smelled the same thing he did. “*A gun is hidden close by.*”

“Yeah, and it has been fired. I can’t imagine anyone would carry a gun, fire it, then accidentally lose it,” he told her.

“We have to find it.”

“My thoughts exactly.” They spread out from each other, looking for the gun, and he sure hoped they would find it and that it would match the ballistics from the spent rounds they had found at the crime scenes.

“Over here,” Amy called out to him.

He hurried over and they saw a couple of wolves watching them.

“They’re Lori and Paul Cunningham, pack leaders of the wolf pack near here,” Amy said.

“I didn’t know about them.”

She growled at the wolves. They howled back in greeting.

The next thing the bears knew, the wolves were joining them. Paul and Cedric shifted.

Paul said, “Hell, you’re the guy who was hired to help the sheriff’s department with the triple murders near here.”

“Yeah. I think we just found the gun that might have been used in the crimes.”

“How far are you from your clothes?” Paul asked.

“About a mile from here,” Cedric said.

Paul nodded. “Okay, our clothes are farther out than that. We’ll watch over the evidence if you want to get your clothes and come back for it. We won’t let anyone remove it.”

Cedric glanced at Amy.

“I’ll stay here with the wolves.”

“All right. Amy will stay here with you. Thanks.” Then Cedric shifted.

Paul did too.

“Hurry back,” Amy said to Cedric.

“I will.”

Cedric hoped that this was the weapon that had been used in the murders and ran as fast as a grizzly could to return to his and Amy's garments. At thirty-five-miles-per-hour, it didn't take him long to reach their clothes. He made sure no one was in the area, then he shifted and hurried to dress. He gathered Amy's clothes, then called Rowland about the gun. He gave him the location as he ran through the woods to meet up with Amy and the wolves.

"I'll meet you out there," Rowland said, sounding eager to take the gun into custody and test it to see if it was the one used in the killings.

When Cedric reached the location, Paul and Lori inclined their heads.

"Thanks for helping us out," Cedric said, then Paul and Lori raced off.

Amy shifted and hurried to dress. "Did you contact Rowland?"

"I sure did. He's thrilled and will be here as soon as he can get here."

"Good. I just—" She looked down at the gun. "Ohmigod."

"What?"

"It's my gun. My father's gun. It's the one that was stolen from my apartment the first time it was burglarized," she said.

The next afternoon, the sheriff's department got the ballistics test back on the gun they had found which matched the bullets that had killed Albert Matheson, Patrick Pascal, and Randy Carson.

"Initially, Rowland thought the burglar who stole the gun from your apartment had been searching for evidence in a PI case involving him that you were investigating. But what if it was something your dad might have written down or had some evidence of wrongdoing that would have implicated the person involved in your dad's murder? Maybe even something about the former CEO's accident," Cedric said to Amy as he dropped by her apartment to have lunch with her.

"Was there any way to confirm that the former CEO of Titan Revolution didn't die accidentally?" Amy asked, making them creamy chicken over egg noodles. "I looked up the reports and it said he had died in a car crash due to being intoxicated. But the crash occurred after he left the office. So had there been an office party where he'd been drinking heavily? Or any witnesses who could confirm that he had been drinking during working hours? I tried to talk to his wife to learn if he had been drinking a lot at work or after work. Also I wanted to know if he suspected anyone wanted him dead, but she wouldn't talk to me. I learned she had received a huge insurance settlement, plus benefits from his position with the company. So maybe she's afraid if this was a case of murder and not an accident, she might worry the police would think

she had something to do with it. Maybe she wasn't too heartbroken over his death."

Cedric served up glasses of water for them. "This morning, I looked into the possibility of him drinking at an office party or after he left. Everyone that I questioned said no. He barely drank ever. That was his father's downfall, so he drank very little. Nothing was going on in his life that would indicate he had felt the need to binge drink. I also asked if anyone had seen or heard anything that indicated he was afraid someone wanted him dead."

"You're good at this investigative business," Amy said.

"So are you. Everyone who had left the company after Aaron Bridgewater took over said he had wanted to be CEO and was miffed when he became the executive assistant instead. If anyone had a motive, it was him. Those who still work at the company couldn't say because they suspect they might lose their jobs."

"And my father?"

"Everyone believed in what the police reports said. Even your dad's secretary. She took an early retirement after he died, and she said she remembered your dad leaving work early to replace the tires on his car a few days before. Then when she heard that the accident report said his tires were threadbare, she assumed something had happened and he wasn't able to replace the tires before he had the accident. She believed the police report that said it was accidental."

"So she knew about the tires too. What about security cameras at the party we attended?" Amy asked.

"If they had any way back then, they are long gone."

"Where did the culprits get the worn tires from? If we could find where they picked them up—but it was so long ago, there's probably no record of it." She snapped her fingers. "Dad had a journal he would write in. I have it in a box of pictures and stuff. I never read it because I felt it was private, but what if he had said something in there that would incriminate Aaron? What if the burglar, or Aaron, had recently

learned of it and had sent someone back to my apartment to steal it?”

“But your sister could have had it, and no one’s ever broken into her home,” Cedric said.

“Right. But she’s always believed it was an accident. So maybe Aaron or Lonnie think I have something that makes me believe it wasn’t an accident. Not anything that would prove in a court of law that he was behind my parents’ death or the sheriff’s department would have been looking at this as a murder investigation, but something that would be enough to cast a bad light on Lonnie.” She was already headed to the bedroom.

Cedric followed her down the hall. “Wouldn’t he have found it then? The burglar, I mean.”

“There’s a removeable panel in my closet wall buried by the shoe racks and shoes. Even when he tossed my shoes about, he didn’t see the panel. Anyway, I tucked a box of important things in there that I couldn’t fit into the small wall safe.” She moved all her shoes off the shoe rack and then pulled the shoe racks away from the wall. “I need to get a Phillip’s head screwdriver. Be right back.”

Once she had it, she removed the panel and pulled out the box. She opened it up and got the journals out. “I’m sure if anything he said had to do with his death or the CEO’s, it will be in the last journal, but just in case we need the others, I brought them out too.”

Then they carried them into her living room and sat down to go through them. She began to read the last entries in her father’s journal.

“Oh, look here. Dad says Michael was sure that Aaron had embezzled money from the company. He was going to ask for some outside auditors to check their accounts.”

Cedric was reading the entry next to her. “This was dated before Michael died.”

“Right.” She pointed to the next page. “Dad was sure Aaron had something to do with Michael’s death and he states

here that Michael was fine when he left work late that day. That it proves Aaron had done something with the money and was trying to stop Michael from reporting it. Suddenly, he was now the CEO and when Dad”—tears filled Amy’s eyes—“this is it—Dad confronted him about having the independent auditors come in to check the books and then that was his last entry in the journal before the accident occurred. We need to turn this over to Rowland.”

“Calling him now.” After explaining what they had as possible evidence against Aaron, Rowland came by to pick up the journal.

When he read the entries, Rowland said, “We’ll see what we can learn about any discrepancies in the financial accounts of the business back then. We didn’t find any fingerprints on the gun, but we didn’t expect to. At least we know the person who broke into your apartment the first time was the shooter. If he was looking for this journal, how would he have known about it? Or that you had it and not your sister?”

“I was the one who always believed it was a case of murder. My sister didn’t.”

Cedric frowned. “Did you ever mention it on social media sites? That you knew someone had killed your parents? Maybe that you knew who had killed them? Or had evidence about it?”

“I didn’t know who had though. But yeah, I talked about their deaths not being accidental on a podcast once. I mentioned it on Facebook that my parents were murdered. I didn’t say I had proof, but if the murderer had learned I thought I knew something—I had been in the accident after all—maybe they were just looking for a diary I might have kept, or anything else that was proof.” Amy suddenly got a call from Rebecca, and she answered it.

“Hey, Amy, Aaron’s having dinner at the Shrimp Stop. I have a friend who still works at Titan Revolution, and she overheard Aaron’s secretary making a reservation for him for six.”

“Thanks, Rebecca.” Then Amy told her sister about their dad’s journal.

“Money, of course. I overheard Dad telling Mom he thought something crooked was going on with the finances. But I had a date with Brent and that’s the last I thought of it. God, that’s why Aaron had them killed?” Rebecca said.

“Possibly. I’ve turned over the journal to Rowland. I’ll let you know if we learn anything at dinner.”

“Good luck with that,” Rebecca said. “Be safe.”

“Absolutely.” Amy ended the call with her sister. “That was Rebecca. We’re having dinner at six at the Shrimp Stop because Aaron’s going to be there. So we need to see if we can learn anything from him while he’s there.”

“The two of you just be careful. If Aaron has orchestrated all these murders, he’s a dangerous man,” Rowland said.

“Yeah, I agree,” Cedric said. “He’s probably aware of the two of us looking into all these murders.”

“I wouldn’t doubt it,” Rowland said. “In fact, I’ll join you.”

Amy’s jaw dropped and she quickly recovered. “Won’t that scare him off?”

“From trying to do anything to the two of you, hopefully,” Rowland said. “I can’t afford to lose either of you.”

Amy couldn’t believe Rowland was treating her like someone important now, as important as Cedric even.

“He has always believed you were important,” Cedric told her privately.

Cedric was not supposed to be listening in on her thoughts! He smiled at her.

“Aaron undoubtedly knows I’m working with Cedric on these cases, and you’re involved, so it won’t look unusual that we’re all together having dinner. In fact, he might want to try and overhear what *we* are talking about in the event we’re discussing what we know about the murders. I’ll call ahead

and make sure we get a table near him so he can hear us better and the two of you can use your psychic gifts to capture what you can of his thoughts. Besides, I love the food at the Shrimp Stop.”

“All right, that works for me.” Amy thought this could work even better now. She was thrilled they might catch the criminal at his game.

Cedric nodded. “It sounds like the perfect plan. I couldn’t have come up with a better one.”



THAT EVENING, Rowland actually picked them up in his car—really wanting to protect them—and drove them to the restaurant. “I made our reservation earlier than Aaron’s so we would be seated before he arrives.”

“Good thinking,” Cedric said. “We can’t mention Aaron’s name in any of this, or Lonnie’s either while we’re at the table.”

“Nope. But we can talk about other things related to the crimes that might get him thinking about them.” Rowland turned onto another street. “Stuff that might have been already reported on the news even because all we have to do is mention it and he’ll surely think about his involvement in it, if he was, correct?”

“Hopefully,” Cedric said. “Hell, unless he knows Amy is psychic.”

“Oh, great, I could jeopardize the whole mission,” Amy said, sounding frustrated. “Wait, no. Not everyone in the bear sleuth knows I am. The same with Cedric. Only you and a couple of the deputy sheriffs who are bears know that, right, Rowland? And no one knows we can read thoughts. I’ve never told anyone that because it can make people extremely uncomfortable around me. Only my sister and Brent, well, and Cedric, his family, and you know that. The ones that do know I have abilities believe it’s only to see future events.”

“No one but the same people that Amy mentioned know about my abilities,” Cedric said, “and I’m not a member of the bear sleuth, though”—he smiled at Amy—“I’ll be joining it for sure.”

“You’re staying here?” Rowland pulled into the parking lot of the Shrimp Stop.

“I am.”

“Hot damn.” Rowland smiled.

The seafood restaurant had the best food and Cedric had planned to take Amy here on a date. This wasn’t exactly what he had in mind, but she seemed as eager to do this as he did. And for good reason. The sooner they proved Aaron and his son were responsible for all the murders, the better.

They walked inside the restaurant and got a prime seat by the window. “It helps to be a well-liked deputy sheriff,” Rowland said.

Amy rolled her eyes.

“Well, most people like me.” Rowland gave her a quirky smile.

“Besides, the hostess is a grizzly bear,” Amy said, as if that explained it all.

Cedric had thought Amy had finally forgiven Rowland for dismissing her parents’ accident as accidental once he turned it into a murder investigation, but maybe she was still holding a bit of a grudge.

She smiled at Cedric. “*No, I’m not holding a grudge. I’m just giving him a hard time.*”

“I know you’re talking about me,” Rowland said, looking over his menu. “It doesn’t take a mind reader to notice the cryptic glances shared between the two of you, the small smiles, definitely something being communicated that’s private, and I doubt it’s about anything intimate.”

Amy and Cedric peered at their menus and chuckled.

“I knew it,” Rowland said. “I’m glad I never dated you, Amy. The two of you seem perfect for each other.”

“As if I’d ever have dated you.” Amy flipped the page to the next one in her menu.

“Don’t look now, but our subject and three male companions are heading for their table next to ours,” Cedric said. “And Aaron nearly had a heart attack when he saw us.”

“Good,” Amy said.

The hostess seated Aaron and the other men, and then the waitress came to take Cedric, Amy, and Rowland’s orders.

“I’ll have the shrimp gumbo,” Amy said, “and Earl Grey tea.”

“I’ll have the honey garlic glazed salmon,” Cedric said, “and water.”

“Water for me too,” Amy said.

Rowland finally decided on what he would have for dinner. “Lemon garlic shrimp for me, water, and a bottle of Pinot Gris also. Stuffed mushrooms, everyone?”

“Hmm, that sounds good.” Amy handed her menu to the waitress.

“That’ll hit the spot.” Cedric gave up his menu and Rowland did likewise.

Then the waitress moved to Aaron’s table and asked if they needed a moment more to order. Aaron said they did, and she left them to decide on their selections.

“He took the seat where he could watch us,” Amy told Cedric.

“Yes. And I’m sure he’ll be all ears, waiting to hear what we have to say,” Cedric said.

“He looks anxious. He’s playing with his napkin. One of the guys he’s with has asked him a question about the menu and he has had to ask Aaron twice now,” Amy said.

“Yeah, we’re making him nervous,” Cedric said.

As if Rowland realized Amy and Cedric were either conversing telepathically, or were listening to Aaron's thoughts, he jumped in with some conversation to help things along. "So about the murders—we now have the murder weapon."

"Good," Cedric said, though they already knew that, but he also knew Rowland was trying to get a mental reaction out of Aaron that Cedric and Amy might pick up on.

And they did! Aaron was thinking about Lonnie, wondering if Rowland and the others had any key evidence on him specifically. But Aaron wasn't seeing the gun in his mind's eye. Cedric suspected Lonnie had never shown it to him.

"Do you think that someone ordered the man to shoot Albert and the other men?" Amy asked Rowland, playing her role well.

Immediately, Aaron thought of himself giving his son the okay to take care of business. Keeping it in the family would keep them safe instead of hiring out the work. The only regret he had was that the lawyer Lonnie had shot had been a golfing buddy of his. They'd had luncheons together, family gatherings—but it couldn't be helped.

"Are you getting all this?" Amy asked Cedric privately.

"Yeah. Man, I wish we could record thoughts."

"That could get a lot of people in trouble."

"It's hard to say if someone else was involved," Rowland said. "It could be a lone gunman, or he could have been acting on someone's orders. We know now that Albert went to see the psychologist just days before their deaths. The same with seeing the criminal attorney. It could be Albert told someone he had seen the psychologist and lawyer, that maybe that person and Albert had been involved in a crime and Albert couldn't live with the knowledge any longer."

"So then whoever he confided in murdered him?" Amy asked, sounding like she was just learning this supposition.

But Aaron wasn't thinking about Lonnie talking to Albert, or anyone else. Aaron was envisioning the lawyer, his good friend, meeting with him at his luxurious estate. There, Randy Carson told him all about Albert seeing the psychologist who had recommended him seeing the attorney because it involved Lonnie, Aaron's son. And that meant Albert, the lawyer, and the psychologist all had to die.

The waitress served Rowland's order of stuffed mushrooms as an appetizer while a wine steward served their wine, then the waitress took Aaron and his guests' orders.

Rowland toasted Amy and Cedric. "To solving murder mysteries and making the men involved pay for their crimes."

Aaron thought of himself and his son. Yeah, they were definitely the guilty parties.

They began eating the stuffed mushrooms and drinking the wine.

"Anything?" Rowland asked, dying to know, but he couldn't flat out ask them because with their bear hearing, Aaron would be able to hear them.

"Absolutely." Amy took another sip of her wine.

The other men were just humans, and Cedric wondered if this was a business dinner. They were all dressed in dark gray suits. All three of the men were talking away, Aaron silent the whole time.

Then Cedric and his companions' seafood dinners arrived, and they began to enjoy their meals.

"You really think Bernie Moffatt and his son were responsible for all this?" Amy suddenly said.

As each of the guys were about to take another bite of their dinner, both Rowland and Cedric stopped their forks midair and glanced at her.

She shrugged. "Bernie's son, Tim, was involved in a hit and run car accident. Your department could never prove it, but you had enough evidence to know he did it."

"Uh, right," Rowland said, playing along.

Cedric wondered where she was going with this. He really loved the idea of working with her full-time.

“Okay, so we know he’d been seeing a psychologist because he’d been having nightmares about it, and he was paranoid that he’d be found out. He thought everyone was following him, peering behind every building, watching him, ready to arrest him.”

“We did have surveillance on him for quite a while trying to catch him doing anything illegal,” Rowland said.

Cedric was beginning to wonder if this was a true case now.

Amy squeezed his hand. *“No. We’re making it up as we go along.”*

“Oh, good. Thanks for letting me in on the secret.”

She leaned over and kissed Cedric. “So, Rowland, you couldn’t catch him for that, but Albert was friends with Tim after they graduated from high school. They were involved in drugs and so naturally, they gravitated toward each other. But they had this hit-and-run accident that Albert knew about and well, he began seeing the same psychologist, who recommended Albert get a criminal attorney.”

Aaron was texting Lonnie. *Do you know any Bernie or Tim Moffat?*

Cedric waited to see Lonnie’s response in Aaron’s mind. Then Lonnie texted: *No, why?*

The sheriff’s department thinks they murdered Albert and the others.

Lonnie texted back: *Good. That gets them off my back.*

Let’s hope it stays that way.

But Cedric assumed Aaron would have someone look into it for them, if only so that if Lonnie ever was eventually considered as the suspect, Aaron’s lawyers could say that it all had to do with Bernie Moffatt and even maybe try to frame him and his son.

“I heard that Bernie and his son had been using aliases, and they’ve left the country,” Cedric said.

“Yeah, they’ve had several since they lived here,” Rowland said. “It’s going to be damn hard to prove they had anything to do with Albert and the other men’s murders.”

After they finished their dinner, Rowland paid for their meals, which Cedric hadn’t expected. They walked by Aaron’s table, not looking him in the eye, but Cedric had noticed Aaron’s steak had barely been touched.

When they were inside Rowland’s car and on their way back to Amy’s apartment, Rowland said, “Did you get anything from that?”

“You bet,” Cedric said, and he and Amy shared all that they had “seen.”

“Okay, so now we know what had happened. I got a text right before dinner saying that Titan Revolutions financial records are being reviewed as we speak, so if there are any discrepancies, hopefully we can tie them to Michael’s murder and hopefully to Aaron’s involvement in the embezzlement,” Rowland said.

“That was a good night,” Amy said.

Rowland agreed. “Well worth taking the chance to hear what he was thinking. And great idea to concoct another couple of suspects to make Aaron believe he and Lonnie have nothing to worry about.”

Cedric said, “Yeah, I agree, though I know he’d have some PI look into who these people were and possibly even try to plant some evidence on them.”

“Which was why coming up with a reason why they couldn’t be located was just perfect,” Amy told Cedric.

Then Rowland told them good night and left them off at Amy’s apartment.

“Do you want to go for a bear run?” Amy asked Cedric.

“With you? Always.”

That night as Cedric and Amy ran as bears in the park, they were having a great time. She loved being with him—the woods drawing them into its embrace—their home when they weren't in their human form. It was perfect for a jaunt in their fur coats in the spring.

The cool breeze felt great. They paused when they saw deer in the woods, but as soon as the deer spied the grizzlies, they took off. Amy smelled the fragrance of water from a creek nearby, making her thirsty, and motioned with her head to Cedric to go that way. He nodded in acknowledgement.

On their way to the creek, they saw a blond grizzly bear watching them from the shadows of the forest—the one she had seen before, the one that Cedric said was named Lonnie Bridgewater. Her heart pounded.

She bumped into Cedric, and he looked in her direction and saw Lonnie too. He could be running out here just like them, nothing sinister about that. But she still wondered if it was more than coincidence since they had seen him at the festival too. Maybe he suspected they knew he was involved in all of this. Maybe he thought to do away with them now—bear to bear.

Cedric headed for the bear, first at a loping gait, surprising her. He looked angry, like he was ready to fight Lonnie. She hoped he wasn't making a mistake. She didn't want Cedric to be injured. Maybe Cedric was just going to chase him off, but Lonnie wasn't budging. He looked ready for a fight, staring

Cedric down as a show of force. Now Cedric was running full out to meet up with him.

Cedric clashed with Lonnie, both rearing up on their hind legs, snarling, growling, teeth hitting teeth. Why was he hanging around near the areas where Albert and the others had been murdered? Looking for something? Seeing if investigators were still combing the area for clues? Revisiting the scene of his crimes to get some sick satisfaction?

Lonnie still wasn't backing down from the fight. Neither was Cedric.

She paused for a moment, indignation and rage washing over her while the two male bears were fighting each other while she weighed her options. She was smaller than them and a male could kill a female, but she was so angry that she didn't think Lonnie would get the chance. She wanted to help Cedric. She raced closer to them and tore into Lonnie. She attacked him just as viciously as Cedric did, leaping away when he tried to bite her back.

Cedric didn't back down. He might have even fought harder to make sure Lonnie didn't turn on Amy. She was so focused and enraged, she was relentless.

Lonnie finally tried to break off from the fight, getting the brunt of their bites and wicked claw marks before he ran off. They chased after him for two miles before Cedric broke off the chase. Amy ran a short distance after Lonnie before she finally stopped, and Cedric joined her. *"Are you okay?"* He nuzzled her, checking her over and she so appreciated his tenderness.

She did the same with Cedric and checked him over. He was bleeding on the face and neck, his right shoulder too. *"Yeah, but are you okay?"*

"Yeah, I'm good. Lonnie's going to be feeling some pain."

She thought Cedric was also. They had a grizzly bear doctor they could see for emergencies and if Cedric needed sewing up, she was taking him to the clinic.

“I’m sure he was stalking us, maybe thinking of taking us on when we least expected it and I wanted to let him know I wouldn’t put up with it.”

They finally reached the location where they’d hidden their clothes, made sure no one was anywhere in the area, and shifted. They hurried to dress and then Cedric pulled her into his arms and gave her a warm embrace. “I was worried he was going to kill you.”

“He was afraid you were going to kill him, so he could barely take his eyes off you while I bit him. Though I riled him up too. Are you sure you’re all right? You have a lot of bite marks. Maybe we should see Dr. Crystal Westover. You might not know it, but she gets upset when her patients wait until they have infections from bites or claw marks and haven’t seen her.”

“It’s nothing.” Cedric got on his phone and called Rowland. “Hey, Lonnie Bridgewater met up with us in the woods as bears, so if you talk to him and he looks a little bit chewed up, you’ll know why.” Then he explained that they’d see him at the fair too. “Okay, thanks, Rowland.”

Then they walked to where Cedric had parked his car and they got in. Amy got her phone out and called the doctor’s office. “I’m bringing Cedric Shader in. He had a bear confrontation tonight in the park and he needs to make sure he gets his bites cleaned up and see if he needs any stitches.”

“I’ll heal,” Cedric said.

“Bring him right in,” Dr. Crystal Westover said.

Amy and the doctor ended the call. “Go to the Westover Clinic. You’re lucky. She tends to be a night owl and she’ll be ready for you as soon as you get there.”

Cedric gave Amy a half smile and shook his head.

“Sure, we heal up faster than humans, but we still can get infections that will slow down the healing process. Besides, if you go and get it taken care of, it will heal up faster, and if you run into Lonnie again, at least you’ll look like his bites didn’t have any effect on you.”

“Okay, that’s a good reason.”

She smiled.

They finally arrived at the clinic and even though Amy didn’t need to go in with Cedric, she went with him to the exam room. She wanted to make sure if he needed stitches, he didn’t decline them. She couldn’t really tell because he was bloodied in so many places.

“How does the other bear look?” Dr. Westover asked, while she cleaned up his wounds.

“Worse,” Cedric said.

Dr. Westover glanced at Amy, and she realized she was wearing a bit of blood too. “It’s not mine. It’s the other bear’s.”

Dr. Westover tsked. “Two against one. That seems unfair.”

Amy explained about the guy.

“Aww, so it wasn’t just a fight between two male bears over a female.”

Amy frowned. “No. I’ll be right back. Wait, does Cedric need stitches?”

“No, he does not,” Cedric said.

“You could use a couple,” Dr. Westover contradicted.

“Okay, then do it. I’m going to the restroom to clean up.” Amy hadn’t had to fight another bear in a good long while, so she forgot how messy she could look afterwards. In the restroom, she hurried to clean up and when she left it, she saw seven-year-old Misty Haven with her mother, Sarah, staring at her. “Bear fight,” Amy said. “Sometimes, no matter that you don’t want to have one, you just have to.”

Sarah said, “Amy is right.”

Then Amy returned to the exam room to join Cedric. Dr. Westover was finishing up the stitches and gave him a prescription for antibiotics. She glanced at Amy. “Are you okay? Are you sure you didn’t receive any injuries?”

“No, I’m fine, thanks.”

“Okay, unless there is anything else you need me for?” Dr. Westover asked.

“Nope, that’s enough for me,” Cedric said, wearing bandages on his throat, neck, and a couple on his face.

Then they left, paid for their services up front, and saw Misty with her mother in the waiting room still. Misty’s eyes widened to see Cedric so bandaged up. Sarah looked surprised too.

“The other bear looks much worse,” Amy said.

Cedric agreed. “He had it coming to him.”

“Oh, you’re Cedric Shader, David’s brother, aren’t you?” Sarah asked.

“Yes, ma’am, I am.”

“You’re looking into the whitebark pine murders, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“I hope you catch who did this quickly. Rumors are going through the sleuth that it could be one of our kind,” Sarah said.

“Yes, ma’am. We’ll get him and he won’t have the chance to do it again,” Cedric assured her.

“Good, he’s a danger to everyone.”

“I agree.”

Then Sarah turned to Amy. “Are you helping him?”

“I am, Sarah. We’re getting close.”

“I hope you stay in the area, Cedric. You’d be a great value to the community.” Sarah winked at Amy.

Then Amy and Cedric left the clinic and she said, “She figures we’re together.”

“We are. And you’re the reason I’m staying here.”

Amy raised her brows in question.

“I wouldn’t leave you for anything.”

“Well, then that changes things.” She sighed with relief.

“Oh?”

“You’ll have to get your PI license and we’ll have a partnership. We make a great team with this psychic business.” She wouldn’t take no for an answer.

He smiled. “Now that sounds like a good deal. I have the criminology degree, and the work experience. I would just need to get the certification and I’ll join you.”

“Yes! I love working with you already so this will be perfect.”

“It will be.”

Then they arrived home and made love, and she knew this was all headed in the right direction.



THE NEXT MORNING, Cedric got a call from Blue Beardsman just as he and Amy were waking up and cuddling in bed. “Hey, Blue. I hear you’re coming into town.”

“Yeah, buddy. I’m staying at your brother’s place, but he said you are working on a couple of cases. I had dropped by your parents’ home last night just to let them know I had returned. Of course, they had me stay for dinner. As much time as I used to spend at your home, I love them like they are my own. The first thing your mom said was that you were dating a grizzly who has psychic abilities like us and that they better not hear that I’m trying to steal her away from you. Your dad said the same thing to me. I can’t wait to meet her. She has to be really special since you took her to see them. Believe me, I wouldn’t consider trying to mess up the relationship between the two of you. I’d lose my whole family. Even your brother warned me.”

“He wasn’t supposed to mention her to you.”

“He didn’t. I explained to him that your parents had told me already. Then he knew the bear was out of the bag. So when can we all meet?” Blue asked.

Cedric glanced at Amy. “Do you want to meet my best friend, Blue?”

“The psychic black bear?”

“Yeah.”

“Sure. For breakfast since we haven’t eaten yet. Do you want to go out or I could make a meal?” Amy said.

“Let’s go out to breakfast. I’ll see if David can join us too.” Cedric said to both Amy and Blue, “Let’s meet at the Eagle’s Nest in half an hour—we always go there when you come and visit.”

“Look forward to seeing you then. If you want, I’ll help you with the cases you’re working on.”

“David told you about those too?”

“I think he wanted me to help you to resolve them. He said you told him that the players in Amy’s parents’ deaths could have been some of our fellow high school classmates. Not only that, he mentioned the murderer of the three men was wearing our high school class ring and college class ring. That Amy had envisioned him placing the pine nuts in the pockets of the victims’ clothes. If we put our heads together, maybe we’ll figure it out,” Blue said.

Cedric explained to him about Lonnie and his father and the motive they thought could be the reason for the murders.

“Okay, I have a confession to make though.”

“Don’t tell me you’ve been seeing visions of the murders,” Cedric said.

“No. I’m looking into a Guatemalan couple who worked for Aaron Bridgewater—Maria Lopez was a housekeeper and her husband, Juan, was their groundskeeper. They sent money home to their family every month, but then they didn’t receive anything the week before these other murders were committed

in the national park. Their money was due back then and the family members haven't been able to get a hold of them."

"Do you think they're connected with the murders?" Cedric asked. Hell, this was getting to be worse and worse.

"I hadn't seen any connection before. From what you're telling me, if Aaron could get rid of all those other people, then why not some hired help who might have overheard what they were up to?" Blue asked.

"Can you get a search warrant of the house? What if the couple are alive and just being held captive?" Cedric wanted to barge in and search for them.

"Like the others?"

"Right, none of the others are alive," Cedric said. "But what if the couple still is? By the way, if you don't know it, the Bridgewater family are grizzly shifters. The FBI can't take them into custody."

"No. We'll take care of it. That's why I wanted to touch base with you, besides just seeing you because we've always been best friends," Blue said.

"All right, well, we'll see you at the restaurant then," Cedric said.

"See you."

Then they ended the call and Amy hugged him. "He won't steal me away from you, you know."

Cedric laughed. "Not this time." He texted his brother to meet them at the restaurant for breakfast.

"Do you think Blue will be able to help us solve the mysteries?" Amy asked Cedric.

"The more psychic heads involved in the game, maybe." He told her how Blue was trying to learn what had happened to a Guatemalan couple that had worked for the Bridgewaters.

Tears filled Amy's eyes. "No."

"Yeah."

“Blue thinks they’re dead,” Amy said.

“Yeah. Once I told him about the cases we are looking into, he believes they could be connected.”

They quickly dressed and Cedric drove Amy to the restaurant, but he was concerned about the storms plaguing the area and her sensitivity to them. She had been eager to go, practically dragging him by the hand to the car before they left. He smiled at her. “Are you eager to get there?”

“I sure am. We need to learn what we can about the Guatemalan couple.” Then she changed the subject abruptly. “Now I have to use my new abilities to help keep Blue from listening into my thoughts. He’ll try, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, he’ll be intrigued that you can do this like we can.” Cedric smiled at her.

“I was thinking we could go to the restaurant where Rebecca and Brent had their anniversary celebration at Brannigans and we could eat and dance, then go to a movie afterward too. Maybe tonight. So we have to make sure we have time for all of it. No, the storm isn’t bothering me. Can’t you pick up on that?”

“Yeah, at least as far as I can tell from my sense of smell, you seem calm and collected. I can’t read your thoughts though.”

She beamed. “That’s all because of you. Thanks.”

He smiled. “Good, though I have to admit I liked being your hero.”

“Ohmigod, Cedric, you will always be my hero.”

“It sounds like a great plan for tonight.”

“We have to celebrate that you’re going to be my PI partner.”

He smiled at her. “Yeah, we do. And I have to prove I will be a better date than Howard at the movie theater.”

“I don’t doubt that you will be in the least.”

Then they arrived at the restaurant and walked inside to find David had already gotten them a table. Blue hugged Cedric, but he wisely didn't hug Amy without invitation.

Amy smiled at him. "It's all right. You can hug me. I'm with Cedric. And you're going to help us solve all these murders so that the guilty parties don't get away with it." Then she hugged Blue. "I'm glad to meet one of Cedric's best friends." Then she pulled away and slipped her hand around Cedric's and they smiled at each other and headed with the hostess to their table.

When they sat down at their table, they ordered coffee and tea.

"Have the two of you had the same vision? About the class ring, I mean?" Blue asked.

"Yeah, it was amazing."

"We can go for a run to the crime scenes together as bears," Cedric suggested.

Blue chuckled. "Here you have the perfect girlfriend and what do you want to do with her?"

Amy laughed. "That's what makes us so perfect for each other. We'll have to do it tomorrow though. Tonight, we're going to a restaurant for dinner and dancing and then a movie."

"To celebrate that I'm going to be her new PI partner," Cedric said.

David smiled. "Hell, yeah, you're staying home for good then."

"Yeah, I am."

"Congratulations are in order," Blue said. "I guess this means wedding bells will be ringing in the future."

Cedric smiled at Amy. She blushed. "We haven't decided how to pop the question yet," she said. "But I have a proposition to make. I want to go to Aaron's house while he's at work. I want to ask his wife what she knows about the

couple working for them. And I want to ‘see’ and smell her response.”

“As a PI searching for the truth? Or maybe you could pretend to be a friend of the couple and hadn’t heard from them?” Blue asked. “It would seem more innocuous that way and maybe you could get a reading.”

Cedric really didn’t like the idea unless he or Blue were with her.

“You can read Amy’s thoughts?” Blue asked.

“We can talk to each other in our thoughts,” Cedric said.

Blue looked at Amy. She smiled. “Yep.” She squeezed Cedric’s hand. “*You can go with me.*”

“And me?” Blue asked.

She frowned at him. “You heard me too?”

“Yeah, sure, you told Cedric he could go with you.”

“I only told him telepathically,” Amy said.

“Oh, wow. That’s a handy ability to have,” Blue said. “Man, I wish I’d met you first.”

“It’s great when we’re running as bears,” Cedric said.

“Or when we don’t want others to know what we’re talking about. But I guess I can’t share my conversation solely with Cedric if someone else has our abilities.” Amy sounded disappointed that she couldn’t.

Blue laughed. “So when you go to Aaron’s house—”

Amy nodded. “Both of you have to come with me. The more we have there, the better. Maybe one of us, or all three of us, will pick up on something. Maybe the two of you can stay in the car but be there if I need rescuing.”

“Yeah, absolutely. I wouldn’t let you go alone. Not with what’s been going on with this family,” Cedric said.

“So what do you recommend? I go as a friend or as a PI?” she asked.

“Friend,” Blue said. “I’ve got a ton of information on the family, so while we’re eating, you can read over the details and maybe get an idea what they’re like. I’m sure Aaron and his wife won’t know any of this anyway. But you’ll have to make up a reason why you were friends. How you knew them. Just something.” Blue passed the information over to Amy.

She sipped her tea and started to read through the file, looking at the pictures of the couple and of their family they’d left behind. “I stayed with them on a trip to Guatemala before they moved here. When they had time off from their work, I showed them around the area. I took them on hikes through the national park. They’re young. They looked like they could do a lot of physical activity.”

“Faye, Aaron Bridgewater’s wife, will most likely say they said nothing about having any friends here,” Blue warned.

“I’m sure she never talked to them about their life beyond working there,” Amy said.

“Maybe Faye did talk to them. We really don’t know what she’s like,” Cedric said. “She may be as dangerous as her husband and son, so be careful.”

“Yes, no matter what the situation is,” Blue said. “Faye might not have anything to do with what her husband and son have been up to, but the notion of losing both of them, should they both be found out, could be a good enough reason for her to help them with the cover up.”

Amy couldn't believe she'd have a mission like this today, but she wanted to do everything she could to help Blue with his investigation. If they learned anything about the missing couple, it could give them more fodder for the fire concerning Aaron and his family.

She was used to doing investigations, but still she was afraid she might really spook Faye and Aaron. She continued to read through the file on the family.

When they arrived at the Bridgewaters' home, Cedric said, "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Absolutely." Amy left the car and went to the door and rang the doorbell. When a housekeeper answered the door, Amy said, "Hello, I'm here to see Maria."

The woman visibly paled. "I'm sorry. She's no longer here."

"I need to know where she is or I'm getting the sheriff involved." So much for being careful and non-confrontational. "Did you know Maria and Juan?"

"Uh, uh, yes, but I don't want to lose my position here."

"I understand. But couldn't you lose much more than that if you stay?"

"I'll...I'll get Mrs. Bridgewater," the woman said, then closed the door in Amy's face.

"I don't think I handled that well," Amy told Cedric.

“You scared the woman to pieces,” Cedric said, a smile in his voice. “She’s not going to tell Faye what you said. Exactly. But for her own peace of mind, she might quit her job.”

“If we prove they were all involved in this, the woman will need to get a new job anyway. Maybe one that is safer.”

Then the door opened, and Faye was standing in front of her, her blond hair graying in a tidy coiffure, she was petite, maybe five-four, and about fifty. Her nose was tilted up in an arrogant way while she was measuring Amy up to see just who she was. “Who are you and what do you want?”

“I’m a friend of Maria and Juan Lopez and they said if they ever vanished off the face of the earth to see you about it. Their parents and an uncle and aunt called me when they couldn’t reach them.”

“They stole some of my jewelry and ran off,” Faye said, her face flushed.

But Amy envisioned Faye thinking about Aaron questioning the Lopez couple about what they’d overheard when he and Lonnie were discussing killing Albert and the others. Maria had been mopping the tile floor in an adjoining room, but she quickly left the house to speak to Juan about it. That’s when Aaron and Lonnie ordered them back into the house to question them. Faye was right there, wringing her hands, angry with her staff.

“No. They didn’t steal anything from you. They overheard your husband and son talking about the murders of Albert, his psychologist, and a criminal lawyer, who happened to be Aaron’s best friend. How could he do that to his friend? When Aaron questioned Maria and Juan, you and Lonnie were standing guard, witnessing the whole thing. They were terrified of the three of you.”

Faye’s blue eyes couldn’t have gotten any bigger. “Who are you? Where did you hear such a thing? It’s all lies. I told you already. They got off with some of my precious jewelry and probably sold it and left for Guatemala.”

“Did you report the theft to the police? And their disappearance?”

Faye’s thoughts were in turmoil. She realized the mistake she had made. She needed to report the stolen jewelry right away and claim Maria and Juan had done it.

“It’s too late for that,” Amy said. “Everyone’s looking into their disappearance and the first thing they’ll want to know is why you didn’t report them missing. The sheriff’s department, private investigators, and...the FBI are investigating this now.”

“You...you’re Amy Rutherford.” Faye said her name like it was a disease.

“Bingo! I finally got the sheriff’s department to listen to what I knew to be the truth all along. My parents didn’t die by accident. The accident was caused with murder in mind.”

“This is all a big misunderstanding. I’m sorry. Where are my manners. Won’t you come in?” Faye asked, said the spider to the fly. But then she saw the two men sitting in the car parked out front. “Who are they?”

“An FBI agent and a special investigator for the sheriff’s department. They wanted to make sure I don’t vanish suddenly or have an inconvenient...accident while I am talking to you.”

“I have nothing more to say to you.” Faye began to close the door.

“If they are still alive, you have a chance to redeem yourself if you tell us where they are.”

Faye shut the door in Amy’s face, but not before she envisioned the couple tied up in a dark place—at least that’s what Faye was thinking about. They had to act quickly and free them, while making sure Faye didn’t warn Aaron or Lonnie about what was going on. But the dark place could be anywhere.

Immediately, Cedric and Blue were out of the car and banging on the front door.

“Go away!” Faye shouted.

But her maid came around the side of the house. She waved for them to follow her, and she led them to a back door. Inside the mansion, she pointed to a door. “Basement. In there.”

“Where’s Faye?” Amy asked.

“Going to her office, but Raul, their maintenance man, made Mrs. Bridgewater sit in a chair and took her phone away from her,” the maid said.

“Good,” Amy said.

The door to the basement was padlocked and Cedric kicked in the door.

“I’ll call Rowland.”

“Good,” Cedric said.

She already had her phone out. “Hey, we have a development at the Bridgewaters’ house. Blue and Cedric are breaking down the door to their basement.”

“Hell, I hope they’ve got a good reason,” Rowland said.

Blue and Cedric raced down the stairs. “We found Juan and Maria tied up down here! We’re calling 911 for an ambulance,” Cedric said.

“They found a couple who worked for Aaron and Faye, being held hostage in the Bridgewaters’ basement,” she said to Rowland as she walked into the office where Faye was being held. “An FBI agent is here investigating their disappearance. Blue Beardsman.” The office had a bar and the first thing Amy noticed was that half a bottle of Bacardi rum was sitting in front of all the other liquors, which made her think of how Michael, the former CEO of Titan Revolution, had died.

“Oh, good, I know him and he’s a black bear. I’m on my way.” Rowland would only call on a couple of other deputies who were also grizzlies to help with the case.

Blue rushed up the stairs from the basement, hurried to the office, and took Faye into custody.

Rowland and his deputies arrived and took Faye out to a car in handcuffs. Everything had to be kept hush-hush. No reporters. No reporting this to the sheriff's office. They had to keep it secret so her husband and son didn't learn she had been taken into custody.

"We're going to have to replace this door. Everyone working here needs to leave at once, and not speak of any of this to anyone other than those of us who are cleared to talk of it." Rowland contacted the leader of the bear sleuth and had him order a door and padlock to replace the broken ones.

Then they took off, the ambulance taking the Lopez couple to see the bear doctor to check them out. The Guatemalan couple wouldn't know that this was a clinic for shifters. But they had to keep all this under wraps. They didn't want to tip off Aaron or Lonnie. Lonnie didn't live there, he had a place of his own, but they had to make sure he didn't learn what had happened and flee. He and his dad had the money to do so.

Then Cedric got a call from Glenn Frasier. "You wanted to talk to me about something? We can meet at the Hot Cross Buns Shop now."

"Yeah, sure, I'll be right over." Cedric said to the others, "Glenn wants to talk to me. Who is going with me?"

"I am," Amy said.

"I've got to stay with the Lopez couple and question them about everything that happened to them," Blue said. "I need to resolve this case. Besides, it'll give us more evidence against the Bridgewaters for all that they've been up to."

"Okay, tell me what happens with that," Cedric said.

"You know I will. And I want to know what's going on with Glenn also," Blue said.

"Absolutely."

"I'll stay at the house until the basement door is replaced and ensure that everyone has vacated the house after that. Aaron won't be home until around seven tonight. As the CEO of Titan Revolution, he works late and hopefully he won't get the word that his wife and the Guatemalan couple have

disappeared until after that,” Rowland said. “Though he’ll smell all of us that have been here. We’ll have to take him into custody as soon as he arrives home.”

“Teach him to take the couple hostage!” Amy said.

Rowland smiled at her.

“Do you think Glenn Frasier will confess to anything?” Amy asked Cedric as they drove over to the restaurant. By the time they arrived, it would be lunchtime.

“I sure hope so. I’m glad you came with me. I don’t know if he’ll be willing to talk to me about anything this time though. The last time I tried to speak with him, he wouldn’t talk to me at all. He wouldn’t say anything to anyone at the sheriff’s department either,” Cedric said.

“Maybe I can pick up on something he’s envisioning while you’re asking him questions,” Amy said. “Or we both can.”

“That was my thought also. I was surprised he would even want to have this meeting finally. But maybe he thinks he can learn more about what we know on the case,” Cedric said.

“You don’t think he could have heard anything about this business with Aaron’s hired help, do you?” Amy asked.

“I suspect not. But it won’t hurt to ask him.”

They drove to the Hot Cross Buns Shop and went inside to find Glenn sitting at a table drinking a soda near the entrance beside a window. He was tall, dark-haired, his hair a bit shaggy, dark brown eyed and smelled like a black bear. He eyed Amy and finally said, “You’re Rebecca’s sister.”

She wondered if maybe she shouldn’t have come. That maybe he wouldn’t speak now about—*then she envisioned him taking her sister for a ride and parking, Rebecca getting*

angry and making him take her home when they were both still seniors in high school.

“Yes, I am.” Amy remembered Rebecca telling her how that’s all Glenn wanted to do—park and make out. Rebecca hadn’t been interested in him in that way, which was why she had broken up with him.

A server came to take their orders and Glenn got a grilled steak sandwich, french fries, and a refill on his soda. Amy got some hot tea and a freshly baked croissant chicken sandwich and a fruit dish of grapes, pineapple, and pears. Cedric ordered a coffee and grilled ham and cheese sandwich with fries.

“So you said you wanted to speak to me about something to do with Lonnie?” Glenn asked, sounding both curious and guarded.

“Yeah,” Cedric said. “You, Lonnie, and his friend Albert went to a party that Lonnie’s parents attended ten years ago.”

“A party?” Glenn sounded totally surprised that Cedric was questioning him about *that*. “That’s a long time ago. I’ve been to dozens of parties over the last decade.”

“It was the one when you helped Lonnie and Albert change out the tires on the Rutherfords’ car. We know. We have a security tape of the parking lot and the whole thing,” Cedric said.

Rebecca suspected Cedric was improvising, or he would have already told her that he had a security tape showing it. But mentioning it could make Glenn think about it and they’d know for sure he was involved.

“Uh, okay, but it wasn’t my idea. It was all Lonnie’s.” Glenn suddenly envisioned him and the others rushing to change out the tires on her parents’ car in the pouring rain, lightning brightening the sky, thunder following in his thoughts.

Ohmigod, they had confirmation! She just wished they could get what he envisioned on video to show Rowland.

“Why did Lonnie shoot out the Rutherfords’ car tire?” Cedric asked.

Glenn didn't say anything for a moment. But she could see he was thinking about being in the back seat of the car when Lonnie fired the gun. Albert had been driving the Desoto.

"Lonnie said Mr. Rutherford had to go," Glenn finally said.

Amy wanted Lonnie to pay for his crimes.

"Why?" Cedric asked.

"He said it was a matter of life and death."

"Bullshit," Cedric said. "So he killed both the husband and wife and could have killed Amy when all he wanted was to take out Mr. Rutherford?"

"I know. That's what I thought. If Mr. Rutherford was the problem, why kill anyone else? Listen, Lonnie didn't say he was going to shoot out the tire when we were changing the brand-new ones out with the old ones. I didn't even know he was carrying a gun at the time."

"Did you know he had a gun prior to this?" Cedric asked.

"Yeah. He would take his dad's 9mm to target practice sometimes in the woods behind their home. We all fired it. It was no big deal. On the day of the accident, Lonnie had Albert follow the Rutherfords' car, but two other cars got in between us. Lonnie told Albert to drive past the Rutherfords' car despite how bad the weather was. Even our tires lost the grip on the road at one point, scaring the hell out of me. We were driving way too fast for the road conditions, and I yelled at Albert to slow down, or we'd be in an accident also. Lonnie told me to quit being a pussy and shut the hell up.

"When we reached the Rutherfords' car, Lonnie rolled down the window and aimed to shoot. Hell, I thought he was going to kill Mr. Rutherford then. But Lonnie aimed downward and just shot at the tire, I figured. Before that, he just said they might have an accident because of the bald tires, so the gun wasn't ever mentioned. He told Albert to hurry up and pass and we sped on past the Rutherfords' car. I looked back and saw it crash into the concrete pillar. I wanted to go

back but Lonnie told me to shut up about it and for Albert to keep driving.”

“Why did you want to return to the accident?” Amy asked.

Glenn shuffled in his seat. “I wanted to see if you or your mother needed our help. Then again I rethought that notion, afraid if we did, Lonnie would have just shot all three of you so there wouldn’t be any witnesses. Besides, the other two cars stopped to help them. You have to know I never thought he would do it. We’d been drinking at the party and I just thought he was full of hot air.”

“Why did Lonnie shoot out the tire?” Cedric asked again.

“I don’t know. I swear it. I agree with you that his saying it was a matter of life and death was bullshit, but that’s what he said.”

“Was it because Rebecca broke up with him?” Cedric asked.

“No, he said it was something to do with her father.”

“Something that my father knew about Lonnie’s father, right?” Amy said.

Glenn ran his hands over his cup of soda. “I guess. Something bad enough that he felt he had to take that kind of measure. I did ask, though I figured it was better not to know. But he wouldn’t tell me.”

“Why didn’t you ever report what had happened to the police?” Cedric asked.

“The police believed it was an accident. It was all on the news. Why should I have said anything differently? And dug a grave for myself? Aaron had the money and influence to bury anyone who got in his way.”

That really irked Amy all over again. “You truly have no conscience about it. No empathy.”

The server brought their coffee, tea, a refill on Glenn’s soda, and the food.

When the server left, Glenn said, "I did have a conscience about it. I mean, no one had any beef with you or your mother. And I was sorry about your mother's death and that you had ended up in the hospital."

"And my father? You had no reason to kill him. Just Lonnie must have. Why would you want him dead?"

"I didn't." Glenn lapsed into silence.

She frowned at him. "Were you paid to go with him?"

"Hell, no." Glenn took a deep breath and let it out. "Okay, look. No one reported that anyone had shot out a tire. Lonnie could have missed the tire completely. So it was just an accident and we didn't have anything to do with it at all."

"So that's what you told yourself. That you didn't have anything to do with their deaths. Except that you changed out Dad's good tires for the bald ones?" Amy asked.

Glenn took a drink of his soda and wouldn't respond.

"What about the spent round from the shot that was fired?" Cedric asked.

"I don't know. We didn't go back to look for it, if that's what you're asking." Glenn began eating some of his sandwich. "Maybe Lonnie did after the accident was cleared away, but he just dropped me off at my house and I was there for the rest of the night. I guess Albert went home too."

"What about *Albert's* murder?" Cedric asked.

Glenn nearly choked on his sandwich. "What...what about it?"

"Albert went to see a psychologist. And a criminal attorney," Cedric said. "All of them were murdered by the same person."

If Glenn knew something about it, maybe he'd slip up and say.

"I don't know anything about it." Glenn was still clearing his throat after the bite of the sandwich had gone down the

wrong way. It served him right. “You don’t think Lonnie had anything to do with that, do you?”

“What do you think?” Amy asked. “Lonnie didn’t mention to you that Albert might have spilled the beans about the ‘accident’ to a psychologist and then went to see a criminal attorney to protect himself from prosecution? Then Lonnie felt it was a ‘matter of life or death’ and so he had to kill all three of them? What about you? Did you help him?”

“God, no. I haven’t been around Lonnie since that party. I mean, we all agreed not to hang out with each other, but we really went our separate ways. It wasn’t much longer after that we graduated from high school. Lonnie went off to college and finally became an attorney back here. Albert became a stocker at the local grocery store. He didn’t have any ambition to do anything other than that. Me? I went to the local community college and learned how to be a brewery technician and began working at a brewery. Whatever happened to Albert and the other men had nothing to do with me.”

“Except that Lonnie knew Albert was seeing a psychologist and an attorney. Unless you had a vested interest in them being dead too because you had witnessed Lonnie firing the gun and Albert would have outed you also. Oh, and yeah, you helped change the new tires for the old ones, contributing to my parents’ deaths,” Amy said.

“Hell, no. Not me. Listen, the lawyer was a friend of Lonnie’s father, Aaron. Maybe the lawyer told Aaron that Albert had seen him about retaining him to help Albert at trial because he was going to the police. Then Aaron told Lonnie. Or maybe Aaron hired someone to kill Albert and the others. I don’t know.”

Amy and Cedric already knew that but they had to learn if Glenn was also involved. When Aaron’s own neck and his son’s were at stake, friendships were easily forgotten.

“But Albert talked to you about it. About getting an attorney. He couldn’t live with what had happened,” Amy said.

Glenn ran his hands through his hair. “We ran into each other at the movie theater. He...uh, asked if I was ever

bothered by what had happened to your parents.”

“And you told him what? Not you. You slept well after their deaths. Nothing fazes you.” Amy sipped some of her now cold tea. “Did you and Lonnie hope that my sister was in the car at the time of the accident? Maybe even Brent?” She still wondered if perhaps this had something to do with Rebecca ending her relationship with both Glenn and Lonnie and falling in love with Brent.

“No. At the party, we realized only you and your parents had come. I swear Lonnie was only really after your father. If you or your mother hadn’t been in the car, he would have been fine with it. He hasn’t ever gone after you once you recovered from your injuries, has he? He was only after your dad.”

“Were you also involved in killing the former CEO of Titan Revolution?” Cedric asked.

Glenn’s jaw dropped. Okay, so he really wasn’t expecting to be questioned about that. They had gotten away with both “accidents” after all, ten years ago. “No. That was an accident. Michael Warner was intoxicated when he had the accident.”

“But you knew all about it. Why would a high school student even know about such a thing?” Cedric asked.

Glenn’s face reddened a bit, but he didn’t have an answer.

“After someone had run Michael Warner’s car off the road, the culprits were never caught,” Cedric said. “We’re looking into that accident now also.”

Glenn took a bite of a french fry. “Do you have proof it wasn’t an accident? He had an open bottle of Bacardi rum in the front seat. Well, half a bottle. He had guzzled down the rest.” Then Glenn drank some more of his soda.

“Oh?” Amy said. “I hate to tell you this, but the police reports never said it was rum. The news stories didn’t either. How did you know?”

Glenn’s mouth hung agape, then he clamped his lips shut.

“I learned Lonnie’s dad drinks Bacardi rum. Lonnie took one of his bottles with him. Albert drove the car. Lonnie told

him to run Michael Warner's car off the road. His vehicle rolled. The bottle of rum was brand new, and we know it had been opened in the car because part of the seal had been torn off and left inside. He suffered a major trauma to the head, but he hadn't been drinking. Not until the three of you poured the rum down his throat. He wasn't intoxicated. He had alcohol poisoning. He hadn't driven that far from the office to have finished off that much rum. Which means you three forced it down him and he died. And then you left the bottle in the car," Amy said.

"I had nothing to do with Mr. Warner's death. Why would I have?" Glenn sounded a little worried that they might have learned that he'd been involved in another murder.

"I don't know. You got a thrill out of being Lonnie's sidekick?" Amy asked.

"If you have proof that Mr. Warner was murdered, why was it called an accident?" Glenn asked.

"The sheriff's department just needed our help to investigate why two of the top officials at Titan Revolution died within a week of each other," Cedric said.

"So you're saying there was a witness who saw the accident?" Glenn asked.

"Five in the case of my parents' accident." If Amy counted the murderers. "Three in the case of Mr. Warner's accident. But Albert had nightmares about it. Neither you nor Lonnie lost any sleep over it," Amy said, really bothered that Glenn could be just as much of a psychopath as Lonnie.

"Even if any of this was true, and I'm not saying it is, you can't do anything about it." Glenn looked so smug, she wanted to slug him.

"Did Lonnie tell you that?" Cedric asked, his ire roused.

"You can't put any of us in jail." Glenn began eating his sandwich again as if he'd regained his appetite and no longer was worried that they could do anything about the earlier crimes.

“Have you ever heard of the shifter prison run by jaguars?” Cedric asked. “I sent a wolf there last week for kidnapping his ex-girlfriend. For murder, you won’t get a second chance. In other words, you’re dead. For some crimes, you get a nice long stay in a shifter-run prison. You work hard to pay for your upkeep. We don’t pay for a prisoner’s incarceration. It’s not a country club. There’s nothing worse than losing your freedom as a shifter. You’re not allowed to shift during your incarceration. They make an exception for wolves who are more newly turned who can’t control shifting during the full moon. But even they are put into solitary confinement for their own good. For the others, it’s punishment,” Cedric said. “Besides, you know what Lonnie did to Albert when he began talking to others about the crimes all of you committed.”

“Yeah, but I’m not talking.” Glenn took another bite of his sandwich. “So how do you know Mr. Warner didn’t drink that rum?”

“His fingerprints weren’t on the bottle,” Cedric said.

Of course they didn’t have proof of that, but it was a good gamble that they hadn’t thought of that when they committed the crime and mentioning it would spook Glenn.

Glenn paused before he took another bite of his sandwich.

Yep, he was spooked. “If an open bottle had been in the car and it had been tossed around while the car rolled, there would have been evidence of it all over the car. It was placed there. Staged to make it look like Mr. Warner had finished off half a bottle of rum,” Amy said.

“Just so you have ample warning, Lonnie parked by the Hot Cross Buns Shop window and watched us for a while. You might not be seeing an attorney or a psychologist, but you’re speaking to two people who are officially investigating the murders,” Cedric said.

Glenn immediately turned around to look out the window. He set the rest of his sandwich down on his plate. “You got to protect me. Lonnie’s a psycho. No one will believe he did anything wrong. Hell, he’s an attorney. And his dad is the CEO of Titan Revolution. They’re both powerful people.

They'll say Albert and I did it, or something. Anything to get themselves out of hot water."

"We can't call the U.S. Marshalls and have you placed in Witness Protection. Not when you're one of us," Cedric said.

"Yeah, but you got to protect me. You got me into this." Glenn slurped the last of his soda.

Amy raised her brows. "You were involved in all this with Lonnie and Albert, but *we* got you into this?" She was truly surprised Glenn had hung around and hadn't left the shop already but had continued to answer more of their questions. She suspected it was because Glenn wanted to know how much evidence they had on him to convict him of participating in the crimes.

"I didn't have anything to do with Albert's and those other men's deaths. I swear it."

"Maybe not them, but the other two murders, you were involved," Amy said. "Oh, and what do you know about the couple who were taken hostage?"

"What?" Glenn really looked clueless about that. "I don't know anything about that." Then he ate some more of his fries. "You don't have enough proof about the car accidents—" Glenn's phone rang. He lifted it off the table and stared at it. "It's him. Lonnie." Glenn looked like he'd seen a ghost.

When Glenn got a call from Lonnie, Amy swore her heart skipped a beat. She worried Lonnie might even know they had picked up his mother and had her in custody.

“Answer the call. Put it on speakerphone,” Cedric said to Glenn.

“Hey, Lonnie, what’s up? How long has it been that we’ve even talked with each other? Ten years?” Glenn sounded calm, but he was starting to sweat.

“We need to meet, for old time’s sake.”

Glenn’s face paled and he glanced at Cedric. He nodded.

“Yeah, sure. Where and when?” Glenn asked, a hitch in his voice.

“At the park tonight. You know where. See you soon.” Then the phone went dead.

“Where does he want to meet you?” Cedric asked.

“He’s going to kill me.”

“Where does he want to meet you, Glenn?” Cedric asked.

“Where Albert was shot. Lonnie, Albert, and I used to run from that point in the woods on a jaunt when we were all in high school still. That was before we didn’t have anything further to do with each other after the Rutherfords’ accident.”

“Sounds like he is trying to send you a message,” Cedric said. “But it’s too late to heed the warning.”

“Hell, I can’t meet him there.”

“You’re going to. We’ll go with you,” Cedric said. “We’ll protect you though it appears you’re not worth protecting.” Then Cedric called Rowland and let him in on the news. When they ended the call, Cedric said, “He’s meeting us here before the appointed hour.”

“I want to call Brent. He’ll want to know also,” Amy said.

“Good idea,” Cedric said.

She called her brother-in-law and gave him the news.

“Are you all right? You’re not going out there, are you?” Brent asked her.

“Yeah. I have to. Rebecca can’t come, but if you want to meet us there, you can.”

“Rebecca would be furious if she learned you were out there, and she wasn’t there to do what she could to protect you.”

“Brent, I called you as a courtesy because you’re like a brother to me. Don’t make me feel that it was a mistake to let you in on this. I don’t want her hurt.”

“*You* were hurt. She wasn’t there for you the first time. She won’t forgive either of us if you get injured and she’s not there for you.”

Amy let out her breath, disgruntled. “All right but tell her I don’t want her out there.”

“I will. I’ll see you there.”



ROWLAND, Brent, and Rebecca actually met Amy, Cedric, and Glenn at the Hot Cross Buns Shop. To their surprise, David and Blue showed up also.

“Rowland told me what was going on. No way are you leaving me out of all the excitement,” David said.

“Yeah, I’ve finished questioning Faye and the Lopez family so I’m ready for this,” Blue said.

“How are we going to handle this?” Cedric asked Rowland.

It wasn’t going to be sanctioned by the sheriff’s department because most of the staff were human so they had to keep the situation quiet.

“I’ve talked to the head of the United Shifter Force that deals with shifters involved in criminal activities. They’ve already sent a couple of wolves to take custody of Glenn and prefer charges against him and confine him in the facility in Texas. But they require that he give a full confession of everyone’s involvement, or they’ll leave his disposition up to us.”

“I’ll give a full confession,” Glenn quickly said.

“Cedric and I will get your confession while we travel in your car to the national park, Glenn,” Rowland said. “I imagine Amy will want to come with us. The rest of you can take a couple of other vehicles and follow us, but not too closely. David knows the crime scene location where we’re meeting. There are two different trailheads you can reach to meet us there from different directions to circle around him.”

“Should we call our sleuth leader?” Amy asked.

“I already did. Maximilian said he and two of his men will be there also,” Rowland said.

“Don’t you think Lonnie will suspect Glenn will have bears protecting him?” Amy asked.

“Yeah. It’s a real possibility he’ll play a cat and mouse game and won’t be there. But once we have Glenn’s full testimony, and attempt this meeting, we’ll send him packing to Texas to be incarcerated and he’ll be safe from Lonnie’s wrath,” Rowland said.

“And Aaron? How much do you want to bet that Aaron was the one who had encouraged his son to get rid of Michael Warner and Amy’s father in the first place?” Cedric asked.

“Unless Lonnie confesses to it, we may never be able to prove Aaron was involved in either car accident. Though he had every motivation in the world,” Rowland said.

Glenn cleared his throat. Everyone looked at him. “Listen, I’ll tell you everything, okay? Hopefully it’ll be enough to prove Aaron was behind all of it and you’ll go easy on me.”

“All right then. Let’s go,” Rowland said.

Everyone began climbing into cars.

On the way to the national park, Glenn began telling his version of the story. “Aaron told Lonnie he should have gotten that CEO position and he was furious he didn’t. But it was more because something was amiss with the books and Aaron knew he was going to get caught. Once he was the CEO, he could fix everything so no one was aware anything had gone wrong. Michael Warner told your dad about what he suspected, Amy. Aaron told Lonnie that Michael Warner could have an accident and then Aaron would become the new CEO.”

“You were there when they were talking about this?” Cedric asked, surprised.

“Well, yeah. Albert and I were always over there at Lonnie’s parent’s home. It was super cool, had a big screen TV room, theater seats, tennis courts, an indoor swimming pool, why wouldn’t we be over there? Anyway, Aaron asked if we had any qualms about it and said he’d give each of us a thousand bucks apiece. That happened to be the cost of my books and tuition for getting my associates degree. I couldn’t have afforded it otherwise just out of high school.

“A thousand dollars was a ton of money to Albert, so we agreed. We didn’t really think we were killing Warner, just running him off the road, maybe injuring him so he could no longer work as the CEO. But Aaron said we needed to make it look like he’d been drinking and driving. Aaron had picked

out the Bacardi rum—a brand new bottle even—and handed it to Lonnie. It was Lonnie’s idea to pour all that rum down Warner. I kept worrying that he was pouring down too much all at once and it wouldn’t look like Warner could really have finished so much of it on his own. But the cops just chalked it up to drunk driving. Lonnie swerved at Warner’s car to force him off the road, careful not to hit him when there were no witnesses about. Even though Aaron would have had Lonnie’s car repaired without anyone being the wiser—evidence would have been left at the scene. And if the autobody shop guy ever decided to blackmail Aaron or decide to go to the police—”

“Like you should have done,” Amy said.

“Uh, well, anyway, Lonnie couldn’t take that risk. When Lonnie aimed his car toward Warner’s, Michael swerved to the rough shoulder of the road, trying to avoid being hit and lost control. His car rolled several times and we pulled over, backed up, and you know about the bottle of rum.”

“Did you help him ‘drink’ it?” Cedric asked.

“No. That was all Lonnie’s doing. I mean, think about it. There was only room for one person to lean inside the car. If I had done it, I wouldn’t have poured that much rum down his throat. It was way over what would be reasonable and for the person to be able to drive at all,” Lonnie said.

“He’s speaking the truth,” Amy said.

“Why did the Rutherfords have to die then?” Rowland asked.

“Everyone in the office knew Warner wasn’t a heavy drinker. One glass of anything, and he didn’t have anything after that. Nothing was going on in his life that would make him suddenly binge drink like that on the way home from work. Mr. Rutherford was asking a lot of questions about that and also about the financial situation at Titan Revolution. Apparently, Michael had confided in Mr. Rutherford about it and Aaron told Lonnie that Mr. Rutherford had to go before Aaron’s theft was discovered. Lonnie asked him how.

“Aaron told him the car accident had worked fine in Warner’s case but to force Mr. Rutherford’s car off the road after he left from the mayor’s party, rather than after he left work. Mr. Rutherford had changed out his tires to brand new ones and so it was Lonnie’s idea to change them to threadbare ones. But he was afraid that wouldn’t be enough. He calculated where we had to get to on the road so that the Rutherfords would have a fatal accident. Lonnie didn’t want to damage the Desoto he was driving—not only because the car was a classic but for the same reasons he didn’t want to damage the car he’d been driving when he caused Warner’s accident.”

“But you didn’t check to see if the Rutherfords had died that time,” Cedric said.

“No. We couldn’t. Two cars stopped to help them. We just took off and I knew if that attempt hadn’t worked, Lonnie would have to try again. I wasn’t about to get involved in that any further. We listened to the news, learned that it was a fatal accident and Amy was in a coma at the hospital. Lonnie asked his dad if he wanted to eliminate her too and he said no.”

“How did you feel about that? There possibly could have been more money for you if you had helped to kill her,” Cedric said.

“No way. That was totally up to Lonnie and his dad. We didn’t take part in that—I mean, Albert and me. We weren’t paid for it. Anyway, over the years, Amy had said it hadn’t been an accident, but nobody paid any attention to her claims so we all thought we were in the clear. Then you come along and she’s stirring up that business all over again. Rowland was looking into it. You were, Cedric. Amy was. We didn’t know if our bear sleuth leaders were aware of it, but that was a good bet. Suddenly, it wasn’t going to be easy to get rid of all the people investigating this and if some died, the heat would be on even more.”

“But Albert, the lawyer, and the psychologist had to die,” Rowland said.

“Hey, I had no part in that. I hadn’t talked to Lonnie in a decade. I hadn’t talked to Albert either, not until I ran into him at the movie theater like I said. Albert took me aside afterwards and talked to me about how he was all shook up about what had happened before. He told me he’d seen the psychologist about it. Pascal informed him it was in his best interests to obtain a criminal attorney and speak to him about it. I could have told Albert that the lawyer he had spoken with golfed with Aaron, and they were best friends. They’d gone to college together. But I figured it was too late to warn Albert about it since he had already spoken to the lawyer by then. I really didn’t think Lonnie would kill them. I guess that when the lawyer told Aaron about Albert’s claims, suddenly, three people were dead. Lonnie sent me a text after that, bragging to me that if I talked, I’d end up like the others. That’s the first and only time he’s communicated with me in a decade.” Glenn had saved the text and showed it to them.

“So you had known all along that Lonnie had killed them. Why did Lonnie put pine nuts in the dead men’s pockets?” Rowland asked.

“I assumed he was making out that it was like grizzly bear food for their next life, even though they weren’t grizzlies, just humans. Lonnie can have a sick sense of humor,” Glenn said.

“How did they convince Albert, Pascal, and the lawyer to go to the park where Lonnie killed them?” Cedric asked.

Glenn cleared his throat. “Lonnie told Albert he was meeting him to discuss going to the sheriff’s department to clear Albert’s name. That’s what Albert told me. I warned him to watch his back and not to trust him. But Albert always did whatever Lonnie told him to do, so I think he really believed him. Since the lawyer was Aaron’s friend, I’m certain Aaron told him he’d meet him out there, except Lonnie did instead. I don’t know how they could have gotten the psychologist out there.”

They were nearly to the trailhead where they would park and hike to the location where Lonnie and Glenn were supposed to meet when Rowland got a call on his phone and answered it. “What? No way. I want to know if there were any

witnesses to the accident. No? Hell. No. Okay, keep me posted.”

Now what?

Rowland ended the call. “On the way here, Lonnie was involved in a single car crash. His car went up in flames. The fire department is putting out the fire now.”

“No one survived, I take it,” Cedric said.

“I suspect all they found was a body burned so badly it’s beyond recognition,” Amy guessed.

“That’s what they found,” Rowland confirmed.

“It’s not Lonnie. They—Aaron and Lonnie—killed someone else and staged the whole scene so he could slip away and get a new identification,” Glenn said. “I’m still a dead man.”

“Exactly my thoughts,” Rowland said, then they pulled the car onto the shoulder of the road and the other cars pulled in behind them. Rowland told them what had happened and called their sleuth leader also.

“So what do we do now?” Glenn asked.

“We’ll go to the meeting place in case Lonnie believes you’re still coming,” Rowland said.

Then the three vehicles took off for the different trailheads.

Once Glenn and his party arrived at the trailhead closest to the meeting place, they hiked to the location where Albert had died. Rowland, Amy, and Cedric separated, leaving Glenn alone, but they were watching him from the woods, listening for any sign of anyone else in the area for about an hour. When no one showed up, everyone regrouped.

“The wolves from the USF will pick you up and take you to Texas. There, they’ll need all the transcripts about the accidents and murders and some of us will go there and your fate will be decided. At least you’ll be safe from the Bridgewater family,” Rowland said.

“What about Faye?” Amy shared her vision of Faye wringing her hands while Aaron and Lonnie interrogated the terrified Lopez couple. “She did nothing to stop Aaron or Lonnie.”

“She’ll be going to Texas too. She’ll just vanish. You’ll vanish, Glenn, but hopefully we’ll be able to catch Aaron and Lonnie before they disappear for good,” Rowland said.

Blue said, “We’ve frozen their bank accounts and are investigating the financial matter with Titan Revolution that could have triggered the chain of events that caused all this to take place.”

“Good. If they don’t have a lot of their money in offshore accounts, maybe they won’t be able to escape,” Amy said. “Oh, so, Glenn, do you know who was breaking into my house?”

“I don’t know for certain. But I saw in a news report that the gun used in the murders of the lawyer, psychologist, and Albert was your father’s gun. So I’d say Lonnie was the one who broke into your apartment,” Glenn said.

“Did he ever use hunter’s concealment?” Rowland asked.

“Uh, yeah. When we were at Michael Warner’s accident, Lonnie made us wear hunter’s concealment in case Rowland was investigating the scene. Or one of the other deputy sheriffs who are bears like us.”

“And the second break-in?” Amy asked.

Glenn’s eyes widened. “I didn’t know about that. What was missing?”

“Another gun and no scent was left behind,” Amy said.

“Hell, no telling who Lonnie plans to kill using that gun this time. Well, probably me,” Glenn said.

“Are you sure that you didn’t have anything to do with the three men who were murdered?” Amy had to know if he had been involved.

Glenn shook his head. “I swear I didn’t know anything about them. Albert wasn’t my friend, but I didn’t have any

grudge against him or the other men. I wouldn't have gotten involved."

"Not even for money?" Amy asked.

"No. I make good money at my job. And I'm not a killer. I would say I couldn't believe Lonnie would risk his career over doing this and not just hire someone, but in truth, he really only trusted Albert and me. When Albert stomped on that trust—that was the living end for Lonnie, I figured."

Then Rowland got a call, listened, thanked the caller and ended the call. "Aaron's whereabouts are unknown. He left work early. We have no idea where he is."

"He's vanished with his son. Does he even care that Faye has disappeared?" Amy asked.

Glenn shook his head. "He's trying to save his own ass as usual."

Then a couple of wolves from the United Shifter Force arrived at the park and took Glenn into custody. "Remember I told you everything I knew," Glenn said. "What...what are you going to do with my car and other effects?"

"Sell everything off and then use the proceeds to help pay for your prison time. Think of it like this, you won't have to work as hard for some of the time as long as you have enough money to help out with your expenses," Rowland said.

Amy hoped he'd get life at the shifter prison for his part in her parents' and Michael Warner's deaths.

Blue said, "I'm going with Glenn and Faye to Texas. But when I get back, let's get together."

"Sure. And you can try to read my thoughts and I'll practice keeping them from you. It's the only way I can do it—with people who have our abilities," Amy said privately so that Glenn didn't hear her.

"Hey, see you when you return," Cedric said.

David and Rebecca wished Blue well as the wolves took Glenn in their Suburban, and Blue went with them. Glenn

looked like he thought he was about to be executed for his crimes in all this.

“What else can we do to help with this?” Amy asked Rowland.

Rowland looked surprised that she finally wasn’t showing any animosity toward him. “Nothing for now, but thanks for offering. We’ll keep you informed of any developments should any occur.”

“That means we can have our date night,” Amy told Cedric, not letting this opportunity go to waste.

“You’re still up for that?” Cedric asked.

“Absolutely. As long as we aren’t needed to track down the murderers, it’s time for us to celebrate.”

“That works for me.”

“Are you sure the Bridgewaters won’t come after you?” Rebecca asked Amy and Cedric. “They’re still dangerous and most likely armed. Would you like us to come with you?”

Amy wanted this to be just her date with Cedric, but it wouldn’t hurt for them to be cautious and have more of them there to help each other out if they needed it. “Yeah, sure. David too.”

“I won’t have a date,” David said, sounding like he didn’t want to intrude.

“We want you to come with us,” Cedric said.

“I’ll dance with you,” Rebecca said to David.

“So will I,” Amy said. “We should invite your parents too, Cedric.”

“On it.” Cedric pulled out his phone. “Hey, Mom, we’re going to Brannigans to celebrate me staying in the area. We’re stuck on the cases and Amy’s sister, brother-in-law, and David are joining us. Can you and Dad meet us there? We’re headed over there right now.” He took hold of Amy’s hand and squeezed. “Great. We’ll see you there.”

“Great,” Rebecca said.

“Yeah, they said that they had no plans for dinner, and there couldn’t be a better reason to eat out,” Cedric said.

Cedric, Amy, Rebecca, and Brent headed over to the restaurant for dinner and dancing. Not for an anniversary, this time, but a celebration of getting somewhere with the cases—though capturing Lonnie and Aaron needed to be done to make this a real success. Still, it was a commemoration of Cedric staying in the area and becoming Amy’s PI partner. And Amy had every intention of asking Cedric to mate her. She hadn’t thought when she did, they’d have the whole family there, but this would work even better.

As soon as they reached the restaurant and were seated, Amy was so glad Cedric was going to be her mate—as long as he was willing to go along with the plan—and not just a voice in her head this time. His parents didn’t take long to show up at the restaurant and joined them at their table.

They ordered their meals and a couple of bottles of champagne.

“I was going to ask you to mate me at the dinner tonight,” Cedric said. “With our families here, this is even nicer.”

“Ha! I was going to ask the same thing of you.”

“Then, yes, I’ll mate you.” Cedric leaned over to kiss her.

“I’ll mate you for sure.” Amy kissed him back. “I can’t believe a bear I’ve never met comes into my life, sweeps me off my feet, and steals my heart.”

“You did the very same to me,” Cedric said, smiling down at her.

They all cheered them.

Rebecca was smiling. “To think that the two of you met at Brannigans at our anniversary celebration under rather unusual circumstances.”

“Yeah, I went to Amy’s rescue when I didn’t recognize who Cedric was,” Brent said, laughing.

Then Cedric told his parents how he had met Amy.

To Amy’s amusement, his mom shook her head. “You’re just lucky that she forgave you for that intrusion when she didn’t even know who you were, Cedric.”

His dad said, “Son, that was a smart move on your part when she was on a blind date.”

Melissa pushed at her husband’s shoulder. “John.”

Amy smiled. “Cedric really helped me with all the conversations I was hearing, and the thunderstorm was so loud, it was really bothering me. I wasn’t sure of him, of course, but he certainly changed my mind in a hurry.”

“We knew this was where this was headed,” Melissa said, “as soon as Cedric forgot he was supposed to be having dinner with us.”

Everyone laughed. David cleared his throat. “Then I had to do all the explaining.”

“I was on bodyguard duty,” Cedric said, serious as could be.

Everyone laughed again.



AFTER THEY ATE their meals and drank champagne, the couples moved to the dance floor and the ladies all took turns dancing with David too. But when Amy was back in Cedric’s arms, he said, “Are we still on for a movie tonight?”

“Yes! I want you to be the perfect date for the movie.”

“You’ve got it.”

“But this is awfully nice. When we danced before, I wanted to just dance more with you and not with Howard. You swept me into your arms and took my troubles away.”

“I’m so glad I could do that for you. You made me forget my problems too, you know,” Cedric said.

“Really?”

“Yeah. I was worried you’d pick up on the work I did, but you were such a bright light for me.”

“I’ve been meaning to ask how come you were so close by when I had the break-in?” she asked.

“I went to a convenience store in the direction that Howard had driven to take you home. I don’t know. I guess if Howard got fresh with you and you didn’t like it, I would have come to your rescue or if you were still bothered by the storm, I could have helped calm you if I wasn’t too far away. Then I felt your panic. At first, I thought it was because of Howard or the storm. Then I realized an intruder was in your apartment. I couldn’t get there fast enough. I didn’t even know if I was headed in the right direction until you told me the address.”

“You’re totally handy to have nearby.”

“I always want to be there for you.”

“The same with me for you.”

After dinner, drinks, and dancing, everyone shared hugs and then Cedric took Amy to the theater, got them buttery popcorn, and bottles of water. He snuggled with her through the whole movie. She loved it. *“You are just the perfect movie goer for me.”*

“I’ve never been to the theater where I’ve enjoyed the time this much—the movie’s okay, but the company? Outstanding.”

Despite how she was enjoying the time with him and the movie, in the back of her mind was the worry that Lonnie and his father had escaped justice. Had they slipped out of the

country already? The problem with being shifters, the ones trying to apprehend them couldn't always use the network of law enforcement agencies all over the country. Not when they couldn't turn their own kind over to the human policing agencies.

Cedric leaned over and kissed her cheek. *"We'll get them. Someone will get them."*

The movie finally ended, and they left the theater, hand in hand. "Did you see the twist coming at the end?" Amy asked.

"That the child would carry on the family curse, but be immortal? Nope. I thought for sure the dad would continue having to live with the curse. The ending was great." They climbed into his car and headed home.

"Yeah. That was a great twist and I loved how his mother was glad because now her young son would be safe. I didn't expect the dad to end up in jail again either."

"Nope. But he deserved it."

"That's for sure. Did you ever feel like your abilities were a curse?" Amy asked.

"Nah," Cedric said. "It gives me the upper hand when it comes to dealing with the bad guys. Besides, I met you that way, so if I ever had regrets, that would have been the end of them. What about you?"

"No."

Just then, Cedric envisioned Aaron and Lonnie climbing into a red Ford Raptor. But where were they? The cool, evening air mixed with the warmer day, and they were now driving in thick fog, water droplets collecting on the windshield.

"They could be anywhere," Amy whispered, as if Lonnie and Aaron could hear her.

He would never get used to Amy having the same visions as him at the same time. "Did you catch any location markers?"

"The First National Bank of Kalispell...David's bank."

“Yeah, and they’re headed north.”

“Toward Alberta, Canada, but it’ll take them about eight hours to get there if they keep going in that direction,” Amy said.

To reach Amy’s apartment, they were already driving toward the bank, which was probably why they both had a vision of Lonnie and Aaron in the truck headed that way. Amy immediately called Rowland and put it on speaker. “It’s Amy and Cedric. Lonnie and Eric are in a red Ford Raptor and just passed the First National Bank of Kalispell headed north. It’s so foggy, we can barely see anything, or we might have gotten a license plate number.”

“Don’t spook them,” Rowland said.

“We haven’t personally seen the truck,” she said.

“You saw this in a vision?” Rowland asked.

“We both did,” Amy said.

“I’m not sure they’d recognize my car either if they managed to spy it,” Cedric said. “I’m not sure we’re even going to find them in this fog, but I don’t want to lose them.”

For the moment, they had to forget about their next adventure—going home and making love. If they could catch these bastards, they had to do it.

“We just passed David’s bank,” Cedric said.

“Do you think they’re planning to make a run for Canada?” Rowland asked.

“That’s our guess,” Amy said.

“I’m getting the other two grizzlies who work with me to help me search for Aaron and Lonnie’s truck, Rowland said. “Talk to you later.”

Then Cedric envisioned the truck’s online navigation system, and it showed Edmonton, Alberta.

“They’re headed to Edmonton, Alberta,” both Cedric and Amy said at the same time.

Cedric smiled at Amy. “Now if we could just see the truck’s license plate.”

“Yeah, but they’re not thinking about it, and I can’t envision their bumper. We’d have to actually see it.”

Rowland called them back, but on Cedric’s Bluetooth this time. “Do you see any sign of them? We’re out here, but we’re not finding them. The Bridgewaters don’t have any Raptor trucks registered to them.”

“The truck’s stolen then?” Amy asked.

“Could be,” Rowland said. “We need a license plate to learn who it really belongs to.”

“Okay, well just be careful. I didn’t expect fog tonight,” Cedric said. “Oh, and their online navigation system said they’re heading to Edmonton, Alberta.”

“Thanks. Talk soon.”

They ended the call.

That was the trouble. Even though they had great eyesight at night and during the day, they used their enhanced sense of smell and hearing more when they were roaming as bears through fog this thick. They couldn’t see any better in it than humans could.

Then Amy screeched, “Look out!”

Cedric swerved to miss a grizzly bear in the road and nearly had a heart attack. If they’d hit it, the grizzly would have totaled his car and could have caused them serious injuries and probably would have injured himself also.

“Is it anyone you know?” he asked Amy.

She shook her head. “I wouldn’t think one of ours would be crossing the road here. I sure can’t see any sign of any taillights ahead of us, can you?”

“No. None. Do you know what Aaron looks like as a bear?” Cedric asked.

“No, only Lonnie,” Amy said, peering out the windows. “And that wasn’t Lonnie.”

“I agree with you.”

“You don’t think they ditched the truck and shifted, do you?” Amy asked.

“I can’t imagine why they would. They wouldn’t get anywhere if they shifted.”

“Unless they suspected we were following them, and they slipped off somewhere to hide. Though that would be difficult to do as big as grizzlies are. When the fog clears, then what would they do?” she asked.

“Do they have any friends in the bear sleuth who would protect them? Give them refuge?” Cedric asked.

“After the crimes they’ve committed, I would hope not,” she said.

Cedric got on his phone. “Hey, Rowland, can you check with Maximilian to see if he can learn if any of the bears in the sleuth are friends of Aaron or Lonnie who would hide them for a bit?”

“I’m on it.” Rowland ended the call.

“I can’t believe you can get Rowland to do stuff like that with a snap of the fingers,” Amy said, sounding amazed.

“I bet now that you proved you were right all along about your parents’ accident, he’ll do the same for you.”

They had nearly reached Amy’s apartment building, still not seeing any sign of the red truck and were going to drive past when he had a really bad feeling about it.

“Go to my apartment complex,” Amy said.

“Something’s not right,” Cedric agreed.

“Not my apartment but—”

“Libby. She has been injured,” Cedric said. “She’s at her place.”

They hurried to Libby’s combination managerial office and apartment and found the door locked. They both knocked.

“Libby,” Amy called out. “It’s me, Amy. Cedric’s with me.”

Cedric began looking through Libby’s windows. Through the open blinds on one of the windows, he saw blood on the floor of her living room. “I see blood.” Cedric returned to the door and pulled out a lock pick to open it. They rushed inside and found Libby propped up against a wall, her shoulder bleeding, her face ashen, her blue eyes widening when she saw them.

“A bear,” Libby croaked.

They knew as soon as they smelled the bear’s scent, Lonnie was the bear who had attacked Libby.



“WE’RE TAKING you to see a doctor,” Amy said, binding Libby’s wound with a towel and packing tape, so angry at Lonnie, she could scream.

Cedric carried Libby out to the car while Amy called Crystal. “We have a medical emergency. Bear bite, my apartment manager, Libby, has lost a lot of blood.” Amy looked at Libby as she got into the back seat of the car with her. “What’s your blood type?”

“B-positive.”

“That’s what I am,” Cedric said glad they didn’t have to call in another bear to give Libby blood and waste more time. “I’ve got you covered.”

Amy called Rowland, “Lonnie, uhm, the rogue grizzly bear that the hunters have been searching for? He bit my apartment manager. We’re taking her to see Crystal now.”

“Hell,” Rowland said. “Was it recent?”

“It appears to have been,” Amy said. “Did this just happen to you, Libby?”

“Yes. I..I thought I saw someone peeking in your windows, but I didn’t think you were home. It was so foggy

that I couldn't make them out. Two men, I thought. But when I went outside to get a better look, I didn't see them, then the bear came out of nowhere and bit me. I somehow managed to punch him in the nose, he whined and growled, then shook his head. I succeeded in diving inside and locked my door, though I mean, he couldn't have unlocked it, but he could have bashed it in with his big body. It scared me to pieces and you know me. Nothing scares me. I guess I passed out until I heard you at the door. It took me a couple of minutes to realize it was you though."

"I heard," Rowland said. "We're still looking for the pickup. I'm wondering if it was stolen, and they dumped it somewhere. But why go to your apartment?"

"Looking for us? Figuring we knew something about Faye maybe?"

"Okay, we're going to search closer to your apartment then. Let me know how your apartment manager does. You know what this means, right?" Rowland asked.

"Yeah, she's one of us now," Amy said.

"I'll let you go."

"Talk soon." Then Amy ended the call and reached over and squeezed Libby's hand to reassure her she'd be all right. She would show her all the ropes. She and Cedric would take her on grizzly bear runs. At least Libby's wound would heal twice as fast as a human's. At Libby's age, she needed something going in her favor, though she was resilient and was barely ever sick a day in her life. But she looked so pale and fragile right now.

"Thanks for coming to my rescue," Libby finally said. "Who...who is Faye?"

"We're here," Cedric announced. "I'll come around and get you, Libby."

Amy jumped out of the car and ran around it to close the door after Cedric carried Libby out of the vehicle. The medical facility was closed for regular shifter visits but open for emergencies like this one.

Pushing a wheelchair, Crystal's nurse met them at the door, unlocked it and let them in. Then she locked the door, but Cedric wasn't setting Libby down as if she was in his care now and he was taking his job to heart.

Amy loved him for it. Then they were shown into an operating room and several other people were there, ready to take care of Libby. "We already have donated blood for her," Crystal said.

"Good." Amy was glad because it would take a while for Cedric to give blood to share with her. They left the operating room and went to the lounge to clean up and get some bottled water.

"I wish we could force visions," Amy said to Cedric.

"Yeah, I know. I do too. I wish we knew where Lonnie and Aaron were and if they'd managed to grab another vehicle." Biting innocent humans for no good reason was a serious crime too.

Then Amy got an alert on her phone, and she pulled it out of her pocket. "My car! It's moving this way."

"You have a GPS tracker on it?" Cedric asked, surprised.

"Yeah, just in case it was ever stolen. So it seems it was well worth it."

Cedric synced his phone with Amy's.

"Go after them. I can stay here with Libby. One of us has to," Amy said.

"All right. If you're sure."

"Yeah, if anything happens to Libby and one of us wasn't here, I'd feel terrible." Though she wanted to catch the fugitives too. But she had to stay with Libby.

Cedric pulled her into a hug and squeezed tight and kissed her. She sighed against his mouth and kissed him again. "Be safe."

"I will be." Then Cedric got on his phone, calling Rowland, to give him an update about Amy's car and headed

outside.

“Rowland, they’ve switched vehicles. They stole Amy’s but hers has a GPS tracker. They’re on their way north of here, past the shifter clinic. I’m going after them,” Cedric said.

“Damn. We just found the red pickup that had crashed into a light pole. They must have been driving too fast for the fog. We ran the license plate, and it belongs to someone else. He’s human and was at a club. He didn’t even know it was stolen until he left a few minutes ago and reported it to our office. The truck wasn’t too far from Amy’s apartment. It doesn’t appear that Lonnie and Aaron had suffered any injuries, though they hit the pole hard enough that the airbags inflated. I’ve told the office we have three men on it. We don’t want any of the human deputy sheriffs involved. Maximilian said that Aaron and Lonnie don’t really have any friends in the sleuth. They stuck to human friends. Maximillian put out the word for everyone to be on the lookout for them. That they’ve murdered several people and taken another couple hostage, and now have bitten and turned a civilian woman in case they do try to seek safe harbor with some of our bears.”

“Excellent. With that kind of record, if anyone sees them, I’m sure they’d report them to us,” Cedric said.

“I agree. Or it’s on their heads next. How’s Libby?” Rowland asked.

“She’s in surgery. Amy’s staying with her.”

“Good. Keep in touch to let me know where Amy’s car is. We’re headed your way.”

“All right. Playing tag in this fog isn’t fun.” Cedric saw lights approaching him and then finally saw a car, but they had to get close to it before he could even make out what kind of vehicle it was.

“I agree with you there. You’re not having any more visions, I take it,” Rowland said.

“No, unfortunately not. I’d love to see Lonnie and Aaron perish in a car crash so that we don’t have to deal with them any longer because we’re going to have to terminate them otherwise. Not that I want Amy’s car to be ruined.”

“I know what you mean. I had the same thought when I saw the totaled pickup truck. I just hope they don’t run into anyone else,” Rowland said.

Cedric was driving as fast as he could considering the weather conditions. Sure, sometimes they had fog that was this dense, but it was as if the Bridgewaters had made a pact with the devil to help hide them in this pea soup.

His phone rang on Bluetooth. It was Amy. “Stop the car!” she said.

“What?”

“They know you’re following them, or that someone is after them. Stop the car! They’re going to ambush you!” Amy said.

Cedric pulled onto the shoulder of the road and peered ahead at the fog-covered road. “If you see that they shoot me in a vision—”

“No. Just that they are waiting up ahead on the road. Now, instead of you dealing with them before you’re ready, they have to come to you.”

“I just can’t sit here and do nothing. What if they decide I’m not coming and take off? Then I’ve lost them. Besides, why am I not seeing this like you are?”

“We were together when we saw the same visions at the same time. Tell Rowland and his men to drive north of your location and come at them from that direction. Lonnie and Aaron won’t be expecting—forget that.”

“What?” Hell, he wished he could see what Amy was envisioning.

“Lonnie got tired of waiting for you. He’s coming for you.”

“With a gun? I’m armed.”

“No. In his bear suit. I’m coming.”

“No. You stay there for Libby.” He sure as hell didn’t want Amy fighting one of the two bears on her own. “Besides, you don’t have a car.”

“Brent’s bringing me. We’re already on our way as soon as I told him what was going on.”

“Damn it, Amy. I don’t want you getting hurt.”

“Just wait for us to get there.”

He heard Brent’s car engine in the background over the phone.

“It’s too late for waiting.” Cedric saw Lonnie’s distinctive blond bear coat coming out of the fog like a grizzly nightmare. “He’s looking at my car. I suspect he recognizes it.”

Brent said, “I called Rowland to go north of you. Hopefully, they’ll grab Aaron if he’s still human and armed with a gun.”

“Rebecca’s not with you too, is she?” Cedric asked. No way did he want to see either of the sisters get injured.

“No,” Brent said. “She just learned she’s pregnant so I convinced her to stay at home.”

“Ohmigod, really?” Amy said, sounding thrilled. “I’ve been waiting for that news forever.”

“Yeah, we can celebrate later,” Brent said.

“Congratulations,” Cedric said, glad for them, but watching Lonnie amble toward him. Stupid bear. If anyone should drive along the road in such low visibility, they might not see him until it was too late.

Then Lonnie stood up on his hind legs in a menacing manner and roared, showing off his killer canines and claws. Cedric suspected he was telling his dad that he had found Cedric and to join him. But would his father drive back here and try and shoot Cedric? Cedric didn't believe Aaron would run back here as a bear too. They needed to get Cedric out of the car to fight him, or just shoot him in the car.

Cedric didn't want to turn around and drive off when they'd probably just do the same, headed in the opposite direction back to Canada. There was only one other option available to Cedric. He didn't want to have a shootout with Aaron, and he didn't want to shoot Lonnie in his bear form. He would, if he had to, but it just wasn't their way. Yet, if Aaron planned to shoot Cedric, which he figured Aaron would, Cedric couldn't shift into his bear and fight Lonnie. The only plan that might work was to use his car as a deterrent until help arrived, which he didn't believe would happen soon enough. He was on his own.

Rowland called him then. “What's going on?”

“Lonnie's shifted into his bear and he just alerted his dad that I haven't fallen for their ambush. I suspect Aaron's driving back to shoot me.”

“Do you have a gun on you?” Rowland asked.

“I do.”

“We're about fifteen minutes from your location,” Rowland said.

“The GPS tracker on Amy's car say it's headed back this way and will be here any minute.”

“Leave then. Head back toward the clinic. Don't confront them,” Rowland said.

“But—”

“Damn it, Cedric. You finally found the right she-bear for you. You and Amy proved Aaron and Lonnie were behind the murders. We’ll take care of them. You join Amy and make sure she stays safe.”

Cedric hated to give up on this. He knew Aaron wouldn’t chase him down. He’d turn around and leave, which was a lot like tucking tail and running away for the both of them which didn’t sit well with Cedric at all. What if Lonnie and Aaron took off in some other direction and got away from Rowland and the other deputies? Cedric would never forgive himself if he let them get away after all the crimes they had committed.

That’s when Cedric saw Amy’s car barreling down on his car. Aww, hell, it appeared that Aaron was planning to use her car as a weapon like Lonnie had done once he had run the former CEO’s car off the road. Only this time it would be a head-on collision if Aaron didn’t swerve first. Cedric started his engine and headed straight for Amy’s car. He would turn at the last minute, unless Aaron did so first.

“No!” Amy said.

But Cedric didn’t see that he had any other choice. He thought Aaron had a death wish. Suicide by cop came to mind, though Cedric wasn’t a cop.

At the last second, Aaron turned Amy’s car sharply to the shoulder. He lost control and the car sailed off the road into the fog and Cedric slammed on his brakes as he heard the car crash in the misty trees with a bang.

Cedric stopped his car and stared off into the fog. It was so misty; he couldn’t tell if Aaron was injured or dead or how bad the car was. The engine was still running. Lonnie was looking in that direction, motionless as if he couldn’t decide what to do. Like he was in shock. Then Lonnie finally ran down the embankment to check on his father.

Cedric told Rowland what had happened.

“Return to the clinic and Amy. We’ll take care of Aaron and Lonnie,” Rowland said again.

If Amy's car was totaled, neither Aaron nor Lonnie could get away—unless they forced someone to pull over and took their car. Cedric couldn't allow that to happen.

"They're coming for you," Amy said to Cedric.

"How are you seeing this—forget it. I see Lonnie running toward my car and I see headlights behind me. That must be you."

"It is. We see your taillights," Amy said.

Brent pulled up behind Cedric's car, got out, and immediately began stripping off his clothes.

"Stay in Brent's car, Amy," Cedric said, unable to stop Brent from taking this into his own hands. Cedric quickly left his car and started stripping out of his clothes and then he shifted into his bear. Brent had already shifted, but he was waiting for Cedric to join him.

Together they headed for Lonnie. Cedric just hoped Amy would stay in Brent's car for safety's sake.

At that point, Lonnie came in for the kill, attacking Cedric first, but Brent tore into Lonnie too.



AMY DIDN'T WANT to stay in the car. She wanted to check on Aaron and make sure he hadn't run off. She was afraid he might just come out of the car shooting at both Brent and Cedric too. She was afraid of seeing what shape her car was in also.

She left Brent's car, removed her clothes, then shifted and made a wide circle around the fighting bears. They were growling and snarling, and she knew they had every intention of killing Lonnie. It was their way of eliminating a murderous bear shifter.

She really hoped Aaron had died in the accident, but villainous characters like that so often seemed to have nine

lives. She could imagine him slipping off, stealing another car, and getting away while his son was fighting for his life.

She cautiously approached her wrecked vehicle, wedged up against a tree trunk. It looked like an accordion, but the passenger's side door was open. She didn't see Aaron near the car. She slowly moved in closer and peered inside. Aaron had bled on the driver's side window, but he had crawled out over the console and through the passenger's side, the driver's door too badly smashed.

A branch snapped close by, and she turned to see Aaron raising a gun to shoot her. She didn't think she could reach him before he fired the gun. But then out of the corner of her eye, she saw someone coming. No, two grizzlies, and she realized Brent and Cedric and even Rowland were running down the hill, Rowland shouting, "Drop the weapon, Aaron!"

Everything seemed to happen at once. Cedric slammed his body into hers, knocking her down as Brent slashed his powerful arm at Aaron's head, and knocked him down. Still on the ground, Aaron lifted his gun to shoot Brent when Rowland fired two shots at Aaron and he fell back, dropping his gun at the same time.

"Is Lonnie dead?" Amy asked, still underneath her protective hero of a bear.

"He is." Cedric sighed. *"You were supposed to stay in the car."*

She licked his nose. *"I had to make sure Aaron was no longer a threat to you."*

Cedric groaned. *"He was a threat to you!"*

"Did you make him run my car off the road?"

"Yeah. Sorry. I'll make it up to you."

"You sure will. Let's go home. Wait, you and Brent have to see Crystal and have her check your bites over."

Cedric finally let her up, his heart still pounding like crazy. So was hers, Brent's, and Rowland's. *"I'm fine,"* Cedric told Amy.

“We’ll be sure after you see the doctor.”

The other deputies arrived to help Rowland take care of Lonnie and Aaron’s disposition.

“We’ll take care of all this. Why don’t you go home,” Rowland said. “And, hell, well done.”

The bears grunted at Rowland and then returned to the cars where they’d left their clothes. After Amy dressed and shifted, she hugged Brent. “Thanks for bringing me here and helping Cedric. And congratulations again about the baby.”

“You were supposed to stay in the car,” Brent grumbled. “When I tell Rebecca what happened, she’ll have a conniption.”

Amy said, “Well, it all worked out fine. Oh, and you’d better see Dr. Crystal before you go home, or Rebecca will make you return there. Are you going to be able to drive all right?”

“Yeah, I’ll be okay. But you’re right about Rebecca.”

Then Amy joined Cedric and he pulled her into a warm bear hug and kissed the living daylights out of her which was jut what she needed. “Let’s go home and make love,” he said.

“For the rest of the night and the day—but after you go see the doctor.”

“Not that again,” Cedric said.

She smiled at him. “I think I mated just the right bear for me.”

“I know I did. Love you, babe.”

“Love you with all my heart, you big, growly teddy bear.” At least he was with her and that’s what truly mattered the most.

“How’s Libby?” he asked, as they got into his car and drove back to the clinic.

That was another reason she loved him. He genuinely cared about people. “She came through the surgery just fine. I told her she was a grizzly shifter now like us, showed her my

grizzly form and she wanted to shift and take a bite out of Lonnie for having bitten her.”

Cedric laughed. “She’s going to be fun to mentor.”

“She is.”

When they arrived at the clinic, Brent was already there, waiting to see Crystal and talking on his phone to Rebecca. He nodded to Amy and Cedric when they joined him in the waiting room. “Yes, Amy made me go to see Crystal as a precaution and Cedric and I fought Lonnie.” He glanced at Amy. “No, both Cedric and I made sure Amy didn’t get hurt... Did she stay in the car? Take a guess.” Brent laughed. “Right. She was intent on saving us. I’ll tell you all about it later. The doc is motioning for me to go with her.”

Amy took hold of Cedric’s hand. “Let’s see Libby. She might be asleep, but we can check on her while you’re waiting to see the doctor.”

“Yeah. As long as I don’t scare her with the way that I look.”

She looked at the claw marks on Cedric’s neck and arms, and the bite on his jaw. “When she learns you and Brent eliminated the bear who bit her, I’m sure she’ll be glad to see you, no matter how beat up you look.”

They peered into Libby’s room to see if she was awake and wouldn’t mind the intrusion.

“Oh, my, what happened to you, Cedric? Are you okay?” Libby asked, her eyes wide.

“Yeah. But you don’t have to worry about the bear that bit you coming after you again,” Cedric said. “How are you feeling?”

“Better. I didn’t believe it when everyone kept telling me I’d heal up in half the time that humans do. I was kind of hard of hearing before, but now I can hear stuff I never was able to hear before. It’s amazing. I can toss my hearing aids now! Won’t my audiologist be surprised when I tell her I don’t need any more annual hearing tests? Even when the lights are off in this room, I can still see you. It’s unbelievable.”

Amy drew closer to the bed and squeezed her hand. “We’ll take you for a walk in the park as a bear when you’re feeling up to it.”

“Do I have to turn into a bear?” Libby asked.

“No. Not unless you want to,” Amy said. Which was one good thing about newly turned bears. They weren’t like newly turned wolf shifters in that regard who would have to turn when the full moon was out.

“Okay. I’d like to but when I’m feeling more comfortable with the idea.”

“Absolutely.” No one who had been born a shifter knew how a newly turned shifter would feel about it.

Then Crystal came into the room and said to Cedric, “Let’s get you looked at. Brent tells me it was the same bear that you and Amy tangled with before.”

“Yeah, only he won’t be hurting anyone any longer.” Cedric glanced at Amy. “Are you coming with me.”

She smiled. “Sure.” Then she gave Libby a gentle hug. “We’ll come pick you up when you’re ready to go home.”

“Tomorrow,” Libby said.

Amy knew nothing would keep Libby down for long. “I can help you out with anything you need assistance with until you feel your normal self.”

“It’ll do me good to get back to my usual routine. I don’t think I will ever quite feel back to my normal self.” Libby smiled. “But I really like that I can hear so well now.”

Amy chuckled. “We’re used to it, having been born this way. We’ll see you tomorrow. Night, Libby.”

“Night, you two. Oh, I’m invited to the wedding, aren’t I?”

“Oh, yeah, absolutely.”

Libby smiled and then they left the room to see Crystal in an exam room. “You look better this time. No stitches needed. Brent must have helped to keep Lonnie from biting and slashing you so deeply this time,” the doctor said.

Brent popped in to give Amy a hug before he left to go home to Rebecca. He had cleaned up so she wouldn't be so startled to see him. "We'll have to have another celebration."

"For sure. For taking these guys down and for Rebecca and your happy news too." Amy gave Brent a hug back.

"I haven't had to deliver bear cubs in a while. I'm looking forward to it," Crystal said.

"Cubs? More than one?" Amy asked.

"Well, it's too early to tell, but she could be having more than one cub."

Then Brent inclined his head to Cedric. "See you later."

"Yeah," Cedric said.

Crystal finished cleaning his wounds. "Do you still have the antibiotics I gave you?"

"I do."

"Then you're good to go."

"Thanks, Doc."

Then he and Amy headed out to the car. Amy was going to call Rebecca, but Rowland called Amy first.

"Your totaled car is being hauled off, but I grabbed all your personal belongings and will drop them off tomorrow at your apartment."

"Thanks, Rowland."

"Oh, and the gun Aaron was using? It was the gun stolen from the second burglary at your apartment. I'll be returning both to you since we don't need them to build a criminal case against Lonnie and Aaron."

"Thank you."

"You probably have a stack of PI cases you're looking into, but we have five other cold case homicides and if you and Cedric think you might have the time to look into them—"

Amy smiled at Cedric, and he smiled back and nodded. "We'll get right on it—after we spend tomorrow

recuperating,” she said.

“I don’t blame you. See you both soon.”

“Recuperating, eh?” Cedric said to Amy as he continued to drive to her place.

“Ha! Crystal said that you didn’t need any stitches so that means we’re spending the day fooling around. Just nobody else needs to know that.”

“When you put it like that, I’m all for it.”

“But I was thinking about poor Libby.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. When she returns home tomorrow, she’ll see what a mess her place is,” Amy said.

“You want to clean it up for her tonight.”

“Yeah, it shouldn’t take too long.”

“Not with two of us taking care of it.”

She glanced at him, surprised he’d want to help her clean up.

“Remember the first time I went to your place?”

“The break-in, sure. You were in grizzly bear rescue mode. How could I forget? And then you cleaned up the broken glass in the kitchen with such finesse.”

“Yeah, well, we can wrap this up quickly, take a shower, and—”

“Make love as a mated couple. The perfect ending to the perfect day—eliminating the bad guys, learning my sister is pregnant, and you and I are—”

“Meant to be together for the long run.”

“Yeah, you must have read my mind.”

“Always.”

EPILOGUE

All the members of the bear sleuth, even Amy's one-time blind date, Howard, had gone to Amy and Cedric's wedding three months later to wish them well. Libby was dating a widowed bear who was all too happy to bring her to the wedding and had been mentoring her. Even David had a date at the affair.

Cedric had gotten his PI license so he could be Amy's partner in the business. Not only were his parents delighted that one of their sons had married a local grizzly who had his abilities, they were thrilled she had been the reason to bring Cedric home permanently. Since she and her sister's parents were gone, they had quickly adopted both of them—and Brent—as part of their own family.

David was just as glad to have Amy as his sister. Rebecca and Brent were hopeful Cedric would help Amy further with dealing with the voices in her head, but also would keep her safe while they investigated cases together.

They'd bought a home that had a large yard that backed up on woods where Amy could plant gardens to her heart's delight and her mother-in-law had already given her several cuttings for her flowerbeds. Cedric's dad had given her some of his extraordinary mosaic garden creations, but he'd also helped them make a fountain of their own.

Blue Beardsman was now on the lookout for a psychic she-bear too, and he was always making Amy practice at

keeping him from reading her thoughts whenever they all got together.

The Guatemalan couple, Maria and Juan Lopez, had so many job offers for doing gardening and housework for the bear families in the area that they were making a good living and were glad. They were both also testifying against Faye at the shifter trial, held by the jaguars. Of course the Lopez couple didn't have a clue that they were all shifters. The one question that hadn't been answered was how the psychologist had ended up in the park near where Albert and the lawyer had been killed. Faye had finally admitted she had turned up some dirt on Pascal and said if he wanted evidence of his infidelity, he would have to meet her at the park at the appointed hour with cash to pay for her silence. Except instead of seeing her, he'd run into her gun-wielding son, Lonnie.

For being at two murder scenes—the jaguars found Glenn guilty in helping with causing the accident that had killed the Rutherfords because he had changed the good tires for bad ones, and for being paid in the case of Michael's death—he received forty years' incarceration.

Faye was given forty years for aiding in the kidnapping of the Juan and Maria Lopez, but also with knowing Aaron and Lonnie had murdered the others and did nothing to stop them or report it. The families who had lost their loved ones had been told the men were responsible had died in South America. They didn't want them trying to learn the details of how they had died in the local area, since that had all been kept hush-hush.

Rebecca and Brent had learned they were having triplets—three boys. Brent and Cedric had the job of putting together cribs, though earlier that morning, Amy had learned she was pregnant, and she still needed to break the news to Cedric. They had been busy taking care of PI cases together and working on some cold case files for the sheriff's department. She hoped Cedric would be happy about the news she was pregnant.

“You'll know just how to put together some more cribs for us,” Amy told Cedric, while he had a wrench in one hand, still

working on putting together the last crib.

Everyone just stared at Amy for a moment, stunned. She smiled. “Yep. The baby, or babies, will be born a few months after yours, Rebecca, Brent.”

Cedric dropped the wrench he was holding and swept her up in his arms.

“You worked a lot faster at it than we did,” Rebecca said, giving them both a hug.

Brent laughed. “We held off to work on our careers, but they’re just the right age and already have their careers. But yeah, when you learn how many you’ll have, we’ll be experts at putting these together.”

“I love you, honey,” Cedric said to Amy and kissed her on the mouth.

She wrapped her arms around his neck. “I love you too.”

But then they had to call Cedric’s parents and his brother, not to mention Blue, because he really was just part of the family. Cedric’s parents were over the moon because they were already having three grandchildren by Rebecca and Brent, and now their own son and daughter-in-law were pregnant? David was just as thrilled, though he knew that meant everyone was looking at him to settle down next. Blue was glad for them, but he was still looking for the right she-bear.

Then Cedric got back to working on the last crib, smiling broadly now.

“You know what this means, don’t you?” Rebecca asked.

“Another celebration,” Cedric said.

“Brannigans?” Amy asked.

“Yeah,” Brent said. “It seems to be our new tradition.”

That night, they all went to Brannigans for dinner and dancing with Blue, David, John and Melissa, Rebecca and Brent, and Cedric and Amy.

Brent said, "I should have gotten Blue and David a date each for tonight."

"No," both of them said.

"But look how it turned out for Cedric and Amy," Brent said.

They all laughed. Cedric was glad that Howard hadn't been the one for Amy and he had been instead. He couldn't believe they were having their own baby, or babies. But he couldn't have been more thrilled.

"Thank you," Amy said to Cedric. "I couldn't be either."

"Do you think they'll be like us? I mean, psychic?"

"If they are, they'll have us and Blue to guide them through it."

"I love you." Cedric leaned over and kissed his beautiful bear.

"I love you too, hero of my heart."

Not even the summer storm thundering overhead could disturb Amy now. No more nightmares about the accident. Meeting Cedric had been the best thing that could have ever happened to her.

"The same for me, honey." Cedric squeezed her hand.

"You are listening to my thoughts again."

He smiled. "Always."

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AUTHOR BIO

USA Today bestselling author Terry Spear has written over a hundred paranormal and medieval Highland romances. In 2008, *Heart of the Wolf* was named a Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year. She has received a PNR Top Pick, a Best Book of the Month nomination by Long and Short Reviews, numerous Night Owl Romance Top Picks, and 2 Paranormal Excellence Awards for Romantic Literature (Finalist & Honorable Mention). In 2016, *Billionaire in Wolf's Clothing* was an RT Book Reviews Top Pick. A retired officer of the U.S. Army Reserves, Terry also creates award-winning teddy bears that have found homes all over the world, helps out with her grandchildren, and she is raising two Havanese puppies. She lives in Spring, Texas.

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Heart of the Wolf Series: [Heart of the Wolf](#), [Destiny of the Wolf](#), [To Tempt the Wolf](#), [Legend of the White Wolf](#), [Seduced by the Wolf](#), [Wolf Fever](#), [Heart of the Highland Wolf](#), [Dreaming of the Wolf](#), [A SEAL in Wolf's Clothing](#), [A Howl for a Highlander](#), [A Highland Werewolf Wedding](#), [A SEAL Wolf Christmas](#), [Silence of the Wolf](#), [Hero of a Highland Wolf](#), [A Highland Wolf Christmas](#), [A SEAL Wolf Hunting](#); [A Silver Wolf Christmas](#), [A SEAL Wolf in Too Deep](#), [Alpha Wolf Need Not Apply](#), [Billionaire in Wolf's Clothing](#), [Between a Rock and a Hard Place](#), [SEAL Wolf Undercover](#), [Dreaming of a White Wolf Christmas](#), [Flight of the White Wolf](#), [All's Fair in Love and Wolf](#), [A Billionaire Wolf for Christmas](#), [SEAL Wolf Surrender \(2019\)](#), [Silver Town Wolf: Home for the Holidays \(2019\)](#), [Wolff Brothers: You Had Me at Wolf](#), [Night of the Billionaire Wolf](#), [Joy to the Wolves \(Red Wolf\)](#), [The Wolf Wore Plaid](#), [Jingle Bell Wolf](#), [Best of Both Wolves](#), [While the Wolf's Away](#), [Christmas Wolf Surprise](#), [Wolf Takes the Lead](#), [Wolf on the Wild Side](#), [Her Wolf for the Holidays \(Highland Wolf, 2023\)](#)

SEAL Wolves: [To Tempt the Wolf](#), [A SEAL in Wolf's Clothing](#), [A SEAL Wolf Christmas](#), [A SEAL Wolf Hunting](#), [A SEAL Wolf in Too Deep](#), [SEAL Wolf Undercover](#), [SEAL Wolf Surrender \(2019\)](#)

Silver Bros Wolves: [Destiny of the Wolf](#), [Wolf Fever](#), [Dreaming of the Wolf](#), [Silence of the Wolf](#), [A Silver Wolf Christmas](#), [Alpha Wolf Need Not Apply](#), [Between a Rock and a Hard Place](#), [All's Fair in Love and Wolf](#), [Silver Town Wolf: Home for the Holidays](#)

Wolff Brothers of Silver Town [Wolff Brothers: You Had Me at Wolf](#), [Jingle Bell Wolf](#), [Wolf on the Wild Side](#)

Arctic Wolves: [Legend of the White Wolf](#), [Dreaming of a White Wolf Christmas](#), [Flight of the White Wolf](#), [While the Wolf's Away](#)

Billionaire Wolves: [Billionaire in Wolf's Clothing](#), [A Billionaire Wolf for Christmas](#), [Night of the Billionaire Wolf](#), [Wolf Takes the Lead](#)

Highland Wolves: [Heart of the Highland Wolf](#), [A Howl for a Highlander](#), [A Highland Werewolf Wedding](#), [Hero of a Highland Wolf](#), [A Highland Wolf Christmas](#), [The Wolf Wore Plaid](#),

Red Wolf Series: [Seduced by the Wolf](#), [Joy to the Wolves \(Red Wolf\)](#) [Best of Both Wolves](#), [Christmas Wolf Surprise](#),

Novellas: [A United Shifter Force Christmas](#)

Highland Wolves of Old: [Wolf Pack \(Book 1\)](#)



Heart of the Jaguar Series: [Savage Hunger](#), [Jaguar Fever](#), [Jaguar Hunt](#), [Jaguar Pride](#), [A Very Jaguar Christmas](#), [You Had Me at Jaguar](#)

Novella: [The Witch and the Jaguar](#)

[Dawn of the Jaguar](#)



Romantic Suspense: [Deadly Fortunes](#), [In the Dead of the Night](#), [Relative Danger](#),
[Bound by Danger](#)



Vampire romances: [Killing the Bloodlust](#), [Deadly Liaisons](#), [Huntress for Hire](#),
[Forbidden Love](#), [Vampire Redemption](#), [Primal Desire](#)

Vampire Novellas: [Vampiric Calling](#), [The Siren's Lure](#), [Seducing the Huntress](#)



Other Romance: [Exchanging Grooms](#), [Marriage, Las Vegas Style](#)



Science Fiction Romance: [Galaxy Warrior](#)

Teen/Young Adult/Fantasy Books

The World of Fae:

[The Dark Fae, Book 1](#)

[The Deadly Fae, Book 2](#)

[The Winged Fae, Book 3](#)

[The Ancient Fae, Book 4](#)

[Dragon Fae, Book 5](#)

[Hawk Fae, Book 6](#)

[Phantom Fae, Book 7](#)

[Golden Fae, Book 8](#)

[Falcon Fae, Book 9](#)

[Woodland Fae, Book 10](#)

[Angel Fae, Book 11](#)

The World of Elf:

[The Shadow Elf](#)

[Darkland Elf](#)

Warrior Elf

Blood Moon Series:

Kiss of the Vampire

The Vampire...In My Dreams

Demon Guardian Series:

The Trouble with Demons

Demon Trouble, Too

Demon Hunter

Non-Series for Now:

Ghostly Liaisons

The Beast Within

Courtly Masquerade

Deidre's Secret

The Magic of Inherian:

The Scepter of Salvation

The Mage of Monrovia

Emerald Isle of Mists